

Berlin, 25 November 2020

Statement by Michael Roth, Minister of State for Europe, on behalf of the Council at the
November II Plenary Session of the European Parliament

President, Honourable Members,

I regret that I cannot be with you in person on the occasion of this plenary session, and I would like to thank President Sassoli for granting me this opportunity to address you in writing again. I will follow this debate attentively from Germany.

In December, EU Leaders will focus on some of the key challenges facing us all: the continued fight against COVID-19, climate change and security.

Fighting COVID-19 remains the top priority for EU Leaders, who held another video conference last week to discuss vaccines, testing and restrictive measures. Their discussion was based on a report by the German Presidency on the EU's coordinated response.

On vaccines, the results of ongoing trials are encouraging. Thanks to the EU's coordinated approach, several Advance Purchase Agreements have been concluded. But for vaccines to work, they need to be successfully distributed and accepted. This will require more work in terms of logistics and communication.

It will take some time before these developments translate into concrete outcomes. Our immediate focus should therefore remain on pursuing current efforts to contain the pandemic.

Hence the importance of testing: we need mutual recognition of test results, including rapid tests, as well as the alignment of minimum standards and common criteria for the use of rapid antigen tests.

Another major challenge facing the EU is climate change. The aim for the December European Council is to take decisive action for the future of all Europeans and the planet by endorsing a binding Union target of at least 55% domestic net reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 (compared to 1990) and to set out the key principles of an enhanced framework ahead of the Commission proposals expected next year. This goal will put us on the path towards climate neutrality by 2050, in line with the Paris Agreement.

The German Presidency will then work to finalise the EU's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to be submitted to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) before the end of the year.

The third challenge we are facing is security, with recent attacks in Member States reminding us of our shared vulnerability, but also our unshakeable unity and solidarity in fighting all forms of terrorism and defending our common values.

Leaders are expected to look into ways to improve collaboration between EU member states on counter-terrorism, including through better information exchange and effective police cooperation and coordination.

Upholding freedom and social cohesion for all requires the prevention of radicalisation online. The Presidency therefore aims to successfully complete the negotiations on the Regulation on terrorist content online by the end of the year. I appeal for your support to conclude our talks swiftly. More broadly, the responsibility of platforms for illegal content online needs to be addressed.

Apart from the three key strands I outlined (COVID-19, Climate, Security), Leaders will also discuss Turkey and the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean, as agreed at the 1-2 and 15-16 October European Councils. Since our last discussion, unfortunately, events suggest that things are not moving in the right direction. Leaders will have to discuss the way forward in the face of this further deterioration of the situation.

The European Council will also hold a strategic discussion on EU relations with the Southern Neighbourhood, following the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona process.

In the margins of the European Council meeting, a Euro Summit at 27 will take place. Leaders are expected to take stock of progress on the Banking Union, and provide political impetus to the Capital Markets Union as an enabler of the green and digital transitions.

Lastly, on EU-Africa relations. The 6th EU-African Union Summit, foreseen for October of this year, had to be postponed to 2021 due to COVID-19. Africa is a key partner for the EU, and we remain committed to developing a more ambitious partnership based on mutual interests and shared responsibility. That is why an EU-African Union High Level Meeting is under preparation for 9 December.
