

# Introductory remarks by President Charles Michel at the videoconference of EU leaders with US President Biden



Good afternoon, President Biden. Thank you for accepting our invitation. We are delighted to welcome you today. It's not common practice for the European Council to host foreign guests at our regular meetings. The last time was 11 years ago. It was your good friend, Barack Obama.

In Washington, it might not be clear what the European Council does. As you know, the European Council is the gathering of the 27 EU Heads of State and Heads of Government, each responsible to their own people and parliaments. This group is the strategic hub of our Union. And we decide on the orientation for our European project.

Mr President, you know well the challenges of bi-partisanship. Just imagine, partisanship times 27! Because 27 Member States.

Yet, most importantly, in the European Council, day after day, we forge our unity. By consensus. We decided here to become the first climate neutral continent by 2050. We decided here on our historic 1.8 trillion Covid recovery plan. On top of our national stimulus plans.

It is here, for example, that we determine the EU's policy towards China, Russia and Turkey. And after the US elections, we discussed what your Presidency would mean for our transatlantic relationship. We are united in our assessment. This is a historic opportunity to re-energise our cooperation. And deepen our historic bond.

Since your election, we have talked a lot about you. Now we are happy to talk directly with you. America is back. And we are happy you are back.

Today, Covid-19 is the top priority. No one is safe until everyone is safe. We must join forces to defeat the virus.

This includes working closely together on vaccines. To boost production and delivery, and ensure open supply chains. We will be the major producers of vaccines – to protect our people, and people around the world. So we must also lead efforts – through the COVAX Facility – to make sure vaccines reach all countries.

We have all the tools – science, ability, resources, and the collective will. By standing together, shoulder-to-shoulder, we can show that democracies are best suited to protect citizens, to promote dignity, and to generate prosperity.

The shock caused by the pandemic must be a wake-up call. And we must build back better and smarter. That's why the European Union has undertaken a

fundamental twin transformation, with our Green Deal and our Digital Agenda. We were the first bloc to commit to climate neutrality by 2050. And others have followed. Your decision to bring America back to the Paris Agreement is wonderful news. It's music to our ears. And we support the Earth Day summit you will convene next month.

In digital, we also want to lead by example. And avoid abusing our data resources like we have abused our natural resources. We believe people will not accept the over-exploitation of their personal data. Whether by companies in pursuit of profit. Or by states for the purpose of controlling their citizens. This is neither sustainable for business, nor for democracy.

We need a wise framework, where our digital resources will be used for innovation and economic development. And we must also protect the "environment" of our democracies and our individual freedoms. This is a complex and exciting challenge. Let's frame this digital democratic standard together.

After the atrocities of WW II, we worked together to build the rules-based international order. We created the United Nations and other international institutions.

And for several decades, this rules-based order was challenged by the Soviet Union. They imposed their own rules and threatened with brutal force those who resisted. When the Soviet empire fell, we believed in the so-called "End of History" ... the final victory of democracy. Indeed, democracy expanded. Free markets progressed. More countries joined the multilateral system.

But thirty years later, we know we were wrong about the general victory of liberal democracy. Authoritarian tendencies morphed into new models. They abused or bent the rules, using new tools (disinformation, cyber, and hybrid threats) to attack democracies, both from outside and from within. These new regimes threaten democracy, human rights and the rules-based order. At least as much as the Cold War regimes.

This is why NATO remains the cornerstone of our collective peace and security. And we Europeans are determined to assume our fair share of the burden. More than ever, it is up to America and Europe, with our like-minded partners, to promote the democratic model and free market economy.

What we do together today will determine the world our children and grandchildren will live in, tomorrow. That's why yesterday we were pleased to host Secretary Blinken and discuss geopolitical topics like China, Russia, Iran or the Horn of Africa, Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership.

Let's band together – to build a fairer, greener and more democratic world. Anchored in our common history. The EU is a peace project. If we live in peace, freedom and prosperity today it is because 76 years ago, countless Americans landed on our shores. They fought for our freedom, justice, and democracy. And so many died – in the name of liberty. The Battle of the Bulge, in my home country, lives on still today in the hearts and minds of families. This binds us forever.

Let's build on this friendship – to forge a new transatlantic mind-set. A strong basis for our renewed cooperation. Thank you again for joining us this evening. And for sharing your thoughts on our future cooperation.

[Visit the meeting page](#)

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## **Statement by the members of the Euro Summit, 25 March 2021**



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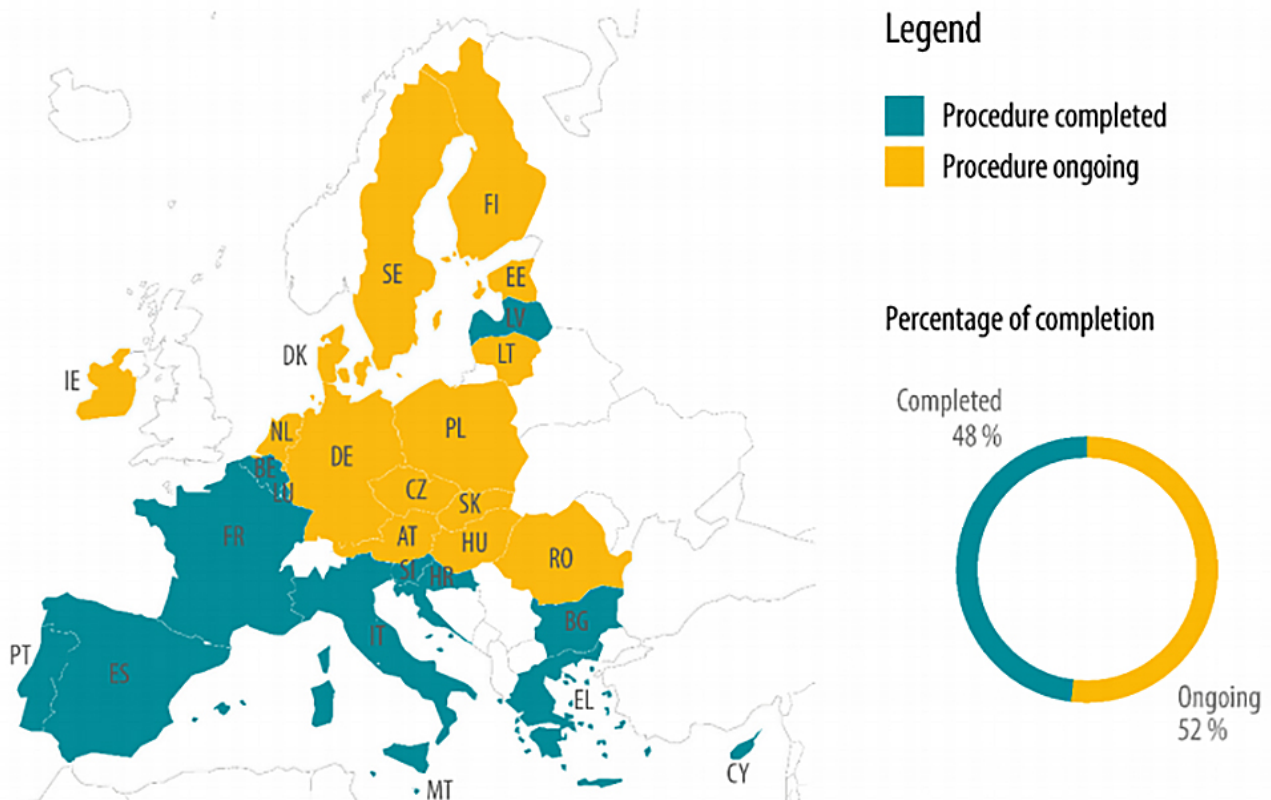
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## **Press release – MEPs clear another hurdle for the COVID-19 recovery plan**

# Ratification of the Own Resources Decision as of 18/3/2021



On Thursday, MEPs adopted one implementing and two operational regulations on which methods to use to collect or make available specific Own Resources, which constitute the revenue for the EU budget. The three laws work in conjunction with the key [Own Resources Decision](#) (ORD), [approved by Parliament in September](#) and by Council in December 2020. The member states are currently in the process of ratifying this decision, with 13 out of 27 having done so already as of 18 March ([more information on the ratification here](#)).

The approved regulations include provisions on calculating and simplifying the EU's revenue, on managing cash flow, and on monitoring and inspection rights. These are needed to ensure the EU budget's reformed revenue side continues to function smoothly.

Once member states have ratified the Own Resources Decision, the [package](#) adopted today will apply retroactively from 1 January 2021. It will introduce the new plastics levy as the first of various new streams of revenue that will be set up between now and 2026. The ORD will enable the EU to borrow €750 billion for the [“Next Generation EU” recovery plan](#).

## Quotes by the co-rapporteurs

[José Manuel Fernandes](#) (EPP, PT): “Once more, the European Parliament sets the tone. By approving this package, we are ensuring that the EU's system of own resources will contribute to establishing the ‘Next Generation EU’ recovery plan as soon as the ORD has been ratified by the member states. Today's vote is a reminder that we need to act quickly and decisively to set up the

recovery.”

[Valérie Hayer](#) (RENEW, FR): “Parliament is again acting swiftly to make the recovery plan a reality. We now urge all member states to ratify the recovery plan as soon as possible. We cannot afford any delay. In addition, December’s repayment agreement binds the Commission to propose an EU digital levy in June of this year, regardless of what happens at OECD level.”

### Vote results

Regulation on own resource based on plastic packaging waste

540 votes in favour, 109 against, 38 abstentions

Implementing measures for the system of own resources

560 votes in favour, 48 against, 82 abstentions

Collection of own resources accruing from value added tax

552 votes in favour, 69 against, 67 abstentions

### Background

During the negotiations on the EU’s 2021-2027 long-term budget (“Multiannual Financial Framework”), [MEPs obtained a binding roadmap](#) for new sources of EU revenue. The three steps of the [Own Resources roadmap](#) are as follows:

- First step (2021): a contribution on plastic introduced in January 2021, new legislative proposals on a **carbon border adjustment mechanism, a digital levy and the Emissions Trading Scheme** will be submitted by June;
- Second step (2022 and 2023): Council will deliberate on these new sources of revenue by 1 July 2022 at the latest in order to be able to introduce them by 1 January 2023;
- Third step (2024-2026): by June 2024, the Commission will put forward a proposal for **additional new own resources, which could include a Financial Transaction Tax and a financial contribution from the corporate sector or a new common corporate tax base**. Council will deliberate on these new sources of EU revenue by 1 July 2025 at the latest in order to be able to introduce them by 1 January 2026.

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**[Press release – Enlargement reports: MEPs fully support Western Balkans'](#)**

# European future



In their reports assessing the progress made by Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia in the last two years, MEPs warn that advancement by these countries towards joining the EU depends on lasting, in-depth and irreversible reforms across fundamental areas such as the rule of law and the effective functioning of democratic institutions.

MEPs also stress the importance of stepping up the fight against corruption and organised crime, along with good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation.

## **Albania**

MEPs welcome Albania's clear strategic orientation and commitment to the country's EU integration and call for the formal start of accession negotiations without any further delay, following the complete fulfilment of the conditions set by the European Council. They underline that the Albanian general elections on 25 April 2021 will be key for the consolidation and renewal of Albania's democratic process, with MEPs warning that free and fair elections are fundamental to the EU integration process.

The report was adopted by 581 votes in favour, 61 against and 45 abstentions.

## **Kosovo**

MEPs urge the Kosovar and Serbian governments to refrain from any action that could undermine trust between the respective parties. Noting that five EU member states have not yet recognised Kosovo, MEPs reiterate their call for them to do so, stressing that Kosovo's independence is irreversible. Recognition by these remaining EU member states, MEPs argue, would be beneficial to the normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, would enhance and consolidate the stability of the region, and would facilitate the EU integration of both states. MEPs also call on the Council to urgently

proceed with the adoption of a visa-free regime for the citizens of Kosovo.

The report was adopted by 471 votes in favour, 109 against and 104 abstentions.

### **North Macedonia**

On North Macedonia, MEPs state the country has made consistent progress and is maintaining a steady pace in adopting EU reforms. As a result, they call for the EU to hold a first intergovernmental conference with North Macedonia – which would mark the formal start of accession negotiations – as soon as possible. MEPs regret that Bulgaria and North Macedonia have yet to come to an understanding on outstanding bilateral issues and encourage them to reach a compromise over an action plan of concrete measures to resolve this impasse. Their previous recommendations regarding discrimination against citizens who openly express their Bulgarian identity and/or ethnic background have not been implemented, they note.

The report was adopted by 558 votes in favour, 70 against and 59 abstentions.

### **Serbia**

MEPs warn that the normalisation of relations by Serbia with Kosovo, and the genuine respect of fundamental rights domestically, is essential to determining the pace of accession negotiations. They also express concern about the effective functioning of Serbia's new parliament, where there is no parliamentary opposition, and the legitimacy of which is challenged by opposition parties. MEPs reiterate the importance of alignment with the EU common foreign and security policy, given that Serbia's rate of alignment is currently the lowest in the region. MEPs welcome the progress Serbia has made in developing a functional market economy and encourage the Serbian government to continue its structural reforms in this area.

The report was adopted by 538 votes in favour, 69 against and 79 abstentions.

### **Background**

The enlargement reports are the European Parliament's response to the [annual Commission reports](#) on the candidate and the potential candidate countries for EU accession. Resolutions adopted in plenary represent the European Parliament's official position as regards EU relations with these countries.

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**[Press release – MEPs demand safe and clean travel](#)**



The resolution on an EU strategy for sustainable tourism, adopted by 577 votes to 31, and 80 abstentions on Thursday, notes that the COVID-19 outbreak has paralysed the EU's tourism sector, with 6 out of 27 million jobs at risk. MEPs highlight that the tourism and travel sectors account for around 10% of the EU's GDP. They therefore urge EU countries to include them in their recovery plans and to consider temporarily reducing VAT on these services.

### **'Safe and clean' tourism**

Due to the pandemic, travellers want "safe, clean and more sustainable tourism", Parliament says, calling on member states to fully implement common criteria for safe travel without delay. These should include an EU Health and Safety protocol for testing before departure, and establish that quarantine requirements should be applied only as a last resort.

A common vaccination certificate should facilitate travel and act as an alternative to PCR tests and quarantine requirements, MEPs say. A new certificate should follow privacy and data protection rules and could start being used once there is sufficient evidence that those who have been vaccinated do not transmit the virus.

The resolution also urges the Commission to introduce an EU hygiene certification seal, which could certify minimum COVID-19 virus prevention and control standards and could help restore consumer trust in the tourism and travel sectors.



## Beyond the pandemic

MEPs welcome the '[Re-open EU](#)' portal and urge EU countries to send clear information to the Commission when they apply or lift restrictions on free movement.

They also stress that the Commission must look beyond the pandemic and replace the 2010 strategy on EU tourism to maintain Europe's standing as a leading destination. The text finally calls on the Commission to set up a European Agency for Tourism, which will support the tourism ecosystem, promote the European brand, provide the EU with the latest data on tourism, assist small businesses to access EU funding and help the tourism sector to prepare for future crises.

## Quote

"This report calls for a truly European effort to relaunch tourism in the continent's worst-affected regions. The vaccination certificate and sanitary seal have been taken on board, but what is needed now is proper European coordination for testing regimes that do not impose additional costs on European citizens. The EU needs to urgently speed up the roll out of vaccines across Europe and to put in place proper financial instruments to support the green and digital transition", said EP rapporteur [Cláudia Monteiro de Aguiar \(EPP, PT\)](#).