Oireachtas Digest on Europe

Week 18: 3 to 9 May 2021 | Ref: 17-21

Seirbhís Thithe
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Spotlight

Last Week

European Parliament:

MEPs voted with a large majority in favour of granting its consent to the agreement setting the rules of the future EU-UK relationship. The consent decision was adopted by 660 votes for, five against and 32 abstentions, while the accompanying resolution, setting out Parliament's evaluation of and expectations from the deal, passed by 578 votes, with 51 against and 68 abstentions. The vote took place on Tuesday, with results announced on Wednesday.

MEPs approved the reformed EU Civil Protection Mechanism on Tuesday. The mechanism aims to ensure the EU and its member states will be better prepared to respond to large-scale disasters, especially when these affect several countries simultaneously.

MEPs gave their final approval to the agreement with Council on the Horizon Europe regulation on Tuesday, adding a political declaration.

The renewed European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, adopted by MEPs on Tuesday, includes improvements secured by the EP negotiating team during the talks with Council in December and will allow more European workers to access financial support from the fund.

A new law to address the dissemination of terrorist content online was approved by Parliament on Wednesday.

In a resolution adopted on Thursday the European Parliament takes stock of developments in Malta in the case of Daphne Caruana Galizia and other related investigations, following the testimony of convicted criminal Vincent Muscat. Expressing deep concern about the possible involvement of ministers and political appointees in the murder case, MEPs urge the Maltese government to bring to justice all those implicated in all cases brought to light by the journalist.

On Thursday the European Parliament officially gave its approval on LIFE, the only programme at EU-level solely dedicated to the environment and climate. It will enter into force retroactively from 1 January 2021.

On Thursday, Parliament adopted its negotiating position on the proposal for a certificate to reaffirm the right to free movement in Europe during the pandemic. MEPs agreed that the new "EU COVID-19 certificate" - instead of Digital Green Certificate, as proposed by the Commission - should be in place for 12 months and not longer.

The leaders of Parliament's political groups issued a statement on the Conference on the Future of Europe which, inter alia,calls on the Conference Plenary to be adequately composed ensuring representation by all main stakeholders when it comes to the future of Europe, but also to have a final say about the outcome. And given the delay in the start of the Conference due to the pandemic, asks that any conclusions presented in spring 2022 be preliminary and that the Conference be allowed to continue.

European Commission:

On Tuesday, the Commission announced €3.7 mill in support under European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) to 1,500 former workers of the aviation services company Swissport Belgium, who lost their jobs due to the impact of the coronavirus crisis on air transport activities. Similarly 500 former workers of the metal-works factories of GMH Guss in Germany are also to receive €1.1 mill in support from the same fund.

The Commission has adopted the first EU Strategy on voluntary return and reintegration of migrants. The Strategy promotes voluntary return and reintegration as an integral part of a common EU system for returns, a key objective under the New Pact on Migration and Asylum.

A shipment of urgently needed oxygen, medicine and equipment will be delivered over the coming days by EU Member States to India, following the country's request for support through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, which is coordinated by the Emergency Response Coordination Centre of the European Commission. The offer of support from Ireland is : 700 oxygen concentrators; 1 oxygen generator; 365

Spotlight

ventilators.

The Commission has received official recovery and resilience plans from Germany and Greece, France, Slovakia Denmark, Spain, Latvia and Luxembourg Belgium, Italy, Austria, and Slovenia

European Council and Council of the European Union:

Agriculture Ministers held an informal meeting to discuss CAP reform, market situation, and trade.

EU development ministers held an orientation debate on the future European Financial Architecture for Development (EFAD), with the participation of the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

Coming Week:

European Parliament:

The week ahead is reserved for External Parliamentary activities

Commission:

College meeting Wednesday

On Thursday Mr Johannes Hahn participates via videoconference in the "A Career for EU: Launch of Ireland's strategy to increase Irish representation in the EU's Institutions and Agencies" event organised by the European Movement Ireland.

European Council and Council of the European Union:

Foreign Affairs Ministers (Defence) meet on Monday.

Porto Social Summit on Friday,

EU leaders will meet in Porto on Saturday to discuss social issues, including those related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Discussion will focus on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights at EU and national level, as established by the EU Strategic Agenda 2019-2024.

EU-India leaders' meeting via video conference, Porto, on Saturday.

European Parliament

– Coming Week Highlights

WEEK 18

Reserved for External Parliamentary Activities

European Commission

Coming Week Highlights

College meeting Wednesday

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European Council – Council of the European Union

Coming Meetings

Foreign Affairs Council (Defence), 6 May

AGENDA HIGHLIGHTS

Ministers of Foreign Affairs will be briefed by the High Representative, Josep Borrell, about current affairs, thereby reviewing a number of recent developments and upcoming events, including on Sahel, Ukraine, Mozambique and Operation IRINI.

Link to full agenda here

Porto Social Summit, 7 May

AGENDA HIGHLIGHTS

The Summit aims to reinforce the commitment from Member States, European institutions, social partners and civil society to the implementation of the Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Link to Porto Social Summit website here

Heads of State or Government, Informal Meeting, Porto, 8 May 2021

AGENDA HIGHLIGHTS

EU leaders will meet in Porto on 8 May to discuss social issues, including those related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The informal European Council will follow the high-level conference held by the Portuguese presidency on 7 May.

The EU leaders' discussion will focus on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights at EU and national level, as established by the EU Strategic Agenda 2019-2024. The Action Plan presented by the Commission in March 2021 provides guidance on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, including in the areas of employment, skills and social protection. The Action Plan also sets three main targets to be achieved throughout the European Union by 2030:

- an employment rate of at least 78% in the European Union
- at least 60% of adults attending training courses every year
- a reduction in the number of people at risk of social exclusion or poverty by at least 15 million people, including 5 million children

Link to full agenda here

Portuguese Presidency of Council of the European Union Programme for Inter-Parliamentary Events

Date	Meeting	EP Committee	Location Provisional
Postponed TBA	High level Interparliamentary Conference on Migration and Asylum in Europe		E Parl Brussels
4 May tbc	Conference on the European Union's Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: bringing nature back into our lives		Lisbon tbc
10/11 May	Conference of the Speakers from the national parliaments of the EU member states and the European Parliament (EUSC), organised by the German Bundestag in cooperation with the Bundesrat	Bundestag Bundesrat	Remote
30 May - 1 June	Portuguese Presidency Meeting LXV COSAC Plenary Meeting	COSAC	Lisbon
15 June tbc	Conference on Rural Development		Lisbon tbc
20 -21 June	Conference on the role of Parliaments in deepening the EU Africa relationship		Lisbon

Highlights of Week 17.   26 April to 2 May 2021

European Parliament Plenary and Committee
Highlights Week 17.   26 April to 2 May 2021

EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement

MEPs voted with a large majority in favour of granting its consent to the agreement setting the rules of the future EU-UK relationship. The consent decision was adopted by 660 votes for, five against and 32 abstentions, while the accompanying resolution, setting out Parliament's evaluation of and expectations from the deal, passed by 578 votes, with 51 against and 68 abstentions. The vote took place on Tuesday, with results announced on Wednesday.

In the resolution prepared by the UK Coordination Group and the Conference of Presidents, Parliament strongly welcomes the conclusion of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement that limits the negative consequences of the UK's withdrawal from the EU, which it considers a "historic mistake" as no third country can enjoy the same benefits as an EU member.

Link to EP report here Link to Statement by Commission President here

Link to Statement by Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič here

Civil Protection:

MEPs approved the reformed EU Civil Protection Mechanism Tuesday with 641 votes in favour, 44 against and 14 abstentions. The mechanism aims to ensure the EU and its member states will be better prepared to respond to large-scale disasters, especially when these affect several countries simultaneously.

In order to deploy crisis relief more swiftly, the Commission will be able to acquire directly, under specific conditions, the necessary resources via the rescEU reserve.

1.263 billion EUR will be allocated to the Mechanism for 2021-2027, supplemented by 2.056 billion EUR from the EU Recovery Instrument (approximately five times more than the previous seven-year budget).

Link to EP report here

New rules approved for a common mandatory Transparency Register

A report by Parliament's co-negotiator Danuta Hübner (EPP, PL) was adopted with 645 votes in favour, five against and 49 abstentions. This vote signifies a major change to the structure of the existing Transparency Register: interest representatives will have to register in order to be able to carry out certain lobbying activities relating to any of the three signatory institutions, while each institution will now also put in place complementary transparency measures to encourage their registration.

Link to EP report here

MEPs adopt landmark research programme Horizon Europe

MEPs gave their final approval to the agreement with Council on the Horizon Europe regulation on Tuesday,

adding a political declaration with 677 votes to 5 and 17 abstentions. They adopted the agreement with Council on the Horizon Europe specific programme with 661 votes to 5 and 33 abstentions.

The programme was already provisionally put in place by the European Commission from 1 January 2021.

Link to EP report here

European Globalisation Fund

The renewed European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, adopted by MEPs on Tuesday, includes improvements secured by the EP negotiating team during the talks with Council in December and will allow more European workers to access financial support from the fund.

The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) helps people who have lost their jobs because of globalisation, technological, or environmental changes to retrain and find alternative, quality employment.

Link to EP report here

New rules adopted for quick and smooth removal of terrorist content online

A new law to address the dissemination of terrorist content online was approved by Parliament on Wednesday.

The new regulation will target content such as texts, images, sound recordings or videos, including live transmissions, that incite, solicit or contribute to terrorist offences, provide instructions for such offences or solicit people to participate in a terrorist group. In line with the definitions of offences included in the Directive on combating terrorism, it will also cover material that provides guidance on how to make and use explosives, firearms and other weapons for terrorist purposes.

Hosting service providers will have to remove or disable access to flagged terrorist content in all member states within one hour of receiving a removal order from the competent authority. Member states will adopt rules on penalties, the degree of which will take into account the nature of the breach and the size of company responsible.

The Regulation will enter into force on the twentieth day following publication in the Official Journal. It will start applying 12 months after its entry into force.

Link to EP report here

Resolution on Taxes for Digital Age

In a resolution passed on Thursday, a few months ahead of decisions expected from the OECD, MEPs are seeking to keep the momentum going at European level while pushing for changes on their primary concerns.

To reduce tax avoidance and make taxes fairer, MEPs make a number of suggestions to amend outdated rules established well before the digital economy existed.They call for a minimum effective tax rate to be set at a fair and sufficient level to discourage profit shifting and prevent damaging tax competition. In this regard, the resolution also welcomes the US administration's recent proposal of a 21 % global corporate tax rate.

Taxing rights should reflect that, as a result of digitalisation, the interaction between businesses and consumers significantly contributes to value creation in highly digitalised business models. This would allow more taxes to be paid where value is being created, as has always been the concept behind taxation, rather than where the rates are lowest.

Finally, MEPs insist that the EU should develop its own fall-back position, which would kick in if global negotiations do not yield results by the end of the year. By mid-2021, there should be a proposal on a digital services tax and a Commission road map with different scenarios, with or without agreement at OECD level.

The resolution was adopted 549 votes in favour, 70 against and 75 abstentions.

Link to EP report here

Rule of law in Malta:

In a resolution adopted on Thursday with 635 votes for, 46 against and 12 abstentions, the European Parliament takes stock of developments in the case of Daphne Caruana Galizia and other related investigations, following the testimony of convicted criminal Vincent Muscat. Expressing deep concern about the possible involvement of ministers and political appointees in the murder case, MEPs urge the government to bring to justice all those implicated in all cases brought to light by the journalist.

There are serious and persistent threats to EU values in the country, including media freedom, judicial and police independence, and the freedom of assembly, though MEPs note that the Government of Malta has made some progress in relation to the rule of law and judicial independence. The launch of the structural reform project is welcome, they say, given the 'deep corruption patterns' identified by the Commission in its 2020 Rule of Law Report. MEPs acknowledge the steps taken by the Maltese authorities to protect independent journalism, stressing that further improvements are needed, and calling on the Maltese authorities to implement the EU whistle-blower directive.

Link to EP Report here

MEPs approve investment of €5.4 billion in climate and environmental projects

On Thursday the European Parliament officially gave its approval on LIFE, the only programme at EU-level solely dedicated to the environment and climate. It will enter into force retroactively from 1 January 2021.

The EU programme will contribute to making the necessary shift towards a clean, circular, energy-efficient, low-carbon and climate-resilient economy, to protect and improve the quality of the environment, and to halt and reverse biodiversity loss.

The total budget allocated for LIFE in the compromise on the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework is EUR 5.4 billion (current prices), of which EUR 3.5 billion will go to environmental activities and EUR 1.9 billion to climate action.

Link to EP report here

"EU COVID-19 Certificate"-/ Digital Green Certificate,

On Thursday, Parliament adopted its negotiating position on the proposal for a certificate to reaffirm the right to free movement in Europe during the pandemic. MEPs agreed that the new "EU COVID-19 certificate" - instead of Digital Green Certificate, as proposed by the Commission - should be in place for 12 months and not longer.

The document, which may be in digital or paper format, will attest that a person has been vaccinated against coronavirus or, alternatively, that they have a recent negative test result or have recovered from the infection. However, EU COVID-19 certificates will neither serve as travel document nor become a precondition to exercise the right to free movement, say MEPs.

The legislative proposal covering EU nationals was approved with 540 votes to 119 and 31 abstentions, while the one on third-country nationals passed with 540 votes to 80 and 70 abstentions. The vote took place on Wednesday, with results announced on Thursday morning. Both Parliament and Council are now ready to begin negotiations. The aim is to reach an agreement ahead of the summer tourist season.

Link to EP report here

Conference on the Future of Europe

EP group leaders' statement on the Conference on the Future of Europe

On Thursday, the leaders of Parliament's political groups took stock of the ongoing preparatory work on the Conference on the Future of Europe with the co-chair of the Conference's Executive Board and issued a statement which, inter alia, calls on the Conference Plenary to be adequately composed ensuring

representation by all main stakeholders when it comes to the future of Europe, but also to have a final say about the outcome. And given the delay in the start of the Conference due to the pandemic, asks that any conclusions presented in spring 2022 be preliminary and that the Conference be allowed to continue.

Link to statement here

European Defence Fund

On Thursday, Parliament adopted the European Defence Fund (EDF).

Link to Commission statement **here**

European Commission
Highlights Week 17.   26 April to 2 May 2021

State Aid Temporary Framework

Czech Republic. The Commission approved a Czech scheme worth €1.9 billion to support the uncovered fixed costs of companies affected by the coronavirus outbreak.

Slovenia: The Commission has approved, under EU State aid rules, a €2.5 million compensation granted by Slovenia to the Slovenian Press Agency STA to fulfil its public service mission. The public funding will contribute to the independent news provision to the Slovenian public without unduly distorting competition in the Single Market.

Germany. The European Commission has approved, under EU State aid rules, the prolongation and modification of a German scheme to support the production of electricity from renewable energy sources and from mine gas, as well as reductions of charges to fund support for electricity from renewable sources**.**

Portugal: The Commission approved €12 million in Portuguese support in favour of SATA Air Açores - Sociedade Açoriana de Transportes Aéreos S.A. ('SATA Air Açores') as compensation due to damages suffered as a direct result of travel restrictions imposed due to the coronavirus outbreak. Furthermore, it approved up to €255.5 million additional liquidity support to SATA Air Açores. At the same time, the Commission has extended the ongoing in-depth investigation into other support measures to assess whether Portugal's planned restructuring support measures in favour of SATA are in line with EU rules on State aid to companies in difficulty.

Aid for Belgian and German workers under the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF)

On Tuesday , the Commission announced support to 1,500 former workers of the aviation services company Swissport Belgium, who lost their jobs due to the impact of the coronavirus crisis on air transport activities. The proposed €3.7 million from the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) will help those people find new jobs through further education or training, or support them to start their own business.

The Commission also proposes to support close to 500 former workers of the metal-works factories of GMH Guss in Germany, who lost their employment after several client companies relocated their production to countries outside the European Union.

Migration Management: New EU Strategy on voluntary return and reintegration

On Tuesday, the Commission adopted the first EU Strategy on voluntary return and reintegration. The Strategy promotes voluntary return and reintegration as an integral part of a common EU system for returns, a key objective under the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. It sets out practical measures to strengthen the legal and operational framework for voluntary returns from Europe and from transit countries, improve the quality of return and reintegration programmes, establish better links with development initiatives and strengthen cooperation with partner countries.

Link to Commission statement here

EU channels critical support to India via EU Civil Protection Mechanism

A shipment of urgently needed oxygen, medicine and equipment will be delivered over the coming days by EU Member States to India, following the country's request for support through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, which is coordinated by the Emergency Response Coordination Centre of the European Commission.

The offers of support from EU Member States via the Mechanism currently include:

Ireland: 700 oxygen concentrators; 1 oxygen generator; 365 ventilators;

Belgium: 9,000 doses of antiviral medicines Remdesivir;

Romania: 80 oxygen concentrators and 75 oxygen cylinders;

Luxembourg: 58 ventilators;

Portugal: 5,503 vials of Remdesivir; 20,000 litres of oxygen per week.

Sweden 120 ventilators.

Link to statement here

Recovery and Resilience Plans

The Commission has received official recovery and resilience plans from Germany and Greece, France, Slovakia Denmark, Spain, Latvia and Luxembourg Belgium, Italy, Austria, and Slovenia

Germany: Germany's recovery and resilience plan includes measures for an overall amount of €27.9 billion. The maximum financial contribution in grants available to Germany under the Regulation amounts to €25.6 billion. As the estimated cost of the German plan is higher than Germany's allocation, any additional amount will be covered by Germany.

The German plan is structured around six policy priorities. These include reform and investment measures relating to climate action and energy transition, digitalisation of the economy, infrastructure and education, social participation, strengthening a pandemic-resilient health system, modernising public administration and reducing barriers to investment. Projects in the plan cover the entire lifetime of the RRF until 2026. The plan proposes projects in all of the seven European flagship areas. The plan also includes three Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEIs) in the fields of hydrogen, cloud infrastructure and services, and microelectronics.

Greece: Greece has requested a total of €30.5 billion in support under the RRF, €17.8 billion in grants and €12.7 billion in loans.

The Greek plan is structured around four pillars: green, digital, employment, skills and social cohesion, and private investment and economic and institutional transformation. The plan proposes investments and reforms related to all seven European flagship areas.

France: France has requested a total of €40.9 billion in grants under the RRF.The French plan is structured around the three pillars of resilience, green and digital transformation. It places a particular emphasis on the fight against climate change thanks to investments in energy-efficiency, sustainable transport and green technologies. Projects in the plan cover the entire lifetime of the RRF until 2026, with a strong concentration

of projects in the first three years of implementation. Finally, the plan proposes projects in each of the seven European flagship areas.

Slovakia: Slovakia has requested a total of €6.6 billion in grants under the RRF. The Slovak plan is structured around five key policy priorities. These are green economy, education, R&D and innovation, health, and public administration/digitalisation. It includes measures supporting green investments, particularly in renewables, transport and buildings, healthcare, schooling and the digitalisation of public administration. Projects in the plan cover the entire lifetime of the RRF until 2026. The plan proposes projects in all seven European flagship areas.

Denmark: In the plan it has submitted, Denmark has requested a total of €1.6 billion in grants under the RRF. The Danish plan is structured around the three pillars of resilience, green and digital transformation. The Danish plan foresees significant investments in energy efficiency, green research & development, the reduction of Co2 emissions within the agricultural sector, and digitalisation. Projects in the plan cover the entire lifetime of the RRF until 2026. The plan proposes projects in five of the seven European flagship areas.

Spain: In the plan it has submitted, Spain has requested a total of €69.5 billion in grants under the RRF.

The Spanish plan is structured around four pillars: green transformation; digital transformation; social and territorial cohesion; and gender equality. It includes measures in sustainable mobility, energy-efficiency in buildings, clean power, digital skills, digital connectivity, support to the industrial sector and SMEs, and social housing. Projects in the plan focus primarily on the period 2021-2023. The plan proposes projects in all seven European flagship areas.

Latvia: In the plan it has submitted, Latvia has requested a total of €1.8 billion in grants under the RRF.

The Latvian plan is structured around six components: green and digital transitions; health care; reduction of inequality; economic transformation; and the rule of law. The plan includes reforms in health care, social policy, higher education and skills, and measures on sustainable transport, affordable housing, energy-efficiency in buildings and businesses, digital skills, research and innovation. Projects in the plan cover the entire lifetime of the RRF until 2026.

Luxembourg: In the plan it has submitted, Luxembourg has requested a total of €93 million in grants under the RRF. The Luxembourgish plan is structured around the three pillars of cohesion and social resilience; green transition; and digitalisation, innovation and governance. The plan includes measures in skilling, healthcare, housing, decarbonisation of transport, protection of biodiversity, innovation, digitalisation of public administration, and promotion of a transparent and fair economy. Projects in the plan cover the entire lifetime of the RRF until 2026. The plan proposes projects in six of the seven European flagship areas.

Belgium:. In the plan it has submitted, Belgium has requested a total of €5.9 billion in grants under the RRF. The Belgian plan is structured around six pillars: climate, sustainability and innovation; digital transformation; mobility; social and inclusiveness; economy of the future and productivity; and public finances. Projects in the plan cover the entire lifetime of the RRF until 2026. The plan proposes projects in all seven European flagship areas.

Italy: Italy has requested a total of €191.5 billion in support under the RRF comprising of €68.9 billion in grants and €122.6 billion in loans. The Italian plan is structured around six areas: digitalisation, innovation, competitiveness and culture; green revolution and ecological transition; infrastructure for sustainable mobility; education and research; cohesion and inclusion; health. Projects in the plan cover the entire lifetime of the RRF until 2026. The plan proposes projects in all seven European flagship areas.

Austria: Austria's recovery and resilience plan includes measures for an overall amount of €4.5 billion. The Austrian plan is structured around four policy priorities. These include reform and investment measures relating to: green recovery, covering renovation, mobility, biodiversity, circular economy, and climate neutrality; digital recovery, covering broadband, schools, public service, and enterprises; knowledge based recovery, including research, up- and reskilling, education, and strategic innovation; and fair recovery, encompassing healthcare, resilient communities, art and culture, and reforms. Projects in the plan cover the entire lifetime of the RRF until 2026. The plan proposes projects in all of the seven European flagship areas.

Slovenia: Slovenia has requested a total of €2.5 billion in support under the RRF comprising of €1.8 billion in grants and €700 million in loans.The Slovenian plan is structured around four priority pillars: green transition; digital transformation; smart, sustainable and inclusive growth; health and welfare including investments and reforms in long-term care and social housing. Projects in the plan cover the entire lifetime

of the RRF until 2026. The plan proposes projects in all seven European flagship areas.

Eurobarometer: EU citizens strongly support cooperating with partner countries and youth to reduce poverty

The latest Eurobarometer survey on development cooperation shows that almost nine in ten EU citizens say it is important to partner with countries outside the EU to reduce poverty.

The second most pressing challenge mentioned is education (35%), peace and security (32%), and economic growth and employment (29%). Around one quarter of respondents mentioned water and sanitation (27%), democracy and human rights (26%), and food security and agriculture (24%).

EU citizens overwhelmingly agree (88%) that the EU should tackle climate change and its effects in developing countries, whilst 77% strongly agree that tackling poverty in developing countries should be one of the main priorities of the EU and 61% say that EU development policy should also focus on reducing inequalities in developing countries. About a third of respondents (34%) think that EU development policy should only focus on helping developing countries to strengthen their economies.

Link to Commission Eurobarometer statement here

European Council and Council of the European Union
Highlights Week 17.   26 April to 2 May 2021

Agriculture Ministers, Informal video conference, 26 April 2021

CAP Reform. The presidency provided ministers with an update on the progress of the inter-institutional (trilogue) negotiations on the CAP reform package and sought their guidance on a compromise proposal on green architecture. A central element of the presidency's compromise proposal is the increase of the ring-fenced amounts for eco-schemes, compared to the Council's general approach (progressive increase, starting with 22% in 2023 and reaching 25% in 2025) and the preservation of financial flexibilities (e.g. initial learning period for member states).

Market situation. The Commission provided ministers with an update on the situation of the European agricultural sector and markets highlighting that, overall, the agri-food sector showed resilience and ensured food security during the COVID-19 crisis. Ministers highlighted the negative effects of the recent frosts, particularly for the wine and fruit sectors; several ministers urged the Commission to provide additional support for the impacted sectors.

Trade. Ministers held a strategic discussion on the direction that EU trade relations with third countries (as well as other relevant external EU policies) should take in order to preserve the sustainability and environmental credentials of the EU's agri-food sector. Ministers expressed support for an open, sustainable and ambitious trade agenda that ensures a level playing field and support for the more sensitive sectors.

Ministers also commented on the updated Joint Research Center study on the cumulative economic effects of ongoing and upcoming trade negotiations on the EU agricultural sector: more regular updates and more detailed analysis of the impact of the trade agreements to different regions and sectors were the main asks.

Any other business. The Commission informed ministers about the outcome of the evaluation of the EU's Animal Welfare Strategy for 2012 to 2015 and announced its intention to submit a relevant legislative proposal by the end of 2023. Several ministers highlighted the importance of animal welfare and added the need to revise legislation on animal transport.

The German delegation invited the Commission to consider extending the mandatory labelling of farming methods of hens to foods containing eggs as an ingredient of a processed food (e.g. pasta, mayonnaise). This

initiative received the support of several member states which emphasised the added value of such information for consumers.

Link to Council report here

Foreign Affairs Ministers (Development), 29 April 2021

EU development ministers held an orientation debate on the future European Financial Architecture for Development (EFAD), with the participation of the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

Ministers discussed in particular the conclusions and findings of the "Feasibility study on options for strengthening the future European Financial Architecture for Development", and provided political guidance on the way forward. In line with the outcome of the Feasibility Study, ministers expressed a marked support for a reinforced Team Europe approach, which will have the benefit of avoiding fragmentation, increase synergies, and enhance the collective impact of EU support to development.

Ministers also stressed that EU action should be guided by a strong political steer, and that seamless coordination and strong governance are essential to the success of this approach.

Link to Council report here

Sources: *EU Parliament, Commission, and Council websites*