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The European Council in 2020 - a key institution as crisis manager

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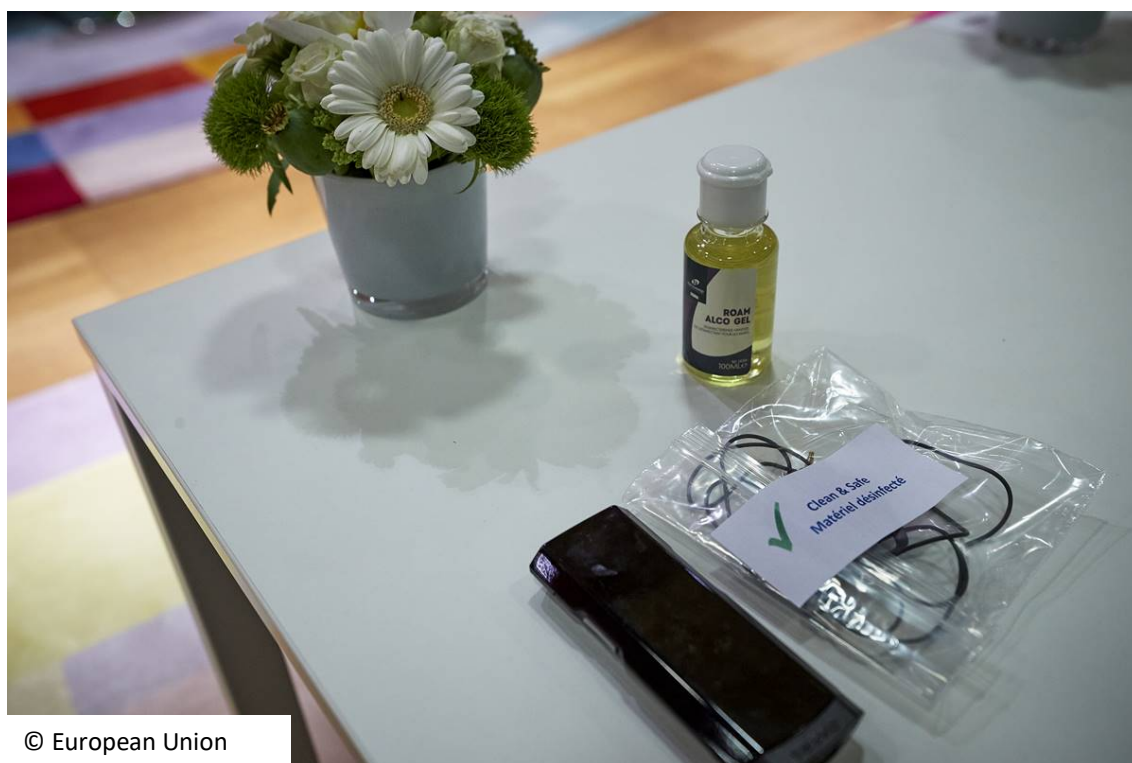


TRACK Teaching and Researching
the European Council

TRACK Annual Report

The European Council in 2020 - a key institution as crisis manager

Authors: Denise Ersoy, Lea Hopp, Marius Henrik Korte and Wolfgang Wessels



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Note: Parts of this Annual Report are based on the TRACK Semi-Annual Report as well as the TRACK Policy Paper Series on the European Council's Corona Crisis Management¹.

¹ The TRACK Semi-Annual Report and the TRACK Policy Paper Series on the European Council's Corona Crisis Management are available online on the projects Website: <https://track.uni-koeln.de/de>.



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Abstract

In 2020, the European Council (EUCO) played a key role in the European Union (EU), especially as a crisis manager in the Corona crisis by dealing with the economic, political and social implications of one of the biggest crises in the European Union. For contributing to research and teaching on this key institution, this Annual Report offers an overview of the European Council's meetings in 2020 and sheds light on the activities of the institution regarding the crises and other topics. The Annual Report argues that although at the beginning of the crisis there was a great reflex of nation states to deal with the pandemic at the national level, the European Council was able to follow its problem-solving instinct as a crisis manager.

Contents

Introduction	4
Meetings of the European Council.....	5
<i>Multiannual financial framework 2021-2027: the European Council exercising the power of the purse</i>	6
<i>The Coronavirus pandemic as the “hour of executives”?</i>	7
<i>The aftermath of the July 2020 summit</i>	11
<i>Other topics</i>	13
Western Balkans	13
Turkey	14
Brexit	14
China.....	15
Conclusions and lessons	16



Introduction



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In 2020, the European Council has once again proven to be a key institution and remains a significant object for teaching and research. This document aims to offer a factual overview over its activities in 2020 which has been an important and eventful year for the European Council and its members. A special focus of this document lays on the “historic” (von der Leyen)² decisions of the July European Council. However, other major decisions taken by the European Council in this extraordinary year will certainly be analysed as well.

For a more detailed analysis we advise you to have a look at the Policy Briefs available on the TRACK website as well as official conclusions and the respective Post-European Council Briefings of the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS).

² Von der Leyen, Ursula (2020). Making Europe's future rhyme for the Next Generation: op-ed by President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ac_20_1425



Meetings of the European Council

Table 1: European Council meetings in 2020

20 – 21 February 2020	Special European Council (MFF)
10 March 2020	Video conference of the members of the European Council
26 March 2020	Video conference of the members of the European Council
23 April 2020	Video conference of the members of the European Council
6 May 2020	EU-Western Balkans summit
19 June 2020	Video conference of the members of the European Council
22 June 2020	EU-China summit via videoconference
15 July 2020	EU-India summit via videoconference
17 – 21 July 2020	Special European Council (NGEU and MFF)
19 August 2020	Video conference of the members of the European Council (Belarus)
6 October 2020	EU-Ukraine summit
15 – 15 October 2020	European Council
29 October 2020	Video conference of the members of the European Council
19 November 2020	Video conference of the members of the European Council
10 – 11 December 2020	European Council

Source: European Council Meeting calendar

The agenda of the European Council in 2020 has been dominated by the coronavirus crisis. Other related topics were however also closely discussed, such as the Multiannual financial framework (MFF), the European Union's long-term budget. Relations with other countries were also high on the agenda, e.g. during the EU-Western Balkans summit or the special videoconference of members of the European Council on the situation in Belarus.

Other issues were:

- The United Kingdom's withdrawal from the Union and negotiations on the form and substance of a future relationship
- Opening accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia
- The EU's relationship with Turkey concerning migration and drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean
- The EU's relationship with China



Multiannual financial framework 2021-2027: the European Council exercising the power of the purse³

For members of the European Council, the year started with budget negotiations. However, discussions on the Union's long-term budget had already begun before that. In general, the preparations for the MFF 2021-2027 followed traditional patterns, it however was a slow and cumbersome process.⁴ The European Commission already published its first proposal in May 2018⁵, the European Parliament's position was adopted in November 2018.⁶ In November 2018 the Austrian presidency and then in December 2019 the Finnish presidency submitted a "Negotiating Box" that put forward tentative figures and proposed a budget representing 1.07% of EU GNI.⁷ One major issue was how to fill the gap in the budget left by the exit of the United Kingdom, which was the second largest net payer. We see some traditional positions which were put on the table early: the group of net contributors coordinated their defensive attitude; similarly, the so called "Friends of Cohesion" argued for a larger budget and the continuation of financing of the CAP and the cohesion funds.^{8 9} However, no real political negotiations started until early 2020 when in order to energize the process the new President of the European Council, Charles Michel, called a special summit in February to identify main elements for an agreement. While no tangible result was achieved during this summit the February conclusions however helped to "constitute the basis for the global compromise"¹⁰ during the July summit.

³ See also: The Budget Summit of February 2020. A spectacular failure of the European Council? Who exercises the power of the purse? Policy Brief No.

(https://track.uni-koeln.de/sites/track/user_upload/Policy_Brief_No.2.pdf)

⁴ Becker, P. (2020). Die Verhandlungen über den Haushalt der Europäischen Union – zwischen Kontinuität und Pandemie-Zäsur., pp. 268-270.

⁵ European Commission (2018). EU budget: Commission proposes a modern budget for a Union that protects, empowers and defends. (https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_18_3570)

⁶ European Parliament (2018). Long-term EU budget: MEPs lay down funding priorities for post-2020 budget. (<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20181106IPR18317/long-term-eu-budget-meps-lay-down-funding-priorities-for-post-2020-budget>)

⁷ European Council (2019). Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027: Negotiating Box with figures. (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/41630/st14518-re01-en19.pdf>)

⁸ Friends of Cohesion JOINT DECLARATION on the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027.

(<https://www.portugal.gov.pt/download-ficheiros/ficheiro.aspx?v=%3d%3dBQAAAB%2bLCAAAAAAABAAzNDA2NwcAeMDfpAUAAAA%3d>)

⁹ Becker, P. (2020). Die Verhandlungen über den Haushalt der Europäischen Union – zwischen Kontinuität und Pandemie-Zäsur., p.267.

¹⁰ European Council Conclusions, 17-21 July 2020.



"We have worked very hard to try to reconcile the different concerns, the different interests, the different opinions on the table. But we need more time."

- Charles Michel, President of the European Council (21 February 2020)

Table 2: European Council meetings on the MFF/RRF since 2018

European Council meeting	MFF as part of the debate?
23 February 2018	Major debate
22 - 23 March 2018	No mention
02 May 2018	Publication of the Commission's proposal
28 - 29 June 2018	Mention
17 - 18 October 2018	No mention
13 -14 December 2018	Mention
21 – 22 March 2019	No mention
20 – 21 June 2019	Mention
17 – 18 October 2019	Major debate
12 – 13 December 2019	Mention
20 – 22 February 2020	Sole topic
10 March 2020 (video)	No mention
17 March 2020 (video)	No mention
26 March 2020 (video)	No mention
23 April 2020 (video)	Mention
19 June 2020 (video)	Major debate
17 – 21 July 2020	Sole topic
19 August 2020 (video)	No mention
15 – 15 October 2020	No mention
29 October 2020 (video)	Mention
19 November 2020 (video)	Mention
10 – 11 December 2020	Major debate and final agreement

Source: EPRS¹¹ and own research based on the European Council conclusions

The Coronavirus pandemic as the “hour of executives”?

The corona crisis hit Europe unprepared. As first reactions we observed the reflex to use national instruments regardless of the impact on the Union. From early March onwards however, the members of the European Council followed their problem-solving instinct to use EU-instruments

¹¹ EPRS (2020). The European Council and the 2021-27 Multiannual Financial Framework. ([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/631732/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)631732_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/631732/EPRS_BRI(2020)631732_EN.pdf))



and procedures to deal with this war-like scenario¹² and most serious crisis since the Second World War.¹³ The impact of the pandemic also led to major changes in the way the members of the European Council met for their deliberations. Instead of holding face to face meetings in Brussels, EU leaders had to hold virtual conferences. The European Council dealt with several aspects of fighting the pandemic and tackling the public health crisis. The table below illustrates which key topics were discussed during the various summits.

Table 3: Key topics in the European Council on the coronavirus pandemic

	10 Mar	17 Mar	26 Mar	23 Apr	19 Jun	21 Jul	19 Aug	02 Oct	16 Oct	29 Oct	19 Nov	10 Dec
Limiting the spread of the virus	X	X	X					X	X			X
Restrict Access to EU for non-essential travel	X	X	X						X			
Access to medical supplies	X	X	X									
Support vaccine research	X	X	X									
Tackling immediate socio-economic consequences	X	X	X	X						X		
Helping stranded citizens		X	X									
Lifting containment measures				X							X	
Roadmap to recovery				X								
Recovery Fund linked to MFF				X	X	X				X	X	X
Potential distribution of vaccine								X	X	X	X	X
Strategic autonomy			X	X		X		X				

Source: EPRS and own research

¹² Politico (2020): Inside Macron's coronavirus war. French president casts himself as commanding general in fight against pandemic. (<https://www.politico.eu/interactive/inside-emmanuel-macron-coronavirus-war/>)

¹³ Merkel, A. (2020): An address to the nation by Federal Chancellor Merkel. (<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/statement-chancellor-1732296>)



Initial financial and economic aid

It quickly became apparent that those Member States most affected by the coronavirus pandemic were not only in need of medical aid but also of financial aid. Therefore, EU leaders agreed on a variety of measures and endorsed an agreement by the Eurogroup which provides “three important safety nets for workers, businesses and sovereigns” worth 540 billion euros¹⁴ (see table below).

Table 4: Measures to tackle the economic consequences of the coronavirus pandemic^{15 16}

Measure	Responsible institution	Sum
Pandemic emergency purchase programme (PEPP)	European Central Bank (ECB)	€ 1 850 billion (initially € 750 billion)
Support to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency (SURE)	European Commission	€ 100 billion
Pan-European guarantee fund for loans to companies	European Investment Bank	€ 200 billion
Pandemic crisis support for Member States	European Stability Mechanism (ESM)	€ 240 billion

EU leaders however quickly realised that these initial financial and economic support mechanisms were not sufficient to tackle the vast socio-economic consequences of the coronavirus pandemic. Worries about keeping the Union’s economic acquis motivated all European leaders to contribute to the controversies about the optimal strategy for the Union in a spirit of solidarity based on strong self-interests.

¹⁴ European Council (2020). Conclusions of the President of the European Council following the video conference of the members of the European Council, 23 April 2020.

(<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/04/23/conclusions-by-president-charles-michel-following-the-video-conference-with-members-of-the-european-council-on-23-april-2020/>)

¹⁵ European Central Bank (2020). Pandemic emergency purchase programme (PEPP).

(<https://www.ecb.europa.eu/mopo/implement/pepp/html/index.en.html>)

¹⁶ European Council (2020). Infographic - The EU’s emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

(<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/covid-19-eu-emergency-response/>)



The July 2020 financial “mega deal”

As expected by many observers, the first European Council “in personam” in July 2020 proved to be a lot more productive than the video conferences the leaders had previously held on a regular basis. Four days and 90 hours of heated negotiations were needed in order to reach an agreement. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte’s frequently quoted statement “we are not here so we can go to each other’s birthdays for the rest of our lives ¹⁷– we are here to defend the interests of our countries” as well as the fact that derogatory comments about other leaders became public¹⁸, vividly illustrate the emotional atmosphere at the summit.

“We’re not here so we can go to each others’ birthdays for the rest of our lives — we’re all here to defend the interests of our own countries.”

- Mark Rutte, Prime Minister of the Netherlands (July 2020)

Just as with negotiating the recovery fund Next Generation EU (NGEU), there have also been controversial discussions on the MFF. Several issues had to be discussed heatedly. The main point of discussion was the total sum of the budget and its distribution. While the “friends of cohesion” supported a higher budget with a focus on cohesion funds and the Common Agricultural Policy CAP, the “frugal” countries demanded a cap of the budget at 1% of the GNI and a shift towards a more “modern” budget with a focus on climate protection as well as research and development. Another proposal strongly supported by the European Parliament was to introduce a strict rule of law conditionality and link funds from the NGEU with the respect of the rule of law by EU Member States. This however has been blocked by the Visegrad-Group. The European Council only agreed on a relatively vague mechanism on this issue, leading to a conflict with the European Parliament which had hoped for a stricter mechanism.

“I don’t know what is the personal reason for the Dutch prime minister to hate me or Hungary, but he is attacking so harshly”

- Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary

¹⁷ Dallison, Paul (2020). EU summit insults and rubbish superheroes.

(<https://www.politico.eu/article/declassified-eu-summit-mark-rutte-emmanuel-macron-budget-recovery/>)

¹⁸ Gonzalez, Cristina (2020). POLITICO EU Confidential: EU budget and recovery summit — Deal, drama and details. (<https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/eu-confidential/politico-eu-confidential-eu-budget-and-recovery-summit-deal-drama-and-details/>)



In the end, Heads of States or Government agreed on the MFF budget based on the proposal for the February 2020 session. The overall budget of €1.074.3 billion however was a lower figure than in February due to the ambitious recovery fund agreed on at the same time. While the European Commission initially proposed to scrap so-called rebates on contributions for net payers to the budget altogether, the “frugals” were in the end even able to increase their rebates, while Germany’s rebate on their budget contributions remained the same.¹⁹ This can be seen as a concession by mainly Southern European countries, who were the most vocal supporters of scrapping the rebates to the “frugals”.

Table 5: MFF 2021-2027 total allocations per heading²⁰

Policy Area	MFF	NGEU	Total
1. Single Market, Innovation and Digital	132.8	10.6	143.4
2. Cohesion, Resilience and Values	377.8	721.9	1099.7
3. Natural Resources and Environment	356.4	17.5	373.9
4. Migration and Border Management	22.7	-	22.7
5. Security and Defence	13.2	-	13.2
6. Neighbourhood and the World	98.4	-	98.4
7. European Public Administration	73.1	-	73.1
Total MFF	1074.3	750.0	1824.3

Source: European Commission

The aftermath of the July 2020 summit

Conclusions of the European Council are political commitments that still needed to be transformed into legal texts. One major controversy on the way from the July 2020 European Council towards a binding agreement has been that according to the Treaty provisions, the EP has to give its “consent by a majority of its component members” (Art. 311(2) TFEU) to the expenditure side of the budget – the MFF in a narrow; on the income side, the own resources (Art. 311 TFEU). On the RRF (Art. 122 TFEU (2)), the EP has weaker powers. Thus, for one major

¹⁹ European Council Conclusions, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 July 2020.

²⁰ European Commission (2020). EU’s next long-term budget & NextGenerationEU: Key Facts and Figures.

(https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/about_the_european_commission/eu_budget/mff_factsheet_agreement_en_12.11_v3.pdf)



part of the package the MEPs had a veto power which they used to extend their influence in defining the other provision of the agreement. In its resolution of 23 July²¹, the MEPs formulated “priorities in view of an overall agreement [with the Council]”, demanding among other things “an effective rule of law mechanism.”



After lengthy negotiations in the trilogue form, the confidential negotiations in a restricted set of the Presidency of the Council, key persons of the EP and of the Commission, the EP and the German Council presidency reached an agreement. Most controversial was the link between decisions of the grant payments and the rule of law conditionality. The controversy between what is inadequately labelled “East against West” blocked the ratification process for some months. Threatening to veto the own resource decisions, which need unanimity of all Member States and thus the whole package, Hungary and Poland who did not accept the rule of law procedures in respective draft regulations, created a main crisis. The crisis even led to the rest of the Union designing a Plan B, e.g. by using Treaty rules for “enhanced cooperation” which

²¹ European Parliament resolution of 23 July 2020 on the conclusions of the extraordinary European Council meeting of 17-21 July 2020 (2020/2732(RSP))
(https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-07-23_EN.html)



permit legal acts only applicable to some Member States.²² However this was eventually not needed, as at their 10 and 11 December meeting, the members of the European Council finally adopted a consensus decision for dealing with this issue in an extended part of their conclusions. To explain this last-minute compromise many involved actors give high credit to the role of the German chancellor. With her personal reputation and as the Head of Government of the rotating presidency in the Council, Mrs. Merkel was apparently a major driver for the conclusions of the European Council against the blocking veto powers.

Other topics

Western Balkans

As Master of Enlargement, the opening of accession negotiations with prospective Member States is consequently a competence of the European Council. Several countries are currently aiming at becoming members of the EU, mainly Western Balkan countries. Most recently a certain degree of ‘Enlargement fatigue’ has risen in the European Union. However, the issue of starting accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia was high on the agenda of the European Council in 2020. During a video conference on 26 March 2020 the members of the European Council finally agreed to start accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia.²³ Furthermore, during the EU-Western Balkans conference, members of the European Council once again reaffirmed their “unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans.”²⁴ The EU moreover pledged “a package of over EUR 3.3 billion to the benefit of the Western Balkans”²⁵ aiming at tackling the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic.

“The second important topic that we have discussed during this summit this afternoon is the European perspective of the Western Balkans partners”

- Charles Michel, President of the European Council (6 May 2020)

²² See e.g.: De la Baume, M. & Von der Burchard, H. (2020). Von der Leyen threatens EU recovery fund without Hungary and Poland. (<https://www.politico.eu/article/the-commission-proposes-eu-recovery-without-hungary-and-poland/>)

²³ European Council (2019). Joint statement of the Members of the European Council, 26 March 2019. (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/43076/26-vc-euco-statement-en.pdf>)

²⁴ Zagreb Declaration, 6 May 2020 (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/43776/zagreb-declaration-en-06052020.pdf>)

²⁵ Ibid.



Turkey

While coronavirus dominated the agenda of the European Council in the first half of 2020, EU-Turkey relations were points of discussion in both the October and December summits. After the first October summit where the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean was being discussed, the Heads of State or Government reiterated their “full solidarity with Greece and Cyprus” stating that their “sovereignty and sovereign rights must be respected”. They furthermore strongly condemned Turkish violations of Cypriot sovereign rights.²⁶ At the following summit, 2 weeks later, the Heads of State or Government reaffirmed their conclusions from 1-2 October and deplored “renewed unilateral and provocative actions by Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean, including recent exploratory activities.”²⁷ Reacting to “Turkish unilateral and provocative activities in the Eastern Mediterranean”, the European Council insisted “on sustained de-escalation”.²⁸ EU leaders however also reaffirmed its “strategic interest in the development of a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with Turkey” offering “a positive EU-Turkey agenda” such as in the areas of “economy and trade, people to people contacts, High level dialogues and continued cooperation on migration issues”. The High Representative and the Commission are moreover asked to “submit a report on the state of play concerning the EU-Turkey political, economic and trade relations and on instruments and options on how to proceed” until the March 2021 European Council.²⁹

For a more detailed analysis, we recommend reading the [VIADUCT Policy Paper “The EU’s Attitude towards Turkey - Shift of Narratives with Limited Actions? An Analysis of the Leader’s Narratives”](#) by Harun Suratli and Wolfgang Wessels.

Brexit

The UK left the EU on 31 January 2020 after the ratification of the withdrawal agreement by the Council one day earlier.³⁰ After that, the so-called transition period started. Consequently, the focus in 2020 then laid on the future relationship between the EU and the UK. The subsequent negotiations on a future relationship between the UK and the Union required several rounds of

²⁶ European Council Conclusions, 1-2 October 2020.

²⁷ European Council Conclusions, 15-16 October 2020.

²⁸ European Council Conclusions, 10-11 December 2020.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Council of the European Union (2020). Brexit: Council adopts decision to conclude the withdrawal agreement. (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/01/30/brexit-council-adopts-decision-to-conclude-the-withdrawal-agreement/>)



lengthy negotiations. After the European Council on 15-16 October 2020, EU leaders noted “that progress on the key issues of interest to the Union is still not sufficient for an agreement to be reached.”³¹ However, on Christmas Eve, the EU and UK negotiators were finally able to reach an agreement which the European Council adopted on 29 December 2020. European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen then signed the EU-UK trade and cooperation agreement on 30 December, just before the end of the transition period.³² The consequences of Britain’s withdrawal from the European Union on the European Council are still to be seen.

China

EU-China relations have been one of the priorities of the German presidency. Hence there have been high level meetings with EU and Chinese officials. While the EU-China summit in Leipzig had to be cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic, President Michel, President von der Leyen and HRVP Borrell met with Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang and Chinese President Xi Jinping for a virtual EU-China summit via video link. After the meeting, President Michel underlined the high economic interdependency of the EU and China and grounds for cooperation while at the same time underlining that the EU and China “do not share the same values, political systems, or approach to multilateralism” and announced, the EU would “engage in a clear-eyed and confident way, robustly defending EU interests and standing firm on our values.”³³

„We strive for a relationship that delivers on our mutual commitments. That generates concrete results for both sides. Results that are also good for the world. In some areas, we are on the right track. In others, more work needs to be done.“

- Charles Michel, President of the European Council (14 September 2020)

The virtual EU-China summit was followed by a leaders’ meeting in September which was also attended by German chancellor Merkel, representing the German Council presidency. The

³¹ European Council Conclusions, 15-16 October 2020.

³² European Council (2021). EU-UK negotiations on the future relationship.

(<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-uk-negotiations-on-the-future-relationship/>)

³³ EU-China Summit: Defending EU interests and values in a complex and vital partnership - Press release by President Michel and President von der Leyen. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/de/press/press-releases/2020/06/22/eu-china-summit-defending-eu-interests-and-values-in-a-complex-and-vital-partnership/>



meeting had a special focus on the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement (CAI).³⁴ It only took a few more months of negotiations until the EU and China were able to reach an “agreement in principle” on investment. However, as approval by the European Parliament is still pending, controversies can be expected.

Conclusions and lessons

The coronavirus pandemic and its socio-economic consequences are undoubtedly one of the biggest crises, if not the biggest crisis in the Union’s history. The Mega deal of the European Council on 21 July deserves further analysis as one of the biggest integrational steps in recent history³⁵ and sheds light on the problem-solving ability of the Union as a whole and for its institutions. While agreeing on a new MFF for the period of 2021 to 2027 and on the RRF to respond to the Corona Virus crisis, the negotiations once again revealed classic lines of conflict between Member States³⁶. In particular the conflict between the Southern member states, that got hit hard by the crisis, and the northern countries once again appeared: While Italy and Spain searched for strong financial support from the EU, some of the northern countries (especially the “frugal four”) argued that these funds will not solve the problems in a long-term perspective and might only affect beneficiary countries’ willingness to undertake economic reforms.³⁷ These cleavages are not a new phenomenon which only emerged during the discussions about measures in the Corona Crisis, but have occurred several times in the history of the Union. Although the July meeting can be seen as a historic step in the European Union, questions have been raised about the suitability of the European Council as a problem-solving institution. While some argue the role of the European Council in times of crisis – as the “hour of executives”³⁸ – has once again proven that it is a key institution of the Union, others question the suitability of those meetings for the problem-solving ability. Indeed, the July negotiations were the second longest meeting in the history of the European Council. Still it needs to be carefully examined, how long the European Council can continue to be the dominant institution in dealing with the

³⁴ EU-China leaders' meeting via video conference, 14 September 2020.

(<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2020/09/14/>)

³⁵ Wessels, Wolfgang (2021). The European Council’s Financial Mega Deal: An unprecedented challenge for the political and academic world. Policy Brief Series Part 2, online available at: https://track.uni-koeln.de/sites/track/user_upload/TRACK_Policy_Brief_Series_-_Part_II.pdf

³⁶ See also: https://track.uni-koeln.de/sites/track/user_upload/Policy_Brief_No.2.pdf

³⁷ See also: https://track.uni-koeln.de/sites/track/user_upload/TRACK_Policy_Brief_No.3.pdf

³⁸ See also: https://track.uni-koeln.de/sites/track/user_upload/TRACK_Policy_Brief_No.3.pdf



crisis. However, it remains to be seen, as the pro-European majority in the increasingly vocal European Parliament certainly wants to have a say and its consent is needed to adopt the next MFF (Art. 312 (2) TFEU). In this matter, can the EUCO's role in the crisis confirm or refute the leading 'grand theories'³⁹? Can we observe patterns of pure intergovernmentalism? Or did some of the member states realise that the EU's problem-solving potential is beneficial for their own national interests?

Therefore, the further assessment of the role of national governments in the process deserve a closer look as well. Especially as the Franco-German tandem apparently had a major impact on the successful implementation of the Recovery Fund, it needs to be reassessed if and how the finding of collective answers can lead to greater convergence between the domestic structures within the European Union. On the other hand, the resurgence of the Franco-German tandem could also lead to deeper separatist alignments of member states, that feel they cannot compete.



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³⁹ Hooghe, L. & Marks, G. (2019) Grand theories of European integration in the twenty-first century.



As for preparing the teaching we recommend:

- To read the detailed conclusions of the European Council carefully and identify key notions
- Use secondary literature, such as the Post-European Council Briefings published by the EPRS or Nicoletta Pirozzi's article "The European Council and Europe's Magic Lantern."
- Use policy briefings, which provide insights into current processes, such as the Policy Briefing Series on the European Council's Corona Crisis Management (Part I, Part II, Part II) by the TRACK project.

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