

Outcome of the meetings of EU leaders, 24-25 March 2022

Russia's war on Ukraine and the linked issue of energy security constituted the clear focus of the European Council meeting held on 24-25 March 2022. The meeting included a joint session with the President of the United States of America, Joe Biden, and it formed part of a trilogy of summit meetings in Brussels (NATO, G7 and EU) demonstrating Western unity in support of Ukraine and in response to President Vladimir Putin's unacceptable violation of international law. The main outcomes of the meeting were: i) the creation of a new Ukraine Solidarity Trust Fund; ii) a voluntary EU joint purchasing scheme for gas, similar to that put in place for coronavirus vaccines; and iii) the endorsement of the new EU 'Strategic Compass'. However, no further steps were taken with regard to Ukraine's EU membership application, no common EU approach was found to address increased energy prices and no further sanctions were imposed on Russia at this stage, despite calls by some EU leaders for energy and/or transport bans. In general, the conclusions reiterated, or built further upon, the [Versailles Declaration](#) of 11 March. Important elements included the need to further reduce the EU's strategic dependence in energy and other sensitive areas, notably critical raw materials, semi-conductors, health, digital and food security. The meeting also saw Charles Michel re-elected as President of the European Council for a second term of 30 months.

1. General aspects

The European Council meeting began with the customary address by the President of the European Parliament, [Roberta Metsola](#). President Metsola had already met 13 of the EU Heads of State or Government bilaterally in the first two months of her mandate, in addition to addressing two informal meetings of EU leaders. Besides stating the Parliament's view on the main agenda points, she also used the opportunity to [address](#) other topics on which the EU urgently needs to advance, notably migration and the rule of law.

Charles Michel's [first term as European Council President](#) ends on 31 May 2022 (see [EPRS outlook](#)). During this formal European Council meeting, EU Heads of State or Government unanimously [re-elected](#) Charles Michel for a second and final mandate. He was also [re-appointed](#) as President of the Euro Summit for the same two-and-a-half-year mandate.

As Charles Michel's invitation [indicated](#), to address transatlantic cooperation in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, US President Joe Biden joined one session of the European Council. Subsequently, the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy joined the meeting by video link.

Due to the high number of meetings on the day of the European Council, notably the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\) Summit](#) and [G7](#) meeting – as well as the heavy agenda of the European Council itself – the Euro Summit scheduled to take place following the European Council was postponed and will now take place alongside the European Council meeting on [23-24 June 2022](#).

The conclusions confirmed that EU leaders would return to all the current agenda items at a special European Council meeting, likely in mid-May, [announced](#) by French President Emmanuel Macron.

The [indicative leader's agenda for 2021-22](#), updated in December 2021, concludes in March 2022, but has not been further extended for the time being.

2. European Council meeting

Russia's invasion of Ukraine

The European Council reiterated its call on Russia to withdraw its troops and to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity and its internationally recognised borders. It urged Russia to abide by the [order](#) of the International Court of Justice, and stressed once again its violation of international law. The EU leaders condemned Russia's targeting of civilian populations and infrastructure, called for 'an immediate end to war crimes', and urged Russia to facilitate the disbursement of humanitarian aid and the creation of humanitarian corridors.

The [joint readout](#) of the discussion with the US President stressed the united and coordinated Western response, expressed readiness to go beyond existing sanctions on Russia and Belarus, discussed humanitarian needs and assistance, and stressed the importance of 'strengthening democratic resilience in Ukraine, Moldova and the wider Eastern partnership region'. The joint readout also underlined the importance of the [transatlantic agenda](#) and of 'transatlantic security and defence through robust EU-NATO cooperation as described in the strategic compass'.

Support for reconstruction of a democratic Ukraine was at the centre of the EU leaders' debate. They agreed on a Ukraine Solidarity Trust Fund, with funding to be the subject of an international conference to be organised in due course. Estonia also put forward a [proposal](#) to set up an 'escrow account' to fund Ukraine's reconstruction from a share of gas and oil payments. Referring to the [Versailles Declaration](#), EU leaders renewed their invitation to the European Commission to present its opinion on Ukraine's request for EU membership 'in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Treaties'. They did not [agree](#) to offer Ukraine a 'fast-track' to membership.

Millions of Ukrainians have fled the war, with one in four being [displaced](#). The EU leaders called for intensified efforts in support of refugees, and stressed that the EU would 'continue to provide coordinated political, financial, material and humanitarian support' to Ukraine, which in the words of the Prime Minister of Latvia [Krišjānis Kariņš](#), 'is fighting our battle' for values. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen [stressed](#) that the EU is providing humanitarian aid and working on 'securing safe passage'. She added that €17 billion mainly from cohesion funds (due to additional flexibility) would be made available to front-line EU countries, €3.4 billion of which would be frontloaded to swiftly provide liquidity to EU countries hosting refugees.

No further sanctions were adopted, the focus being set on full implementation of existing sanctions and on the elimination of loopholes. However, EU leaders called on the world to align with existing sanctions, and stressed the Union's [readiness](#) to adopt 'further coordinated robust sanctions on Russia and Belarus'. This was a compromise solution between Member States (including [Ireland](#), [Poland and the Baltic countries](#)), which wished to go much faster with sanctions and Member States (including [Belgium](#), [Germany](#), Greece and the Netherlands), which stressed that it might take time to [cut](#) energy dependency in a sustainable way. Estonian Prime Minister [Kaja Kallas](#) spoke of 'smart containment', stressed the importance of unity and underlined that there can be no return to 'business as usual' that signals 'to dictators of the world' that they may continue their disruptive behaviour.

The G7 meeting and NATO Summit, which preceded the European Council meeting, also focused on the situation in Ukraine. The G7 leaders [underlined](#) their unity and determination 'to restore peace and stability and uphold international law', and warned against 'the use of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons'. While they did not propose new sanctions, they called for Russia to be isolated in international organisations and multilateral fora, which might result in Russia's [suspension or even exclusion](#) from the United Nations. Prior to the summit, the US and its allies [questioned](#) Russia's participation in the G20, whilst China has thus far [opposed](#) any exclusion. The NATO leaders [committed](#) to continue to fight false narratives and expose 'fabricated narratives or

manufactured "false flag" operations'. They warned of 'severe consequences' in case of use of chemical or biological weapons and confirmed the further strengthening of the eastern flank. They also reaffirmed NATO's open door policy and called on China to play a constructive international role. Jens Stoltenberg's mandate as NATO Secretary-General was also [renewed](#) for an additional year.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, participated in two of the meetings. At the NATO Summit, he [stressed](#) that the Ukrainian army has proved its value and contribution to European security and urged leaders to give or sell 1 % of their equipment to Ukraine, in particular tanks, aircraft and air defence systems. When addressing the European Council, he [asked](#) EU leaders not to be 'late' in endorsing Ukraine's European path and urged them to determine their position in earnest.

Main message of the President of the European Parliament: Roberta Metsola [stressed](#) that Ukraine 'looks to the EU as its destination'. She also underlined that Europe should help the displaced and that Parliament would be 'a constructive and pragmatic partner' in finding solutions on asylum and migration. Speaking of hope, she welcomed the Ukraine Solidarity Trust Fund initiative.

Security and defence

As flagged up in the [EPRS Outlook](#), EU leaders [endorsed](#) the [EU Strategic Compass](#). They continued the debate [initiated](#) in Versailles on bolstering defence capabilities in preparation for a special meeting in May 2022, at which further decisions are expected. The strategic compass offers a long-term vision, which requires sufficient means. A share of two per cent of GDP for [defence spending](#) 'must be the floor not the ceiling'. As President Biden [urged](#), the allies must share the burden of transatlantic security, step up defence investments and foster EU-NATO cooperation.

Main message of the President of the European Parliament: Roberta Metsola stressed that the EU was at risk and that it should show solidarity, raise national defence spending and use the 'common EU budget more efficiently', channelling resources 'towards the causes that need them the most.'

Energy security

EU leaders [reaffirmed](#) their commitment to phase out the Union's dependence on Russian fossil fuels, and called again on the Commission to present an ambitious plan by May 2022. In a joint [statement](#), Presidents Biden and von der Leyen [committed](#) to stepping up cooperation on security of supply. The US will supply an additional 15 billion cubic metres at least of liquefied natural gas (LNG) in 2022, aiming to reach at least 50 billion cubic metres per year. A joint task force was established to assess 'immediate energy security needs'. President von der Leyen [stressed](#) that the energy partnership with the US would enable the acceleration of the green transition and would help phase out EU fuel dependency on Russia.

EU leaders agreed to refill gas storage to prepare for next winter, and tasked the Commission with establishing 'solidarity and compensation mechanisms'. They also agreed to work on a voluntary joint procurement mechanism allowing the 'common purchase of gas, LNG and hydrogen', which would offer the EU enormous '[bargaining power](#)' and would be open to Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and the Western Balkans.

The most heated part of the debate focused on energy prices and the reform of the energy market. President von der Leyen [stressed](#) that EU leaders had explored various options to mitigate the impact of high energy prices on consumers and businesses and invited Member States to make the best possible use of the Commission's [toolbox](#). Regarding the Commission [communication](#) envisaging measures to cap energy prices, the Prime Minister of Italy Mario Draghi stressed that the Council will discuss the subject in May 2022, when the Commission will present options for [decoupling](#) energy prices from gas prices.

Main message of the President of the European Parliament: Roberta Metsola expressed support for a coordinated European approach to energy prices and for replenishing gas storage. She stressed that the 'long-term target must be zero gas from the Kremlin'.

Economic issues

The EU leaders' main message on economic issues was to further reduce the EU's strategic dependence in the most sensitive areas, such as critical raw materials, semi-conductors, health, digital and food, by pursuing an ambitious and robust trade policy and fostering investment.

To ensure the single market functions correctly during crises, EU leaders called for strict implementation and enforcement of the single market rules, implementation of the industrial and small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) strategies, the completion of the single market in digital and services, better ecosystem interconnection across Member States, as well as improving the security and diversity of supply chains.

EU leaders endorsed the [annual sustainable growth survey](#), inviting Member States to reflect the results in their national reform and stability or convergence programmes, as well as the draft [Council recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area](#).

Considering the likely impact of the war in Ukraine on food security and affordability in the EU and its neighbourhood, EU leaders discussed the issue in depth and invited the Council to proceed on the Commission's recent [communication](#) on this issue. They stressed the need to preserve the integrity of food supply chains, and invited the Commission, in coordination with international partners, to prioritise work on global food security and affordability, which will be the core objective of the FARM (food and agricultural resilience mission) initiative.

External relations

In preparation for the forthcoming EU-China summit on 1 April 2022, EU leaders considered relations with China in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. They also discussed the political crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, reiterating the country's European perspective and stressing the importance of finalising constitutional and electoral reform.

The Covid-19 pandemic

Perhaps surprisingly, given the increase in case numbers across the EU – even if [mortality rates](#) are now significantly lower than they were in January 2022 – Covid-19 was not a key focus of this European Council meeting. Indeed it was rarely mentioned by EU leaders' as they [arrived](#) for the meeting.

As [expected](#), the European Council discussed coordination efforts as well as global health governance, solidarity, and future preparedness. They also welcomed [progress](#) on the issue of an Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) waiver for medical products, which has been under discussion at the World Trade Organization since October 2020.

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