



Council of the European Union

PRESS
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BACKGROUND¹
Brussels, 13 January 2021

Informal video conference of European affairs ministers, Monday 18 January 2021

Chair: Ana Paula Zacarias, Portuguese Secretary of State for European Affairs

The meeting will **start at 10.00**.

Ministers will hear a presentation of the **priorities of the Portuguese presidency** for the next six months. This point will be held in public session

They will also take stock of the state of interinstitutional discussions on the **Conference on the Future of Europe**.

Ministers will prepare the leaders' video conference on **COVID-19 coordination** to be held on 21 January.

A presidency press conference will be held at the end of the meeting.

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[Informal video conference of European affairs ministers meeting page](#)
[Press conferences and public events by video streaming](#)
[Video coverage in broadcast quality \(MPEG4\) and photo gallery](#)

¹ This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the press office.

Priorities of the Portuguese presidency

The Council will hear a presentation on the priorities of the Portuguese presidency for the next six months. This point will be held in public session.

Portugal has set out three main priorities for its presidency:

- promoting a recovery boosted by the climate and digital transitions;
- implementing the European pillar of social rights as a key element for ensuring a fair and inclusive climate and digital transition;
- strengthening Europe's strategic autonomy whilst remaining open to the world.

In the area of general affairs, the Presidency will promote the coordination of the European response to COVID-19, seeking to minimise the impact on citizens' lives and to safeguard the proper functioning of the single market. It will also give priority to the EU's relationship with the United Kingdom.

The Presidency will continue to pay attention to the mechanisms put in place to strengthen the rule of law, including by continuing the discussions in the Council of the new annual rule of law report published by the European Commission in September 2020. Promoting equal opportunities and combating all forms of discrimination will also be cross-cutting priorities.

Work will also continue on the Conference on the Future of Europe, which should be an inclusive process, contributing to the development of medium and long-term policies to address current and future challenges.

In the area of preventing and countering disinformation, the Presidency will focus on the European Democracy Action Plan. The Presidency will also seek to enhance confidence in Europe's ability to respond to hybrid threats and cyber challenges.

The Presidency will continue the process of enlargement to the Western Balkans on the basis of a new, more credible and more effective methodology.

[Programme of the Portuguese presidency](#)

[General Affairs Council configuration](#)

Conference on the Future of Europe

Ministers will take stock of the state of interinstitutional discussions on the **Conference on the Future of Europe**.

Member states want the Conference on the Future of Europe to get citizens involved in a wide-ranging debate on Europe's future in the coming decade and beyond, including in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On 24 June 2020, EU ambassadors agreed the **Council's position** on the arrangements for the conference. In its mandate, the Council takes the view that the conference should be launched as soon as the epidemiological conditions allow for it. It should focus on how to develop EU policies over the medium and long term in order to tackle more effectively the challenges facing Europe, including the economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic and lessons learned from the crisis.

On this basis, in July 2020 the German Presidency started informal consultations with the European Parliament and the Commission.

[Council's position on the Conference on the Future of Europe, 24 June 2020](#)

COVID-19: EU coordination

Ministers will prepare the leaders' video conference on **COVID-19 coordination** to be held on 21 January. Discussions are expected to focus on the vaccine roll-out, three weeks after the start of the vaccination programme.

The European Commission has concluded vaccine procurement contracts with six vaccine developers for a total of up to 2.3 billion doses. To date, two safe and effective vaccines against COVID-19 have been authorised for use in the EU following positive scientific recommendations by the European Medicines Agency: BioNTech-Pfizer (21 December 2020) and Moderna (6 January).

Following this, vaccination programmes have begun across member states, with the first stage targeted in most cases at healthcare workers as well as residents and personnel in long-term care facilities.

In December 2020, the European Council welcomed the positive announcements on the development of effective vaccines against COVID-19 and the conclusion of advance purchase agreements by the Commission. However, it recalled that the arrival of vaccines does not mean that the pandemic is over, as the epidemiological situation in Europe remains worrying. The European Council committed to continue coordination efforts, including in the area of vaccines.

[COVID-19: research and vaccines \(background information\)](#)
