

Venezuela: HR/VP chairs International Contact Group meeting



Today HR/VP Josep Borrell chaired a Ministerial level meeting of the International Contact Group on Venezuela. The HR/VP briefed the group on his latest contacts with national actors, discussed the latest political developments in Venezuela as well as the humanitarian situation in the country, particularly in the context of a worsening Covid-19 pandemic.

HR/VP Borrell outlined the need for a peaceful, negotiated solution to the crisis in Venezuela that includes credible, free and fair elections.

A [Ministerial declaration](#) was agreed by the International Contact Group.

Philippines: Speech on behalf of the HR/VP at the European Parli



Delivered by Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen on behalf of High Representative Vice/President Josep Borrell on the situation in the Philippines, including the case of Maria Ressa.

Check against delivery!

Thank you.

Madam President, Honourable Members of the European Parliament, thank you for your remarks.

The European Union has expressed its concerns about various human rights issues in the Philippines on numerous occasions: recently through the [EU27 statement at the Human Rights Council](#); also through the [February 2020 biennial Generalised Scheme of Preferences \(GSP\) report](#) discussed in the European Parliament; as well as directly to the authorities, such as during the [first Joint Committee of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement \(PCA\)](#) in January 2020.

More specifically on Maria Ressa's case, the [EEAS Spokesperson issued a statement](#) on 16 June 2020 underlining that her conviction "*raised serious doubts over the respect for freedom of expression as well as for the rule of law in the Philippines[...] We expect the Philippines, like all countries, to uphold its international human rights obligations and protect and promote fundamental freedoms.*"

With regard to the monitoring of the Philippines' commitments under GSP+, the Trade Commissioner had clearly communicated our concerns to his counterpart in Manila and the Philippines' reply will be taken into account in assessing the compliance to the GSP+ conditionalities during our bilateral dialogue with the government.

The EU remains convinced that both the Philippines and the EU have most to gain from constructive engagement. During our January [Joint Committee](#), we agreed on the establishment of a Subcommittee on Good Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights. This Subcommittee, expected to meet regularly, will be an important forum for directly addressing all human rights issues. The European External Action Service (EEAS) has proposed to hold a first meeting already this autumn, by the end of this year, even under a virtual format.

The European Commission and the EEAS will continue raising these matters with the Philippine government in a clear and constructive way.

Thank you.

Link to the video: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-194737>

Press release – COVID-19: Member states need to harmonise health assessments and measures



Worried by the recent increase in positive COVID-19 cases across Europe, MEPs deplore that member states have not learned the lessons from the beginning of the crisis and have yet again taken different and uncoordinated measures.

In a resolution adopted by 595 votes in favour, 50 against and 41 abstentions on Thursday, they point to the lack of harmonised methodology used to collect and evaluate the number of infected people, leading to differing health risk assessments and restrictions of free movement for people travelling from other EU countries.

Following [Tuesday's debate](#) with Commissioner Didier Reynders and Minister Michael Roth of the German presidency, Parliament urges member states to

- adopt the same definition for a positive case of COVID-19, for a death by COVID-19 and for recovery from infection,
- mutually recognise test results in all member states,
- cut disproportionate waiting times for tests
- establish a common quarantine period,
- coordinate travel restrictions when needed, in line with the [Commission's proposal](#) and

- discuss how to return to a fully-functioning Schengen area, without internal border controls and contingency plans, as quickly as possible.

The [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control](#) (ECDC) should be in charge of assessing the risk of the virus spreading and publishing a weekly updated risk map (per region) using a common colour code, based on the data provided by the member states, MEPs say. Its resources and staff should be increased immediately, they add.

Encourage the use of tracing apps

The resolution asks the Commission to develop a harmonised passenger locator form to build trust in an EU-wide monitoring system. The use of [tracing apps](#) should be encouraged, according to MEPs, who expect the national systems to be interoperable by October, to allow for EU-wide COVID-19 tracing. They underline that these apps must operate in full compliance with the [General Data Protection Regulation](#).

[Press release – MEPs approve €6.2 billion to tackle crisis and speed up vaccine deployment](#)



Cohesion funds will be topped up with €5.1 billion to ensure that requests for reimbursements from member states for actions taken under the [Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus](#) (CRII+) can be covered. The CRII+ was created to relax the cohesion spending rules to increase flexibility, whereas the [CRII](#) redirected unspent money from the EU budget to tackling the COVID-19 crisis.

The vaccine-related €1.1 billion will increase payments for the [Emergency Support Instrument](#) (ESI), a significant part of which is used to secure the production of vaccines in the EU and sufficient supplies for its member states. This is part of the European Commission's COVID-19 [vaccine strategy](#).

Parliament approved the proposal with 643 votes in favour, 29 against and 14 abstentions.

Background

Recognising the importance and urgency of the proposal that was tabled on 28 August, Parliament treated it under the urgent procedure ([Rule 163 of the Rules of Procedure](#)) without a report from the Committee on Budgets.

[Article – Covid-19: MEPs insist on targeted support for culture](#)



Targeted support for culture

The Covid-19 pandemic led to the shutdown of cinemas, concert halls, festivals, museums, theatres and other mass cultural activities across the EU. Although some of the venues have reopened, continued health and safety measures prevent them from operating at full capacity.

Parliament is calling for direct and swift support for the cultural sector. In a [resolution approved on 17 September](#), following a [plenary debate on 10](#)

[July](#), MEPs argue that financial aid should come from both national budgets and EU funds.

MEPs are concerned that no specific amount has been earmarked in the Next Generation [EU recovery plan](#) to directly benefit the cultural and creative sectors and industries. That is why they call on the European Commission and EU countries to earmark at least 2% of the [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#) for their support.

Parliament also calls on the Commission to come up with new ways of mitigating the impact of the crisis on the sector.