

Media advisory – technical background briefing on current foreign policy topics, including recent violence in and around Gaza in the follow-up to the informal VTC of EU Foreign Ministers



A technical background briefing on current foreign policy topics, including recent violence in and around Gaza, in the follow-up to the informal video conference of EU Foreign Ministers will take place via **video conference** on **Friday, 21 May 2021 at 14.00**.

This briefing is “off the record”.

In order to ask questions remotely, **EU accredited journalists** can register using [this link](#).

Journalists who already registered for previous Foreign Affairs press events do not need to register again.

– **Deadline for registration: Friday, 21 May 2021, 12.30**

Further instructions will be sent to all registered participants approximately half an hour after the deadline.

Hit against euro counterfeiters linked to the Camorra



On 20 May 2021, Europol supported the German Regional Criminal Police of Nordrhein-Westfalen (Landeskriminalamt Nordrhein-Westfalen) and the Italian Finance Corps (Guardia di Finanza) of Rome and Naples in dismantling an organised crime group involved in the production and distribution of

counterfeit euro banknotes, drug trafficking and tax fraud. Law enforcement authorities from the Belgian Federal Police (Federale Politie, Police Fédérale) and the French National Police (Police Nationale) also assisted the investigation. The suspects are believed to have ties to the Camorra mafia clan.

The action day led to:

- 19 house searches (1 in Naples and 18 in Germany)
- 4 persons arrested (Italian nationals)
- Seizures include various documents such as accounting records, IT evidence and €30 000 in cash
- Judicial security order of €415 000 in total, issued by Germany

The criminal network is involved in the production of counterfeit euros in the area of Naples in Italy and their subsequent distribution in Germany. The main suspect is also believed to be involved in the trafficking of different illegal commodities including drugs, stolen vehicles and falsified documents. He is suspected of distributing these illegal commodities, acquired by his associates living in Naples and connected to the Camorra.

During the course of the investigation law enforcement officers made several seizures including cocaine, an illegal firearm and counterfeit money for a value of about €160 000. This investigation also led to the first seizure of a counterfeit banknote of the new €100, just six months after its official release by the European Central Bank.

Europol facilitated the information exchange, operational coordination and provided analytical support. During the action day, Europol supported with technical expertise and cross-checked operational information against Europol's databases and the systems of the European Central Bank.

This investigation is part of the Italian DIA Project ONNET, an EU-financed initiative to tackle mafia-type organised crime groups active in Europe. The project was launched at Europol's headquarters and targets the mafia-style criminal groups in their entirety, rather than one or more of their specific criminal activities.

Headquartered in The Hague, the Netherlands, Europol supports the 27 EU Member States in their fight against terrorism, cybercrime, and other serious and organized crime forms. Europol also works with many non-EU partner states and international organisations. From its various threat assessments to its intelligence-gathering and operational activities, Europol has the tools and resources it needs to do its part in making Europe safer.

EU supports start of WHO process for establishment of Pandemic Treaty: Council decision



The Council adopted today a decision to **support the launch of negotiations** for an international treaty on the fight against pandemics. The World Health Assembly, the main governing body of the WHO, is expected to back the establishment of a process for a **Framework Convention on Pandemic Preparedness and Response** during its (virtual) meeting which starts on 24 May. The proposal for an international treaty on pandemics was first announced by the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, at the Paris Peace Forum in November 2020.

The objective of the Council decision is to **assure the participation of the EU in the negotiations** addressing matters falling within Union competence, in view of the Union's possible accession to the treaty.

The proposal to conclude a treaty on pandemics is discussed in the context of **international efforts to reinforce global health security**, in particular on preparedness and response to health emergencies, in light of lessons learnt from the pandemic.

Background and next steps

At the European Council of 25 February 2021 EU leaders underlined the need for global multilateral cooperation to address current and future health threats and agreed to work on an international treaty on pandemics within the WHO framework and to advance global health security.

On 30 March 2021, leaders from all around the world joined the President of the European Council and the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, in an open call for an international treaty on pandemics.

The European Union has an informal observer status at the WHO.

[Visit the meeting page](#)

EU ready to discuss EEA states'

[financial contribution to social and economic cohesion for 2021-2027](#)



The Council adopted today a decision authorising the opening of negotiations with Iceland, the Principality of Liechtenstein and the Kingdom of Norway for an agreement on the future financial contribution of the EEA EFTA States to social and economic cohesion in the European Economic Area.

The Council also adopted negotiating directives which constitute a mandate to the Commission for the negotiations.

On the basis of this mandate, negotiations should now be conducted and concluded swiftly, in order to ensure that the instruments for adopting the above arrangements enter into force as soon as possible, taking into account the timeline of the next seven-year-period for the EU cohesion policy instruments.

Following the expiry of the EEA and Norway Financial Mechanisms 2014-2021 on 30 April 2021, the new mechanism for financial contributions from the three partner countries will be aimed at alleviating social and economic disparities in the European Economic Area in the period 2021–2027.

[Visit the meeting page](#)

[COVID-19: Council updates recommendation on restrictions to travel from third countries](#)



The Council today adopted an amending recommendation on the temporary restriction on non-essential travel into the EU. This amendment responds to the ongoing vaccination campaigns by introducing certain waivers for vaccinated persons and easing the criteria to lift restrictions for third countries. At the same time, it takes into account the possible risks posed by new variants by setting out an emergency brake mechanism to quickly react to the emergence of a variant of interest or concern in a third country.

Criteria to lift restrictions for all travellers

from a third country

For restrictions on non-essential travel to be lifted for a given third country, under the new rules the number of COVID-19 cases per 100 000 inhabitants over the last 14 days is raised from 25 to 75. The progress in having the population vaccinated against the virus should also be taken into account. At the same time, to respond to the risk posed by new variants, the detection in a country of variants of interest should now be considered together with variants of concern.

Other existing criteria continue to apply, including a stable or decreasing trend of new cases, the number of tests performed, a 4% positivity rate among all tests carried out, the overall response to COVID-19 in the country and the reliability of the available information. Reciprocity should continue to be taken into account on a case by case basis.

Lifting of restrictions for vaccinated persons

If member states accept proof of vaccination to waive travel restrictions such as testing or quarantine, they should in principle lift restrictions on non-essential travel for third-country travellers who have received the last recommended dose of an EMA approved vaccine at least 14 days before arrival. Member states could also lift the restriction on non-essential travel to those who have received at least 14 days before the last recommended dose of a vaccine having completed the WHO emergency use listing process.

Where lifting these restrictions, member states should take into account reciprocity on a case by case basis.

Once adopted, the digital green certificate regulation will provide the basis, through a Commission implementing act, for treating third country vaccination certificates equivalent to digital green certificates. Until then, member states should be able to accept third country certificates containing at least a minimum data set, in accordance with national law and taking into account the need to be able to verify the authenticity, validity and integrity of the certificate.

Emergency brake mechanism

Where the epidemiological situation of a third country or region worsens quickly, in particular if a variant of concern or of interest has been detected, member states should adopt an urgent, temporary restriction on all travel into the EU. This emergency brake should not apply to EU citizens, long-term EU residents and certain categories of essential travellers, who should nevertheless be subject to appropriate testing and quarantine measures, even if fully vaccinated.

When a member state applies such restrictions, the member states meeting within the Council should urgently review the situation in a coordinated manner and in close cooperation with the Commission. Such restrictions should be reviewed at least every two weeks.

Background

On 30 June 2020 the Council adopted a recommendation on the gradual lifting of the temporary restrictions on non-essential travel into the EU. This recommendation included an initial list of countries for which member states should start lifting the travel restrictions at the external borders, which is reviewed every two weeks.

On 2 February 2021, the Council adopted an amending recommendation which updated the criteria to lift restrictions, set out measures for travellers and provided for the rapid reintroduction of restrictions in worsening situations or where a high incidence of variants of concern is identified.

On 3 May 2021, the Commission presented a proposal to further ease the current restrictions on non-essential travel, in view of the developments in the epidemiological situation and the progress of vaccination campaigns.

The Council recommendation is not a legally binding instrument. The authorities of the member states remain responsible for implementing the content of the recommendation.

[Visit the meeting page](#)