

[Fusion energy: political agreement in the Council on ITER financing](#)



Member states' ambassadors today reached a political agreement on the proposed Council Decision amending Decision 2007/198/Euratom establishing the European Joint Undertaking for ITER and the development of fusion energy and conferring advantages upon it.

The proposed Decision aims at securing the financing of the ITER project during the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) period 2021-2027 in order to enable the continued European participation in the ITER project in line with its commitments as the Host Party to this international project.

The indicative Euratom contribution to the Joint Undertaking for the period 2021-2027 is set at €5.61 billion (in current prices).

Next steps

On the basis of today's political agreement, the agreed text (following legal linguistic scrutiny) will be submitted to the Council for adoption in the first months of 2021.

Background

The Commission submitted its proposal on 7 June 2018.

The European Parliament adopted a Resolution on the ITER proposal on 15 January 2019 welcoming the proposal and calling on the Council to approve it (the Parliament does not have co-legislative powers on this proposal).

The International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) agreement was signed in November 2006 by Euratom, the United States, the Russian Federation, Japan, China, South Korea and India. Euratom, which is according to the ITER Agreement the Host Party, has taken the lead in this project. This international fusion energy project is a first-of-a kind, long-term project to build and operate a reactor to test the feasibility of fusion as an energy source.

According to the Commission, the important achievement of the first plasma will probably take place in December 2025, with the full operation estimated in 2035. Fusion energy as a viable commercial energy source is not expected to produce electricity before 2050.

Decision 2007/198/Euratom established the European Joint Undertaking for ITER and the Development of Fusion Energy to provide the contribution of Euratom to the ITER International Fusion Energy Organisation and the Broader Approach Activities with Japan as well as to prepare and coordinate a programme of activities in preparation for the construction of a

demonstration fusion reactor and related facilities.

[Council approves the EU drugs strategy for 2021-2025](#)



The Council today approved the EU strategy setting out the political framework and priorities for the EU's drug policy in the period 2021-2025. The strategy aims to ensure a high level of health promotion, social stability and security and contribute to awareness raising. On the basis of this strategy, the Council will prepare an action plan which will set out concrete measures to achieve these priorities.

With this strategy, the EU and its member states reaffirm their commitment to an approach which is based on evidence, comprehensive and balanced between demand and supply reduction of drugs, with the preservation of human rights at its core. At the same time, this strategy uses the lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis in the drugs area and takes a future-oriented approach, promoting research, innovation and foresight to respond more effectively to increasing challenges and to anticipate them.

The drug phenomenon affects our communities in many different ways, from health, family and social relations, to violence and money laundering. This is a phenomenon that stretches across the globe and that no country can tackle alone. The EU strategy for 2021-2025 provides us with the tools to address it in all its dimensions, together with our international partners. It will also allow us to be more proactive in adapting our response to shifts in the way criminals operate or the development of new substances and trends.

Daniela Ludwig, German Federal Drug Commissioner

Under **drug supply reduction/enhanced security** the strategy targets all aspects of the illicit drug market, and includes the prevention of, dissuasion from and disruption of drug related crime, in particular organised crime, through judicial and law enforcement cooperation, intelligence, interdiction, confiscation of criminal assets, investigations and border management. This priority area has been further enhanced as compared to the 2013-2020 strategy, to respond to the challenging developments in European drug markets. These are characterised by a high availability of various types of drugs, ever larger seizures, increasing use of violence and huge profits, as well as the use of social media platforms, apps and the internet and darknet for illicit drug trafficking. Such features have not faded during the COVID-19 crisis, to the contrary.

The **drug demand reduction** policy area consists of a range of mutual reinforcing measures including prevention, early detection and intervention, counselling, treatment, rehabilitation, social reintegration and recovery. Such action needs to be appropriate to the local social context and the needs of the target population, be informed by scientific evidence and be safe and effective. It needs to be developed through the close collaboration of a number of health and social support services. The COVID-19 crisis has further revealed the need to ensure continuity of these actions.

A new, dedicated chapter has been added on addressing **drug related harm**. This section includes measures and policies to prevent or reduce the possible health and social risks and harm for users, for society and in prison settings. It covers aspects such as reducing the prevalence and incidence of drug-related infectious diseases, preventing overdoses and drug-related deaths and providing alternatives to coercive sanctions.

The strategy also identifies three cross-cutting themes in support of the policy areas:

- **international cooperation**: enhancing the role of the EU as a global broker for a people-centred and human rights-oriented drug policy through cooperation with third countries, regions and international organisations, while strengthening the commitment to development-orientated drug policies and alternative development measures.
- **research, innovation and foresight**: providing the EU and member states with the necessary comprehensive research and foresight capacities to address drug challenges in a more agile and proactive manner, increasing preparedness to respond to future challenges.
- **coordination, governance and implementation**: ensuring optimal implementation of the strategy, including via the key action of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) and of Europol, involving civil society and providing adequate resources at EU and national level to achieve this.

Background

The EU drugs strategy 2013-2020 and the two action plans approved on that basis have provided the priorities for EU drugs policy during the past years. In July 2020, the European Commission presented an evaluation of this strategy and an EU agenda on drugs for 2021-2025. On this basis, the Council bodies have elaborated the EU drugs strategy 2021-2025.

[Article – Plenary highlights: EU](#)

budget, Sakharov Prize, water



EU budget

Parliament [gave its consent](#) to the EU's next [seven-year budget](#) on Wednesday. In the negotiations with Council, MEPs had secured additional €15 billion for key EU programmes in areas such as health, research, investment and young people.

Several related files were also approved, including an agreement on the introduction of new sources of EU revenue that would cover the repayment of debt to be issued for the €750 billion [Covid-19 recovery plan](#).

Parliament also endorsed the EU's 2021 EU budget on Friday.

Rule of law mechanism

For the first time, EU governments' access to EU funds will be made conditional on their [respect for the rule of law](#). MEPs [approved on Wednesday](#) the establishment of a mechanism allowing the suspension of payments to countries that violate the rule of law or EU values. The regulation will [apply from 1 January 2021](#), MEPs stressed.

React-EU

EU regions will receive an additional €47.5 billion to fight the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic following Parliament's [approval of the React-EU](#)

[package](#). The money will be disbursed through the EU structural funds, with most of it to be made available in 2021.

Sakharov Prize

On Wednesday Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and Veranika Tsapkala received Parliament's [Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought](#) on behalf of the democratic opposition in Belarus that has been holding peaceful protests for democracy and fair elections in the country.

Water

Parliament [adopted an update of its drinking water legislation](#) on Wednesday to further [improve access to drinking water and tap water quality](#). The new rules also aim to cut plastic waste from bottled water. In a separate resolution adopted on Thursday, MEPs called on member states to fully comply with the EU's rules on the protection of ground and surface waters by 2027 at the latest.

Vaccines

In a [debate](#) on Wednesday, MEPs welcomed the European Commission's readiness to formally approve the first vaccine on 23 December, but also highlighted the importance of safety and a very thorough and independent authorisation process to reinforce trust.

EU-UK relations

MEPs discussed [progress in the negotiations for an agreement on future EU-UK relations](#) on Friday. Parliament is [ready to hold an extraordinary plenary session](#) before the end of December to examine and vote on an agreement if a deal is reached by midnight on Sunday 20 December.

Parliament adopted some contingency measures on Friday to maintain cross-border connectivity between the UK and the EU on roads and by air after the end of the transition period that expires on 31 December.

Support for small businesses

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) should get EU support to survive through the Covid-19 crisis and deal with the challenges of digitalisation and decarbonisation, MEPs said in response to a Commission communication on a [SME strategy](#).

Return of migrants

The EU's policy on returning non-EU nationals who do not have the right to stay in the EU [suffers from gaps and shortcomings](#) that need to be addressed, MEPs said on Wednesday. They suggest that voluntary departures should be facilitated and the fundamental rights of migrants should be respected.

Transitional support for farmers

Delays in negotiating the EU's farm policy reforms [will not affect farmers' incomes](#). MEPs approved on Wednesday [provisions to ensure a smooth transition](#) from the EU's current Common Agricultural Policy to the future one and €8 billion in aid for food producers and rural areas.

[Press release – EU Budget 2021 approved: supporting the recovery](#)



Commitment appropriations for 2021 total €164.3 billion; payment appropriations total €166.1 billion. The details of the 4 December agreement between Parliament and Council [are available here](#).

After Council formally approved the agreement with Parliament on Monday, Parliament approved the budget on Friday by 540 votes to 77, with 70 abstentions. It was then signed into law by President David Sassoli.

For a more competitive Europe, creating jobs and investing in the EU's future

MEPs succeeded in bolstering, on top of the Commission's budget proposal, programmes they considered key to boosting growth and jobs, reflecting widely agreed European Union priorities, namely Digital Europe (+25.7 million) and the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) for transport infrastructure (+€60.3 million).

Strengthen respect for Europe's values and boosting climate action

As a supplementary effort to fight climate change, the additions obtained by the EP for the LIFE programme (+€42 million) aim, from the outset, at contributing to reaching the target of 30% of climate-relevant spending in the EU budget for the 2021-2027 period.

The Rights and Values programme will receive an additional €6.6 million, and the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPP0), an independent EU body that fights crimes against the Union budget will benefit from an extra €7.3 million.

MFF top-ups: supporting the young, EU research and healthcare

Other reinforcements for 2021 reflect the [top-ups to selected key EU programmes](#) that Parliament obtained in the deal with Council on the next long-term EU budget (MFF) 2021-2027, [approved on 16 December](#).

This is the case for Erasmus+ (+€175.1 million), Horizon Europe (research programme, +€20 million) and the EU4Health programme, the EU's response to COVID-19, by a further €74.3 million. EU4Health will support medical and healthcare staff, patients and health systems. Similarly, the commitment appropriations for humanitarian aid have been increased by €25 million and for supporting the EU's southern neighbourhood by €10.2 million.

Quotes

"I'm pleased that we reached a swift agreement in the interest of European citizens in these challenging times. With the top-ups for some of the future-looking programmes agreed in the multi-annual framework just weeks ago, we obtained budget increases for other programmes with proven European added value. These extra investments in, for example, the trans-European transport networks and digital Europe, all respond to real needs and are in line with the expectations of EU citizens", said the Chair of the Budgets committee [Johan van Overtveldt](#) (ECR, BE).

"In all conscience, we know that this budget is not up to the challenge. It was the most that could be obtained given the restrictions of negotiating the MFF with heads of state in unanimity. The good news is that there is a solution that can mobilise 50 billion EUR per year for health, climate and jobs, and that cannot be blocked by the unanimity rule: taxing speculation in enhanced cooperation. The Commission says it can be adopted by the end of 2022. Let's get to work without delay", said the lead rapporteur (Commission section) [Pierre Larrouturou](#) (S&D, FR).

"We cannot build promising policies for the future without operational, efficient, modern, environmentally friendly and interactive institutions that

are capable of functioning even in the event of force majeure. By voting in favour of the 2021 budget, we are giving the institutions of the European Union sufficient resources and staff so that they can best fulfil their missions and meet citizens' expectations in times of crisis. This new agreement finds the balance between making savings in a time of crisis and not impeding the EU institutions from functioning properly, said the rapporteur for the other sections, [Oliver Chastel](#) (RENEW, BE).

[Press release – EU-UK relations: parliament adopts temporary contingency measures](#)



- **Basic air connectivity:** the temporary rules ensuring certain air services between the UK and the EU continue for a maximum of six months were adopted with 680 votes in favour (3 against, 4 abstentions). This includes rights for UK and EU air carriers to continue to fly over and make technical stops on EU territory, as well as serve direct routes to the EU. Also a limited number of specific pandemic-related cargo flights will be allowed.
- **Aviation safety:** the regulation ensuring various certificates for products, parts, appliances and companies remain valid was adopted with 680 votes in favour (3 against, 4 abstentions). This will avoid UK and EU aircraft that use these products and services being grounded.
- **Basic road connectivity:** the temporary rules ensuring road freight and road passenger transport for a maximum of six months were adopted with

680 votes in favour (4 against, 3 abstentions). This will allow carriage of goods as well as coach and bus services coming to Europe and going to the UK to continue.

Background

EU rules will no longer apply to and in the UK after the end of the transition period. The targeted contingency measures aim to avoid serious traffic disruptions and considerable delays in case there is no agreement on EU-UK future relations in place by 1 January 2021. The contingency measures will cease to apply, if an agreement is reached.

MEPs also approved the Commission's proposal to extend reciprocal access by EU and UK vessels to each other's waters until 31 December 2021 by 677 votes in favour, 4 against and 6 abstentions. Read more [here](#).

Next steps

All temporary rules have to be adopted by the Council. They will enter into force after publication in the EU Official Journal and become applicable if a similar set of measures is adopted by the UK.