**Overview:**
All European Parliament activities scheduled for the week starting on 16 March are postponed or cancelled. Council of Europe meetings, with some changes to original schedules, will take place. The Commission’s EU-UK negotiation will not take place in London in the originally scheduled form, both sides are exploring alternative meeting options, including if possible, the use of teleconferencing.

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### European Parliament

#### Coming Week Highlights

Due to the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the Conference of Presidents (EP President and political leaders) modified the European Parliament’s calendar of activities for the coming weeks due to force majeure. The aim is to enable Parliament to exercise its core functions (legislative and budgetary powers, as well as plenary sessions and meetings of governing bodies of the institution), while complying with the duty of care for its Members and staff, and with a view to protecting public health.

The April part-session initially scheduled from Monday 30 March until Thursday 2 April will take place in Brussels on Wednesday 1 April in the afternoon and Thursday 2 April in the morning.

The week starting with 23 March (Committee meeting and Political Group meetings) stays unchanged.

The EU Speakers’ Conference scheduled for 17-19 May in Helsinki has been cancelled.

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### European Commission

#### Coming Week Highlights

<p>| 16 March - 29 April | Future College Agendas Possible items <a href="#">here</a> |</p>
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<td><strong>March 16-22</strong></td>
<td><strong>EU-UK Negotiations:</strong> The Commission’s EU-UK negotiation will not take place in London in the originally scheduled form, both sides are exploring alternative meeting options, including if possible, the use of teleconferencing. Link to joint statement <a href="#">here</a></td>
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<td><strong>COVID-19</strong> Link to an overview on the latest and upcoming meetings, press releases and policies of the Council of the EU and the European Council in relation to the COVID-19 coronavirus <a href="#">here</a></td>
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<td><strong>Eurogroup.</strong></td>
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<td>o Preparation of International Meetings: The Eurogroup will take stock of inflation and exchange rate developments over the past months in view of the upcoming IMF Spring meeting.</td>
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<td>o Greece: Fifth enhanced surveillance report.</td>
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<td>o Updated Draft Budgetary plan of Austria: Ministers will be informed about the upcoming process related to the updated draft budgetary plan (DBP) of Austria.</td>
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<td><strong>Agenda: Inclusive Format</strong></td>
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<td>o COVID-19: Economic Policy Challenges. Ministers will take stock of the economic situation and discuss responses to the economic policy challenges related to the COVID-19 outbreak.</td>
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<td>o Reform of the European Stability Mechanism treaty. Ministers will discuss the work on the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) package of reforms and the early introduction of the common backstop.</td>
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<td><strong>17 March</strong></td>
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o Capital Markets Union: Thomas Wieser, chair of the High Level Forum on the capital markets union, or CMU, will present the group’s interim report of 20 February. The High Level Forum is an expert group charged with proposing policy recommendations for future CMU actions. The aim is for citizens and businesses to access capital markets across the EU on equal terms, regardless of their geographical location.

o Solvency II directive: The Council will hold a policy debate in view of the upcoming review of the 2009 Solvency II directive.

o European Semester: The European Commission will present its 2020 country reports and in-depth reviews. Ministers will exchange views on the implementation of the country-specific recommendations. In line with the EU Green Deal, this year, the reports contain an analysis of environmental sustainability issues. The discussion is expected to focus in particular on greening investment.

o International Cooperation within the G20 and IMF: The Croatian Presidency and the Commission will also report to the Council of the outcome of the G20 February meeting. Ministers will finalise the preparation of the G20 and IMF spring meetings of April 2020.

Weekly Round-up

Highlights of Week 9 - 15 March

New Irish MEP: With effect from 6 March, Chris McManus has replaced Matt Carthy as representative for the Midlands North-West constituency consequent on the election of Matt Carthy as a member of Dáil Éireann.

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International Women’s Day: To mark the occasion of International Women’s Rights Day, statements were heard in the Plenary on Tuesday with contributions from Vice-President McGuinness, political groups and the Council Presidency. Vice-President McGuinness said “On the occasion of International Women’s Day, we must remember that millions of women and girls around the world are still prevented from fully developing their skills and playing their role in society, and this is also the case in the EU. Realising women’s rights is not an option - it is a duty - and it is possible where there is political will”. Frances Fitzgerald (EPP, IE) welcomed the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and stressed that it needed meticulous implementation and strong political leadership.
Contributions from Political Group Speakers and be heard here
**Amended March Agenda:** Due to the exceptional circumstances caused by the impact of Coronavirus, the Conference of Presidents agreed to an amended agenda and curtail the sitting to one day, Tuesday. In an opening statement President Sassoli said “**these changes were approved by the Conference of Presidents, and the European Parliament wants to stay open and functional - but we need to take all necessary precautions and reduce activities to a minimum.**”.

The amended agenda was agreed to include debates and discussions on Coronavirus; Greek-Turkish border; and EU long-term budget/EU summit.

**Coronavirus:** The Council and the Commission updated the EP on the different measures taken since January, especially due to the current escalation of the outbreak in some Member States. They outlined the next steps envisaged, including the videoconference of Leaders convened by President Michel later on Tuesday.

There were many expressions of sympathy for those affected by the virus and admiration for the health care personnel working to take care of those infected.

Calls were made for the need to have EU solidarity and for more funds to be put into researching the virus. Necessary medical supplies such as testing kits, masks and respiratory machines should be produced inside the EU and be made available to all member states.

A view was expressed to have a common risk assessment in order to develop a common response.

**Link to recording of debate [here](#)**

**Long-term EU Budget:**

President of the European Council, Charles Michel, presented his report on the special European Council on the Multiannual Financial Framework. He emphasised his determination to cooperate with Parliament and regretted the lack of an agreement on the MFF at recent Council Meeting. He said that differences remained among Member States, notably on the overall budget size. He recalled the inclusion of rule of law conditionality in the latest NegoBox, although he acknowledged that the details of such a mechanism would need to be defined. On Own Resources, he referred to the ETS system and a plastic tax as possible sources for new revenues. He finally stressed that he had included in the NegoBox a proposal to increase the capital of the European Investment Bank, with an envisaged role for the EP in deciding how such capital could be used, warning, however, that this should not replace the idea of a budget for the Eurozone.

Vice-President Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ addressed the MEPs on behalf of the Commission. He regretted that no agreement had been reached at the last Council meeting, while noting that this was similar to previous budgetary negotiations. He pointed out that financial gap left by Brexit came with consequences. He called for a sufficient overall budget size, noting that key issues would otherwise need to be addressed at national level in a less effective way. He said the worst-case scenario involved no agreement at all, implying the discontinuation of programmes such as Erasmus, as well as a stop to cohesion funds. To avoid this scenario, he pleaded for cooperation and responsibility and stressed that new resources would be needed to fund new ambitions.

MEPs were quite critical of the situation, with a majority calling for a more ambitious budget than the one so far envisaged in Council discussions; a minority expressed views calling for a reduction in the budget size.

**Link to the debate [here](#)**
Greek-Turkish Border: Commissioner Johansson described to MEPs the action plan to provide assistance at the Greek - Turkish border. She emphasized the emergency of the humanitarian situation, especially for unaccompanied minors (UNAMI), and urged the MS to host them. She announced that she would go to Greece on 11 and 12 March in order to discuss the application of asylum legislation and promised that the proposal for a new Pact on Migration and Asylum would be ready by mid-April.

There was consensus across political groups that the EU should not give in to President Erdogan's pressure and that Greece should be supported. Calls were made for a new agreement with Turkey from the EPP and Renew, preferably with EP involvement. Criticism came from S&D, Renew, Greens and GUE as to the announced suspension of the asylum legislation in Greece, with calls on the Commission to act against an alleged violation of EU law. In their view, they said the focus should be on helping vulnerable persons and not exclusively on border protection.

Several MEPs warned about the deteriorating situation in Idlib and humanitarian consequences. While S&D, Renew, Greens and GUE called for greater solidarity with refugees and for stepping up resettlement and relocation, ECR and ID considered that refugees had to be supported outside the EU and closer to the country of origin.

Link to the Debate here

European Council - Council of the European Union
Highlights 9 - 15 March

EU-Turkey Leaders' Meeting. 9 March: Presidents Charles Michel and Ursula von der Leyen met President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Brussels to discuss bilateral relations, the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement on migration, security and stability in the region, and the crisis in Syria. On the EU-Turkey Statement, leaders decided to task Josep Borrell, High Representative, and his counterpart in Turkey, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, to work over the next few days on clarifying the implementation of the deal between Turkey and the European Union. This will ensure that both sides are interpreting the statement in the same way and will help maintain the political dialogue with Turkey over the coming days.

Link to Remarks by President Charles Michel after the meeting with President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Brussels here

COVID-19: The European Council discussed, by video conference, how to coordinate EU efforts to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak. President of the European Commission, President of the European Central Bank, President of the Eurogroup, and High Representative also took part in the discussion.

During the meeting, four priorities were identified: Limiting the spread of the virus; Provision of medical equipment; Promoting research; Tackling socio-economic consequences.

Link to the conclusions of the meeting here
Maritime Conference and Informal Meeting of EU Transport Ministers (Maritime). 10 March:
Link to Conference details here

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Foreign Affairs Council (Trade). 12 March:
The Foreign Affairs (Trade) Council scheduled for 12 March has been postponed until further notice.

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Justice and Home Affairs Council. 13 March:
- **Situation at the EU’s External Borders:** Home affairs ministers were informed of the situation by the member states most directly affected, the Commission and the relevant EU agencies, of the latest developments at the EU's external borders with Turkey. Despite the increased pressure since 28 February, the current situation remains stable on both the land and sea borders.
  Ministers also assessed how the measures mentioned in the home affairs ministers’ statement of 4 March are being implemented.
- **COVID-19: Coronavirus Outbreak:**
  **Civil protection**
  Over lunch, ministers responsible for civil protection issues discussed the coronavirus outbreak, following up on the priorities identified by EU leaders on 10 March. They focused in particular on:
  - lessons learnt so far in the tackling of the COVID-19 outbreak
  - possible additional preparedness and response measures for the EU Civil Protection Mechanism
  - how to step up information-sharing, making full use of the integrated political crisis response (IPCR) toolbox
  - additional support from member states

  **EU guidelines for Health Screening at Borders**
  - Decisions taken at the borders of member states are national decisions and fall under the competence of the respective member state. Notwithstanding, the Commission proposed to prepare guidelines that could suggest a more uniform way of health screening carried out at borders

- **Working Methods of the Council during the Crisis**
  Following a request by the Italian delegation, Ministers had a brief exchange of view with the Secretary General of the Council about working methods of the Council during the coronavirus crisis.
  Link to policy on continuation of Council Meetings is here
Circular Economy Action Plan: On Wednesday Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius issued a statement on the new Circular Economy Action Plan which aimed at achieving the low-carbon and resource efficient economy of the future, and by commencing with tackling the practice of ‘take-make-use-discard’.

Link to statement here

State Aid COVID 19: On Wednesday the Commission approved a €12 million Danish scheme to compensate damages caused by cancellations of large public events due to COVID-19 outbreak. The Commission approval was granted with 24 hours of the request which is the first and only State aid measure notified to the Commission in relation to COVID-19. The Commission has established a dedicated contact point for Member States to provide them with guidance on possibilities under EU rules. Executive Vice President Margrethe Vestager, is in charge of competition policy.

Link to Commission statement here

COVID-19 Announcement of Commissions Coordinated Response: On Friday the Commission President in a joint press conference with Executive Vice-Presidents Margrethe Vestager and Valdis Dombrovskis set out the Commission’s coordinated response which includes measures to ensure continuity of supplies within the single market; assistance to people and firms; and encouragement to states acting decisively and in a coordinated way. Link to the announced measures is here

COVID - 19 Commission’s Q & A: The Commission has issued a helpful Q &A which provides information on issues such as preventing disruption to the single market; support to Italy; help for the aviation industry (air slots); tourism; mobilising the EU budget and impact on cohesion policy.

Link to the Commissions’ Q & A on COVID-19 here
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<td>6th Meeting of the Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group on Europol pursuant to Article 88 TFEU and the Europol Regulation (EU) 2016/794</td>
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<td>Inter-parliamentary Committee Meeting: Current EU Foreign and Security Challenges (TBC title)</td>
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<td>Inter-parliamentary Committee Meeting: Driving Asylum and Migration</td>
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<td>Inter-parliamentary Committee Meeting: The European Child Guarantee</td>
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<td>Inter-parliamentary Committee Meeting: Good Practices for “better law making” from a digital aspect</td>
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Sources: EU Parliament, Commission, and Council websites
For more information, contact the Oireachtas EU Liaison Office at paul.conway@natparl.ep.europa.eu