

COVID-19 transport measures: Council agrees its position on temporary derogations in support of the rail sector



The EU is working on additional temporary rules to **mitigate the severe effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the rail sector**. Today member states' ambassadors agreed on a mandate regarding a proposal to give member states the possibility to help the sector by providing relief from certain infrastructure charges for rail companies, while ensuring a timely refund for infrastructure providers.

These targeted emergency rules are designed to ensure the continuity of rail transport by reducing the risk of COVID-19-related bankruptcies in the sector, which has been badly affected by a temporary lack of demand for transport services. To ensure the fair treatment of operators, the relief measures will apply in a strictly neutral, economically justified and transparent way. A sustainable rail sector is key to achieving EU climate goals and ensuring connectivity across Europe, and is one of the top priorities of the German presidency.

Andreas Scheuer, German Federal Minister for Transport and Digital Infrastructure, President of the Council

Council mandate

The temporary rules on relief from rail infrastructure charges will apply from 1 March 2020 until 31 December 2020, and are extendable if necessary. They entail a relaxation of obligations with regard to track access charges, reservation charges and mark-ups.

In its text the Council has specified that, where appropriate, member states may apply the derogation concerning track access charges according to market segments, such as passenger or freight transport, in a transparent, objective and non-discriminatory way.

It is for each member state to decide whether to implement any of these derogations or not. The Council has added an obligation for member states to inform the Commission of any measures they take, as well as an obligation for the Commission to make this information publicly available.

If needed, these derogations may be extended by means of Commission delegated acts. Under the Council mandate, the reference period can be extended by up

to six months at a time, and by up to 18 months in total after the entry into force of the regulation.

The draft regulation will enter into force the day after its publication in the EU Official Journal.

The negotiations between the Council and the European Parliament are taking place as a matter of urgency.

Next steps

The mandate agreed today by the Permanent Representatives Committee allows the presidency to liaise with the European Parliament on the final text before the Parliament adopts its first reading position.

Applying for asylum at national borders: EASO report outlines divergences across EU Member States

Applying for asylum at national borders: EASO report outlines divergences across EU Member States

The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) has published a [new report](#) outlining the different practices in EU+ Member States¹ using border procedures to process asylum applications.

As part of efforts to establish fast and efficient procedures for international protection in Europe, increasing focus has been put on the external borders of the EU. One solution which has been put forward is a more extensive use of border procedures to efficiently process applicants for international protection directly upon arrival.

A 'border procedure' refers to an application for international protection which is made at the border of a country, such as at an airport or at a land border crossing. In such cases, EU+ countries may choose to decide on such applications directly at the border or in transit zones.

Currently, at the level of national legislation, EU Member States do not have a uniform way of applying the border procedure provided by the Asylum Procedures Directive ([APD](#)). As a result, national border procedures are not necessarily comparable, nor applied in similar circumstances.

The report gathers detailed information on national border procedures to inform discussions on the topic. EASO's current mandate focuses on organising, coordinating and promoting the exchange of information across

asylum authorities in Member States, as well as with the European Commission, rather than monitoring and evaluating the implementation of asylum procedures in practice. The report therefore concentrates primarily on explaining the current legislation on border procedures in EU+ countries, touching to a lesser extent on their implementation on the ground.

While the use of border procedures is envisaged primarily for cases that appear to have less merit, their application has stirred up debate. The report includes concerns which have been raised by international organisations and NGOs, in particular in relation to safeguarding the rights of persons to seek refuge. For more information on select case law related to border procedures, consult the [EASO Case Law Database](#)

For more information on special procedures used for asylum applications in EU+ countries, consult the [EASO Asylum Report 2020](#)

Any further information may be obtained from the European Asylum Support Office on the following email address: press@easo.europa.eu.

¹Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

[New debate series by EEA: How does COVID-19 impact the environment and climate?](#)

We need to ensure that our recovery from the corona virus pandemic moves us to a future in line with the ambition of the European Green Deal. Faced with unprecedented challenges within a relatively short time frame, we need to act quickly and decisively. These online debates aim to share the existing knowledge and trigger action towards our shared European goals.

Hans Bruyninckx, EEA Executive Director

The aim of the debates is to contribute to policymaking by bringing the latest knowledge, research and issues to the attention of key stakeholders, including policymakers and influencers that are shaping the future in these uncertain times. Viewers can follow the debates which will be streamed on a regular basis between September and December on [the EEA's Facebook page](#).

In addition to the debate series, the EEA has also today put online a database of a number of studies, reports and other research from across Europe, looking at the impact of COVID-19 and the climate and environment. The database will be regularly updated as new research becomes available and these publications are shared with us by our partners, mainly in the European Environment Information and Observation Network (Eionet).

The database complements an already active [Post Corona Planet](#) platform, which aims to bring together knowledge and reflections from across Europe and beyond, and to facilitate an informed debate on how this pandemic affects our path towards a sustainable planet. In early April the EEA published a special COVID-19 air quality viewer to help assess how lockdown and related measures affected concentrations of air pollution.

Online Debates

The first debate '**A sustainable recovery – national perspectives**' takes place on Wednesday, **9 September from 16.30-17.30 CEST** (Copenhagen time). Dirk Messner, President of the German Environment Agency (UBA) and Hans Mommaas, Director-General of the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL) will join our EEA Executive Director Hans Bruyninckx for the discussion on this issue.

To watch the event live, leave comments or questions, please **go to the EEA's [Facebook page](#)**. Additional information on the event is available on the Facebook [event page](#).

Information on the following upcoming debates will be shared on our [debate corner](#). The debates will address topics such as sustainable recovery and the European green deal – the EU perspective, the scientific perspective, nature – planetary boundaries, air quality/ transport, environmental health, climate change, and strategic reflections on Europe's environment in a post-COVID world.

[**G7 Foreign Ministers' Statement on the poisoning of Alexei Naval**](#)



The text of the following statement was released by the G7 foreign ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States of America and the High Representative of the European Union.

We, the G7 foreign ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States of America and the High Representative of the European Union, are united in condemning, in the strongest possible terms, the confirmed poisoning of Alexei Navalny.

Germany has briefed G7 partners on the fact that clinical and toxicological findings by German medical experts and a specialised laboratory of the German armed forces have determined that Mr Navalny is the victim of an attack with a chemical nerve-agent of the “Novichok” group, a substance developed by Russia. Mr Navalny is in intensive care in a Berlin hospital and remains in a serious condition. Our heartfelt thoughts are with his family and we hope for his full and speedy recovery.

Any use of chemical weapons, anywhere, anytime, by anybody, under any circumstances whatsoever, is unacceptable and contravenes the international norms prohibiting the use of such weapons. We, the G7 foreign ministers, call on Russia to urgently and fully establish transparency on who is responsible for this abhorrent poisoning attack and, bearing in mind Russia’s commitments under the Chemical Weapons Convention, to bring the perpetrators to justice.

This attack against opposition leader Navalny is another grave blow against democracy and political plurality in Russia. It constitutes a serious threat to those men and women engaged in defending the political and civil freedoms that Russia herself has committed to guarantee. We call on Russia to fulfill its commitments under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and to guarantee these rights, including the right to freedom of expression, to its citizens.

We will continue to monitor closely how Russia responds to international calls for an explanation of the hideous poisoning of Mr Navalny. We remain strongly committed to our support for democracy, the rule of law and human rights in Russia and to bolster our support to the Russian civil society.

5th Angola-EU Ministerial Meeting – Joint Way Forward



On 8 September 2020, the European Union (EU) and the Republic of Angola held the **fifth Ministerial meeting organised under the framework of the EU-Angola Joint Way Forward (JWF)**. The meeting took place by videoconference. The Joint Way Forward is a dedicated framework for dialogue and cooperation based on common interests and shared values.

The meeting was co-chaired on the EU side by the EU **High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, Mr Josep Borrell Fontelles**, and on the Angolan side by the **Minister for External Relations of the Republic of Angola, H.E. Mr Tete Antonio**. The meeting was also attended on the EU side by the **Executive Vice-President of the European Commission, Mr Valdis Dombrovskis**, and on the Angolan side by the **Minister of Industry and Trade, Mr. Victor Fernandes**, and the **State Secretary for Economy, Mr Mario Caetano**.

The Ministerial talks covered a broad spectrum of political and security issues, as well as an exchange on the impact of and response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and on further enhancement of bilateral cooperation, trade relations and cooperation in multilateral fora. The two sides expressed **their satisfaction with the JWF** as a framework, which remains relevant to a **deepening partnership** and responsive to the need to tackle together both **existing and future challenges**.

POLITICAL AND SECURITY ISSUES

Regional political and security priorities

The European Union congratulated **Angola for holding the Secretariat-General of the Africa, Caribbean, Pacific (ACP) Group of States and the Chair of the Economic Community Central African States (ECCAS) Commission**.

The two sides pledged to increase the scope of their **work on peace and**

security. They exchanged views on the **regional situation in central and southern Africa**, noting the important **role played by Angola** in the **Southern African Development Community (SADC), ECCAS and the International Conference on the Great Lakes (ICGLR) and in cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea.** They touched upon a number of specific situations, such as the peace process in the Central African Republic, and the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Region, with a focus on actions to prevent and mitigate conflicts and to address the root causes of instability. In this perspective, they reaffirmed their commitment to **pursue dialogue and cooperation in bilateral, regional and multilateral fora in different key priority areas, including human rights, in line with the ongoing activities of the EU-Angola Working Group on Human Rights.** Whenever possible, EU-UN-AU trilateral cooperation would be promoted.

Cooperation in the field of security and defence

The two sides had a first discussion on different areas of interest for a **possible EU-Angola structured cooperation in the field of security and defence.** Both sides intend to look into **establishing a partnership on security and defence.** The first step would be the identification of **priority issues of mutual interest, with a focus on possible concrete areas for cooperation, building on good ongoing cooperation on maritime security,** through the holding of technical consultations. The two sides will **explore avenues for further joint-cooperation** in support to the Yaoundé architecture for maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea and the potential participation of Angola in EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions or operations.

European Union – African Union agenda: preparation of the Summit

The European Union and Angola stressed the importance of the upcoming Summit to set an ambitious agenda for the future with joint strategic priorities. In this respect, the EU updated Angola on the proposals put forward in its **Joint Communication “Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa”.** They agreed that sustainable investment and jobs, linked to the green transition and the digital transformation alongside governance and peace and security would be priority areas. Both sides stressed their adherence to the promotion and protection of the rules-based multilateral system. They reaffirmed their commitment in World Trade Organisation (WTO) reform and in making their best efforts for a successful Twelfth WTO Ministerial Conference (MC12).

COVID-19 CRISIS – FUTURE EU-ANGOLA COOPERATION

COVID-19 impact and response

The sides exchanged on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe, in Angola and more broadly in Africa and globally, including the importance of an environmentally sustainable economic recovery. The European Union introduced the “Team Europe” support package and explained the EU hosted “Worldwide Vaccine Pledging Marathon” to ensure the universal deployment of diagnostics, treatments and vaccines. Angola shared information on **the country’s response strategy.** Beyond the purely health-related issues, both sides discussed options for **concerted action** to tackle the **socio-economic consequences of the pandemic,** as well as the implications for peace and security. The EU and Angola confirmed their mutual commitment to supporting

the **UN Secretary-General's call to "build back better"** by investing in **sustainable and resilient societies**, recommitting to the **Agenda 2030** and the **Paris Agreement on climate change**.

Preliminary exchange of views on the future of the EU-Angola cooperation

The EU updated Angola on the state of play of the **future EU Multiannual Financial Framework**. They had a preliminary exchange on **possible common interest areas for future cooperation based on Angola and EU priorities (Green Deal, digitalisation, economic growth and jobs creation (including trade and investments) and governance, sustainable economic diversification, resilience to the impacts of climate change, the transition to green energy and to a low carbon economy)**. They agreed that the global economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic represents an **opportunity to pursue green sustainable economic recovery** and to build a more resilient model of economic growth.

Additional EU support to Angola

The European Union announced the preparation of a new package of up to **€20 million in order to support Angola's Covid-19 socio-economic response including economic formalisation**. This comes in recognition of the comprehensive reform agenda of the Angolan government which includes the Macroeconomic Stabilisation Programme, improvements in Public Finance Management and commitments towards protecting the most vulnerable through social sector spending and social protection programmes. This €20 million action would complement the €10 million of funds already mobilised under existing programmes to make available emergency health supplies, provide humanitarian assistance to food insecure populations, deliver services to those affected by the State of Emergency and contribute to research on food and nutrition security of the most vulnerable.

Both sides concurred on the need to join forces to tackle the global challenge of climate change. In this perspective, the EU very much welcomed Angola's ratification of the **Paris Agreement**. **This ratification constitutes** an important step in the context of the trade and sustainable development commitments taken in the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the EU and the SADC EPA States.

The EU presented its newly adopted **action plan to combat money laundering** and Angola provided a state of play of the country's efforts to **fight corruption and illicit financial flows**. The parties recognised the importance of coordinated action in this field and agreed to explore avenues for further cooperation.

Both sides agreed on the **importance of ongoing reforms in the critical areas of strategic natural resources, including extractive minerals**. The EU updated on preparations to implement, as from next year, the 2021 Regulation (EU) 2017/821, which lays down **supply chain due diligence obligations for EU importers** of tin, tantalum and tungsten, and gold originating from conflict-affected and high-risk areas, and both **sides agreed on the importance of supporting the ICGLR in coordinating regional action on minerals due diligence**. In the context of the **Kimberley Process**, a multilateral commitment to remove conflict diamonds from the global supply chain, the EU reiterated

its appreciation of Angola's active role, particularly in its leadership of the Ad Hoc Committee on Review and Reform in 2019. The EU underlined its commitment towards further strengthening the Kimberley Process as unique tool for conflict prevention and sustainable development, and to working closely with Angola in this regard.

EU-ANGOLA TRADE COOPERATION

The EU and Angola stressed their ambition to **build a solid trade and investment partnership**. In order to achieve this, several work streams were discussed.

First, in an effort to promote bilateral, regional and continental trade and investment flows, both sides hope that the **EU-SADC EPA accession process of Angola** can start as soon as possible in 2020. The aim is to finalise the discussions on the terms of Angola's accession by 2021. In addition, the EU affirmed its support for the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), standing ready to share its expertise with Angola, as well as for the long-term prospect of creating a comprehensive continent-to-continent free-trade area.

Second, both sides confirmed their intention to organise a **high-level EU-Angola business event** in the first half of 2021, bringing together representatives of business and public authorities with the aim of discussing how jointly to enhance trade and investment. The discussion would focus on sectors with potential for growth and value addition, and on those which could contribute to the diversification of Angola's production base.

Finally, both sides confirmed their intention to start exploratory discussions on an **EU-Angola investment agreement**, on top of the EPA, focusing on investment facilitation. Such an arrangement would be a novelty for EU action in the **Sub-Saharan region**. To support these goals, both sides plan to continue and deepen economic diplomacy activities, focusing on improving the business climate and ensuring conditions conducive to sustainable investment, economic growth and job creation.

FOLLOW-UP

The European Union and Angola reiterated their full commitment to maintaining the **Joint Way Forward as a forum for constructive dialogue and cooperation based on the principles of mutual respect, openness, and a commitment to promoting human rights, democracy, the rule of law and transparency**. Such a partnership would allow continued future cooperation with a view to **tackling bilateral, regional and global challenges in the mutual interest of both Angola and the EU**.

The **next Senior Officials Meeting (SOM)** would be organised in Brussels, during the first half of 2021. This SOM should be **dedicated to exploring new avenues for cooperation**.

Both sides agreed that the **next (sixth) Ministerial Meeting** would take place in 2021 in Luanda.