

[Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the alignment of certain countries concerning restrictive measures against the Republic of Guinea](#)



On 23 October 2020, the Council adopted Decision 2020/1556[1].

The Council Decision extends the existing restrictive measures until 27 October 2021.

The Candidate Countries the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania[2] , the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this Council Decision.

They will ensure that their national policies conform to this Council Decision.

The European Union takes note of this commitment and welcomes it.

[1] Published on 26.10.2020 in the Official Journal of the European Union no. L 355, p. 3

[2] The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

[ECDC opens ESCAIDE 2020 digital conference](#)



The ESCAIDE 2020 plenaries and sessions will focus on issues shaping infectious disease epidemiology & microbiology in the next decade and beyond, with a special focus on the latest research concerning COVID-19, food-and waterborne diseases, HIV and sexually transmitted infections, vaccine-preventable diseases, influenza and respiratory viruses, antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and emerging diseases.

The aims of the conference include the sharing of scientific knowledge and experience in areas applied to infectious disease epidemiology and public health microbiology, as well as discussing and debating scientific advances and current public health challenges. The conference also aims at strengthening and expanding the human network of those in this field, including fellows and students.

ESCAIDE will have plenary debates looking at different aspects of COVID-19, from the shape and direction of the pandemic, to how countries have responded. Key speakers include **Maria van Kerkhove** (WHO), **Andrea Ammon** (ECDC), **George Fu Gao** (China CDC), **Anders Tegnell** (Public Health Agency, Sweden), **Francesco Maraglino** (Italian Ministry of Health), **Devi Sridhar** (University of Edinburgh) and **Gabrielle Breugelmans** (CEPI). The full programme of keynote sessions, plenaries, abstract presentations is available on the ESCAIDE [website](#).

Over 1500 participants are expected to attend, including epidemiologists, microbiologists, public health professionals, clinicians, veterinarians, science journalists, statisticians, social scientists and policy makers.

The conference is held between 24-27 November 2020 and is this year organised as an online event due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Serbia: EIB supports digitalisation of schools with €65 million



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- **Modern IT equipment and high-speed internet for primary and secondary schools across Serbia.**
- **50 000 teachers to improve their digital skills and 700 new jobs to be created.**
- **Investment enables equal and inclusive access to digital education for all and uninterrupted e-teaching during crisis situations such as COVID-19.**

The European Investment Bank (EIB) will invest €65 million in the modernisation of primary and secondary schools in Serbia to provide new digital equipment, connectivity, and capacity building training for 50 000 school teachers. The investment from the EU bank will support Serbia's national education strategy, upgrade digital capacities in Serbian schools and contribute to economic and productivity growth, youth employability and the advancement of the country's innovative capacity.

Schools across Serbia will benefit from modern computer classroom equipment and wireless local area networks, and 50 000 teachers will be trained to improve their digital skills. The project is expected to create up to 700 new

jobs.

This investment is part of the EIB's Economic Resilience Initiative and will ensure equal and inclusive access to digital education for pupils in Serbia, creating equal education opportunities in rural and urban areas, and empowering young people with digital skills to prepare them for a competitive labour market.

Vice-President Lilyana Pavlova, responsible for the EIB's activities in Serbia, said: "Modern, effective education and digital literacy creates new opportunities in life for young people, and makes them competitive on the modern job markets. A strong digital economy is vital for innovation, growth, jobs and competitiveness. Today, this is one of the key enablers of growth and prosperity in countries around the world. Finally, schools in advanced phases of digitalisation have proven more efficient in challenging times such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The EU bank is pleased to be able to contribute to a more resilient Serbia, capable of operating efficiently even in the most difficult of times. The European Investment Bank looks forward to continuing its support for Serbia and its transition into a digital, sustainable and innovative economy."

The Minister of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications of the Republic of Serbia Tatjana Matic stated: "The project that aims to digitize the education system is a priority for the Government of Serbia. Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications and the Ministry of education, science and technology development of the Republic of Serbia started the "Connected Schools" Project implementation in 2019. This EIB investment will allow major benefits of the project to reach all schools in Serbia. MoTTT will be able to benefit from it. The Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications is advancing with the construction of a standardised and sustainable wireless local area network in all schools and the comprehensive improvement of national academic network communication infrastructure, while the Ministry of Education is providing digital equipment in a synchronised manner and thus creating the infrastructure base for the development of the digitalised classrooms, teaching and learning process. Providing modern IT equipment and high-speed internet, as well as the improving teachers' digital skills will further contribute to digital education, which is necessary pillar of the cotemporary, sustainable and strong society, especially in the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This project will contribute to bridging the digital divide, raising digital literacy and competitiveness in the digital age, and expand the base for IT industry growth. All young people must be given an equal chance to gain competencies that will enable them to make the same choices as their peers in developed digital economies."

Sem Fabrizi, EU Ambassador and Head of the EU Delegation to Serbia, said: "COVID-19 has obliged the whole world to go digital. Mastering digital competence has become more than ever crucial for learning, work and active participation in society, as well as for acquiring other key competencies such as communication, science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and languages. This comprehensive EIB investment in digital school infrastructure and digital skills of teachers across Serbia comes at a critical time in the modernisation of the Serbian education system. It is an integral part of the

European Union's overall efforts that the EU has already made in the education system in Serbia. With more than €100 million so far, the European gold standards and best practices have been integrated in the Serbian education system, many generations of students will be benefiting and thus creating active citizens of the future."

The EIB will provide a significant level of technical support in aid of project preparation and implementation. To date, the EIB has invested €50 million in the modernisation of Serbian schools, improving the quality of learning conditions for around 28 000 primary and secondary school children in over 200 education facilities in Serbia. €200 million has been invested in reviving Serbia's research and development sector, creating a long-term platform for scientific development in all major areas. For more information about this project, please visit the following link:

<https://www.eib.org/en/stories/serbia-digital-education>.

Background information

About the EIB in Serbia:

The EIB has been active in Serbia since [1977](#). Since 2001, we have been providing finance to support key infrastructure projects, as well as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), industry, services and local authorities. To date, 83 projects have been financed and over €6 billion invested in SMEs and in transport, education, healthcare and utility infrastructure. For more information regarding the EIB's projects in Serbia, please refer to:

<https://www.eib.org/en/projects/regions/enlargement/the-western-balkans/serbia/index.htm>

About the EIB in the Balkans:

The EIB is one of the leading international financiers in the Western Balkans. Since 2007, the Bank has financed projects totalling almost €8 billion in the region. Alongside its continued support for the reconstruction and upgrade of public infrastructure, since 2010 the EIB has expanded into many new areas, such as healthcare, research and development, education and SMEs.

For detailed information on the EIB's activities in the Western Balkans, please visit the following link:

www.eib.org/en/publications/the-eib-in-the-western-balkans

About Team Europe and the COVID-19 response in the Western Balkans:

As part of the #TeamEurope strategy, the EU's global response to COVID-19, the EIB Group has rapidly mobilised €5.2 billion outside the EU, accelerating financing and targeted technical assistance. For the Western Balkan countries, the EIB has prepared an immediate support package of €1.7 billion, primarily for SMEs and the healthcare sector. The total EU financial support package for the Western Balkans amounts to more than €3.3 billion. For more information:

Article – How Parliament wants to end homelessness in the EU



Additionally, Parliament calls on EU countries to adopt the principle of “housing first”, already successfully introduced by several countries. Contrary to more ‘traditional’ approaches, the “housing first” model seeks to move homeless people into permanent housing as quickly as possible before addressing other issues.

Lack of affordable housing is a growing problem

Despite substantial differences between EU countries, the lack of affordable housing is a growing problem, with house prices rising by 5.2% in the EU in the second quarter of 2020 compared to the same quarter of 2019.

This is a problem for low-income owners or renters: In 2018, [almost 38%](#) of households at risk of poverty spent more than 40% of their disposable income on housing, compared to 10.2% of the general EU population.

Parliament is also working on proposals for decent, affordable housing and inclusive housing markets.

Press release – EU consumers will soon be able to defend their rights collectively



The new rules introduce a harmonised model for representative action in all member states that guarantees consumers are well protected against mass harm, while ensuring appropriate safeguards to avoid abusive lawsuits.

All member states must put in place at least one effective procedural mechanism that allows qualified entities (e.g. consumer organisations or public bodies) to bring lawsuits to court for the purpose of injunction (ceasing or prohibiting) or redress (compensation). This legislation aims to improve the functioning of the internal market by stopping illegal practices and facilitating access to justice for consumers.

More rights for consumers and safeguards for traders

The European class action model will allow only qualified entities, such as consumer organisations, to represent groups of consumers and bring lawsuits to court, instead of law firms.

In order to bring cross-border actions to court, qualified entities will have

to comply with the same criteria across the EU. They will have to prove that they have a certain degree of stability and be able to demonstrate their public activity, and that they are a non-profit organisation. For domestic actions, entities will have to fulfil the criteria set out in national laws.

The rules also introduce strong safeguards against abusive lawsuits by using the “loser pays principle”, which ensures that the defeated party pays the costs of the proceedings of the successful party.

To further prevent representative actions from being misused, punitive damages should be avoided. Qualified entities should also establish procedures to avoid conflict of interest and external influence, namely if they are funded by a third party.

Collective actions can be brought against traders if they have allegedly violated EU law in a broad range of areas such as data protection, travel and tourism, financial services, energy and telecommunication.

Finally, the directive also covers infringements that have stopped before the representative action is brought or concluded, since the practice might still need to be banned to prevent it from recurring.

Quote

The rapporteur [Geoffroy Didier \(EPP, FR\)](#) said: “With this new directive, we found a balance between more consumer protection and giving businesses the legal certainty that they need. At a time when Europe is being severely tested, the EU has demonstrated that it can deliver and adapt to new realities, better protect its citizens and offer them new concrete rights in response to globalisation and its excesses”.

Next steps

The directive will enter into force 20 days following its publication in the Official Journal of the EU. Member states will then have 24 months to transpose the directive into their national laws, and an additional six months to apply it. The new rules will apply to representative actions brought on or after its date of application.

Background

The Representative Action Directive, [presented in April 2018](#) by the European Commission, was [agreed](#) by EP negotiators and EU ministers in June 2020. The bill, which is part of the [New Deal for Consumers](#), comes as a response to a recent series of scandals related to breaches of consumers’ rights by multinational companies. In some member states, consumers can already launch collective action in courts, but now this option will be available in all EU countries.