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## EU Parliament returns to Strasbourg. A sign of hope

The European Parliament resumes sessions in its Strasbourg headquarters from today until June 10. MEPs have been absent from the Alsatian city for a year and a half due to the Covid-19 pandemic. During the lockdown period the venue had been used to respond to the health and social needs of the local population, giving priority to the homeless. COVID-19 tests were carried out at the Pflimlin building along with catering for health workers, the needy and the homeless. EU Parliament buildings in Brussels were also used for this purpose. **Brexit and biodiversity.** The reopening of the Strasbourg parliament building (opened for the first time this year on May 9 to mark the launch of the Conference on the Future of Europe) is regarded - in the EU and in the city of Strasbourg - as a symbolic sign of post-pandemic “restart.” This week's plenary meeting will leave MEPs free to choose whether to attend in person or follow the proceedings via live streaming:

**the pandemic and vaccination scenario remains uneven across the 27 Member States.**

Brexit-related issues are due to be discussed at 5pm, with MEPs asked to confirm a mandate for talks with the Council on a €5 billion Reserve fund to help EU countries counter the adverse consequences of the UK's withdrawal. The new EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 will also be discussed in plenary, "and MEPs are expected to call for better protection of the EU's land and sea areas, to protect wildlife and humans," parliamentary sources said. Parliament is expected to approve €1 billion funds to help member states purchase, maintain and replace necessary customs control equipment. **Digital COVID Certificate.** MEPs are set to debate and give final approval to the EU Digital COVID Certificate, to facilitate intra-EU travel during the pandemic and contribute to the economic recovery. They will discuss with the Commission and the Council the ongoing evaluation of the national Recovery and Resilience plans: MEPs will wrap up their views in a resolution to be put to the vote. Parliament is set “to debate EU reaction to Belarus forcing a Ryanair flight to divert to Minsk and the arrest of Belarus journalist Raman Pratasevich” in the presence of Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell. **Vaccine patents and Lux Film Award.** On June 7 MEPs are set to approve the Global Europe fund (a seven-year (€79.5 billion fund for development, neighbourhood and international cooperation) along with the € 88 billion European Social Fund, with investments secured to combat youth unemployment and child poverty.

**The Strasbourg plenary session is scheduled to address the COVID-19 crisis on several occasions in the coming days:**

on June 10 MEPs will vote on whether the EU should ask the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to waive intellectual property rights for COVID-19 vaccines. The LUX European Audience Film Award 2021 winner will be proclaimed on May 9. The three shortlisted films are: “Another Round”, by Thomas Vinterberg, “Collective” by Alexander Nanau and “Corpus Christi” by Jan Komasa.

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