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Background Note

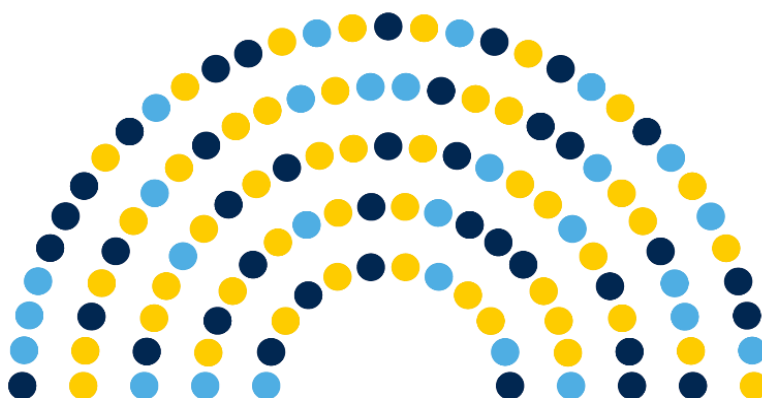
Session I

The Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU

LXV COSAC plenary meeting

31 May-1 June 2021

Lisbon



BACKGROUND NOTE

Session I

The Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU

On 1 January 2021, Portugal took over the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) for the fourth time, as part of the Trio of Presidencies with Germany and Slovenia.

In addition to the [priorities](#) adopted by the Trio, each Presidency sets its specific priorities in line with the objectives of the Union's Strategic Agenda. Under the motto "Time to deliver", Portugal established [three major priorities](#) towards a **Resilient, Green, Digital, Social and Global Europe**:

- To promote a European recovery leveraged by the climate and digital transitions;
- To implement the Social Pillar of the EU as a key element for ensuring a fair and inclusive climate and digital transition;
- To strengthen Europe's strategic autonomy keeping it open to the world.

In the context of European recovery, during the Portuguese Presidency, the [coordinated action on vaccines](#) (distribution, production and export control mechanisms) stands out, with the aim of ensuring the quality, safety and efficacy of vaccines while ensuring rapid, fair and affordable access for Member States. The [EU Vaccines Strategy](#) was adopted for that purpose, and contracts were concluded with [several pharmaceutical companies](#). The development of the COVAX facility, of which the EU is the world's largest exporter of doses and the [leading donor](#), and which seeks to ensure equitable and global access to affordable vaccines for all those who need them, is also relevant here, as well as the [consensus](#) reached to deliver vaccines in a spirit of solidarity to those Member States most in need.

The re-establishment of freedom of movement in the EU has led to the development of [EU COVID-19 certificates](#) (previously referred to as [digital green certificates](#)) which are expected to be used from [June](#) onwards.

During this period, European recovery has also been boosted by the implementation of the [Multiannual Financial Framework \(MFF\) 2021-2027](#) and [Next Generation EU](#), and, in particular, the approval of the [Horizon Europe](#) Programme and the [agreements](#) reached on the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the Border Management and Visa Instrument (BMVI) and the Internal Security Fund (ISF).

In addition, the Own Resources Decision ratification process started and, with the approval of the [Recovery and Resilience Facility \(RRF\)](#), Member States started submitting their national plans, with a particular focus on the green and digital transitions. The Presidency has also made efforts towards the implementation of the Social Pillar of the EU. The [Porto Social Summit](#), which took place in Porto on 7 and 8 May, renewed the commitment to implement the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), whose [action plan](#), presented by the Commission in March, is based on three priorities with quantified targets to be achieved by 2030: employment, skills and social protection. In March, the [Tripartite Social Summit](#) took the first steps to prepare for this Summit, discussing how to achieve a fair and sustainable recovery, with the contribution of social partners.

A fair climate transition has been one of the priorities of the Presidency, and there is already a provisional agreement on the [Public sector loan facility to support this transition](#), the third pillar of the Just Transition Mechanism, set up to address the social and economic consequences of the objective of reaching [climate neutrality by 2050](#) and of the EU's climate targets for 2030. The other two pillars are the Just Transition Fund and a specific just transition scheme under the [InvestEU](#) programme. Through the implementation of the [European Green Deal](#), the European Council and the European Parliament reached a provisional agreement on the [European Climate Law](#), the mandate for the Council to start negotiations with the European Parliament to reach an agreement on the [8th Environment Action Programme](#) was approved, the conclusions on the [Sustainable Chemicals Strategy of the Union](#) were approved, and the [European Year of Rail Transport](#) kicked off. Also in the context of climate neutrality, and bearing in mind the [hydrogen strategy for a climate-neutral Europe](#), focusing on the production and use of renewable hydrogen, the Presidency organised the [High-Level Conference on "Hydrogen in Society – Bridging the Gaps"](#).

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has always been of great importance to Portugal, and the Presidency, with regard to its [reform](#), has [progressed in negotiations](#) on the adoption of three regulations making up the CAP: on strategic plans; on horizontal

governance – financing, management and monitoring; and on a common organisation of the markets in agricultural products. On the other hand, on the commitment to the blue economy and the sustainable use of ocean resources, it is important to highlight the [agreement](#) on a contingency plan ensuring uninterrupted fishing activity for EU fleets until the EU and the UK reach an agreement on definite fishing opportunities for 2021 and for deep sea stocks for 2021 and 2022.

Regarding the digital transition, the Portuguese Presidency followed the negotiations on the [Digital Services Act](#) and the [Digital Markets Act](#), with the 2021 edition of [Digital Day](#), co-organised by the Portuguese Presidency, bringing together Member States to discuss the challenges of technologies. Also, three declarations were signed to join efforts and resources to promote international connectivity: “[European Data Gateways as a key element of the EU’s Digital Decade](#)”; “[EU Startup Nations Standard of Excellence](#)” and “[A Green and Digital Transformation of the EU](#)”. These commitments will help accelerate Europe’s green and digital transition and contribute to the vision and objectives of [Europe’s Digital Decade](#).

In June, at the [Digital Assembly – High-Level Ministerial Conference](#), the *Lisbon Declaration – Digital Democracy with a Purpose* will be signed, in connection with the formal inauguration of the [Ellalink](#) submarine cable, linking Europe and Latin America. The [agreement](#) on a negotiating [mandate](#) allowing the Portuguese Presidency to start talks with the European Parliament on the final text of the [Regulation concerning the protection of personal data in electronic communications](#), a discussion which has been pending since 2017, should also be highlighted.

The Presidency invested in the promotion of human rights, marking the [10th anniversary of the signature of the Istanbul Convention](#) with a high-level conference, progressing on the implementation of the [New Pact on Migration and Asylum](#) by generating the necessary [consensus](#) on its external dimension, discussing the role of disinformation at the [Seminar “Hybrid Threats, including Disinformation”](#) and seeking to [launch](#), in June, a European Platform on Homeless People.

The [Conference on the Future of Europe](#) was launched on 9 May, following the end of the deadlock that prevented it from being held through a tripartite Presidency between the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council and in accordance with the [Joint Declaration](#) signed on 10 March. The Presidency committed itself to make

this Conference an opportunity for open, inclusive and democratic debate, where citizens can express their views through the [Multilingual Digital Platform](#).

Strengthening the strategic autonomy of a Europe open to the world requires relations with Africa. In partnership with the European Investment Bank (EIB), the Presidency organised a month [of dialogue on green transition and green investment between African and European partners \(Green talks\)](#), and the [High-level EU-Africa Green Investment Forum](#), and welcomed the conclusion of [the Post-Cotonou Agreement](#) negotiations.

The [EU-India Summit](#), focusing mainly on tackling the global pandemic and the resilience of health systems, also touched upon topics such as the strategic partnership in the field of technology, connectivity and trade.

The revival of the transatlantic partnership was also highlighted during the Portuguese Presidency. The US Secretary of State attended the [meeting](#) between European Ministers for Foreign Affairs in February, and the United States President took part in the European Council [meeting](#) in March.

Portugal was the first Presidency to deal with the final withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the Internal Market and the EU Customs Union. After reaching a provisional agreement on the future relationship between the two parties, several [discussions](#) were held on the subject, and the European Parliament has already given its [consent](#) to the ratification of the [EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement](#).

