

[Press briefing ahead of the video conference of the members of the European Council, 25-26 March 2021](#)



The press briefing ahead of the video conference of the members of the European Council of 25 and 26 March 2021 will take place via video conference on **Wednesday 24 March 2021 at 15.00**

English and French interpretation will be available.

This briefing is “off the record”.

In order to follow the briefing and to be able to ask questions remotely, EU accredited journalists and journalists who had a EUCO accreditation from June 2019 European Council meeting or later, can register using [this link](#)

Journalists who already registered for high-level press conferences (European Councils, international summits) in 2020 or 2021 **don't need to register again.**

Deadline: Wednesday 24 March, 12.00

Further instructions will be sent to all registered participants approximately half an hour before the briefing.

[Visit the meeting page](#)

[International role of the euro: President Donohoe's report to the President of the Euro Summit](#)



The President of the Eurogroup, Paschal Donohoe, has sent a letter to the President of the Euro Summit, Charles Michel, on the international role of the euro.

The letter will inform the discussion that leaders will hold on the issue at the video conference of members of the Euro Summit on 25-26 March 2021.

Building on the Commission's communication *“The European economic and financial system: fostering openness, strength and resilience”* published on

19 January 2021, the Eurogroup, also in inclusive format, discussed enhancing the international role of the euro as an element of the EU's open strategic autonomy and resilience while strengthening the EU's openness and global engagement.

The letter identifies the following elements that finance ministers will continue work on to contribute to realising euro's global potential:

- pursuing a strong economic recovery;
- continuing to build solid foundations for the euro;
- supporting the development of innovative and resilient financial market infrastructure and payment systems;
- making the euro fit for the digital age;
- making the euro the currency of the green transition;
- extending the euro's reach.

[Readout of the telephone conversation between President Charles Michel and Russian President Vladimir Putin](#)



With a view to the European Council meeting of 25 and 26 March a phone call between the President of the European Council Charles Michel and President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin took place on Monday 22 March 2021.

The Presidents discussed relations between the EU and Russia.

President Michel expressed the view that EU-Russia ties are at a low point and confirmed the EU's approach of the five guiding principles, based on the EU's core values.

There is currently disagreement in many areas.

From the EU perspective, the relationship with Russia can only take a different direction if there is sustained progress on issues like the implementation of the Minsk agreements, stopping hybrid and cyber-attacks on Member States and respect for human rights. In this context Alexey Navalny's case was raised. Charles Michel reiterated the EU's call on the Russian authorities to release Mr Navalny and proceed with a transparent investigation into the assassination attempt on him.

The leaders also exchanged views on the Covid pandemic, on vaccines and on regional and global issues.

Retail payments: Council supports action to promote instant payments and EU-wide payment solutions



EU member states want to make it easier for consumers to pay in shops, and to make e-commerce transactions widely available, convenient and safe across the EU.

The Council today adopted conclusions that respond to the retail payments strategy for the EU presented by the Commission in September 2020. Against the background of rapid innovation and digitalisation of the economy, the conclusions welcome the comprehensive strategy set out by the Commission for the further development of the retail payments market in the EU.

The Council lends its full support to the overall aims of the strategy, such as ensuring a competitive and innovative retail payments market in the EU, promoting the uptake of instant payments, and creating the conditions for the development of EU-wide payment solutions to decrease the EU's dependency on major global players in this area.

The Council also highlights the many challenges to be taken into account when further developing and regulating the market, such as financial inclusion, security and consumer protection, data protection and anti-money laundering aspects.

The conclusions set out the Council's detailed priorities under the four 'pillars' for strategic action outlined by the Commission:

- addressing issues related to increasingly digital and instant payment solutions
- innovation and competitiveness issues
- ensuring access to and interoperability of retail payment systems and other support infrastructures
- improving payments with countries outside the EU

The Council gives the Commission a strong political mandate for pushing forward initiatives across these fields and for presenting legislative proposals, where appropriate, after a due impact assessment. This includes a comprehensive review of the payments services directive to take account of the developments in the market and the challenges encountered in its implementation.

[Visit the meeting page](#)

[Press release – COVID-19: updates on advance purchases of vaccines](#)



On Tuesday, Sandra Gallina, the Commission's Director-General for Health and Food Safety (SANTE), will update Members of the Budgetary Control Committee (CONT) on the eight advanced purchase agreements (APA) on coronavirus vaccines concluded by the Commission with pharmaceutical companies.

When: Tuesday 23 March 2021, 9.30 – 10.30 (indicative timing)

Where: European Parliament in Brussels, room A1G-3, Altiero Spinelli building and videoconference

MEPs expect to get clarifications on several issues that have emerged since the APAs were concluded, such as how effectively these agreements are being implemented, the quantity and quality of supplies, whether the companies are complying with the terms and deadlines of the contracts, and whether EU countries are adopting a consistent approach.

You can watch the debate live [here](#).

Also on Tuesday, [the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety \(ENVI\) Committee will debate](#) with Emer Cooke, Executive Director of the European Medicines Agency (EMA), on the status of approving COVID-19 vaccines.

Background

The European Commission has concluded eight advanced purchase agreements (APA) on coronavirus vaccines with pharmaceutical companies as part of the EU's Vaccine Strategy. The European Parliament plays an essential role in scrutinising the financial management of the EU initiatives on vaccines to

ensure it is sound.