



**EMK 21 | 22**  
**SACHSEN**



EUROPA  
MINISTER:INNEN  
KONFERENZ

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**ANNUAL PROGRAMME OF THE  
PRESIDENCY**

## Welcome

Dear Sir or Madam,

On 1 July 2021, Saxony takes over the chair of the Conference of the Ministers for European Affairs of the Länder (EMK). For one year, we now have the honour to lead this body and to coordinate the European policies of Germany's different Länder. With the formation of Saxony's State government after the elections in 2019, the Department of European Affairs became part of the State Ministry of Justice and for Democracy, European Affairs and Gender Equality. This aligns with our ambition to establish modern and progressive European policies. We want to help shape our European society more democratically and with our prime focus on people. And the Conference on the Future of Europe, launched on 9 May 2021, offers an excellent opportunity to achieve this goal. The coronavirus pandemic has shown the importance of Europe for all of us, the need to work together across borders and what can happen when those borders close. Beyond the pandemic, there are naturally many other reasons to explore the future of Europe. You can find out much more about our priorities in these chapters. We'll also of course be closely involved in the "European Capital of Culture 2025" initiative during our Presidency. It's great that Chemnitz, together with the Slovenian city of Nova Gorica, has been granted the chance to bear this title and bring its potential to life.

Together with my staff, I look forward to an exciting year in which I hope to once again enjoy many more personal meetings and fruitful exchanges.

Yours sincerely,



**Ms Katja Meier**

State Minister of Justice and for Democracy, European Affairs and Gender Equality  
of the Free State of Saxony

## Introduction

The Conference of the Ministers for European Affairs of the Länder (EMK) consists of those ministers, senators, state secretaries and state councillors of Germany's Länder who are responsible for European affairs. The Free State of Saxony is represented by Katja Meier, State Minister for Justice and Democracy, European Affairs and Gender Equality.

The EMK represents the interests of the Länder in European affairs with respect to the Federal Government of Germany and to the European Union (EU). In order to acknowledge and take into account the views of various Länder representatives, its position on current European policy issues and projects has been drawn up by means of joint decisions and opinions that are conveyed to the Federal Government, relevant institutions in Brussels and a host of other stakeholders. Within the EMK, the Länder also coordinate how they intend to raise awareness about European affairs and promote the idea of Europe.

The State of Saxony is chairing the EMK from 1 July 2021 until 30 June 2022. We would like to take this opportunity to work together with the representatives of the other Länder to help make the EU more cohesive, and to ensure that Europe is a more democratic and a more socially and environmentally fairer place. State Minister Meier, committed to a modern, vibrant and above all people-oriented Europe, aims to enhance cooperation, particularly through civil society bodies and by means of exchange between regions. To underpin its Presidency, Saxony is proposing five priorities for meeting these goals:

1. Cross-border cooperation – German-Czech relations
2. EU citizenship and the future of the EU
3. The European Green Deal: innovation, climate and energy – implementing the EU's climate objectives with an emphasis on regions
4. The rule of law, democracy and equality
5. Flight and migration.

The heart of our programme lies in strengthening a sustainable, democratic, European society and focusing on the EU's core values. Our programme will continue to develop dynamically in the course of the Presidency, taking into account the hopes, concerns and wishes expressed by all the Länder.

## Meeting dates and venues

Three EMK meetings are planned during Saxony's Presidency:

- the 87th EMK meeting in Chemnitz on 8 and 9 September **2021**
- the 88th in Brussels on 9 and 10 February **2022**, and
- the 89th in Berlin on 9 June **2022**.

Other events and working meetings will take place, for example in Leipzig, Berlin, Prague or at the joint border where Poland, the Czech Republic and Germany meet. The choice of venues underlines the importance of cooperation with our neighbours to the east. In 2022, Saxony's Liaison Offices in Prague and Wrocław will also celebrate their tenth anniversaries.

## Chemnitz – European Capital of Culture 2025

As one of the two European 2025 Capitals of Culture, Chemnitz is proud to host the first EMK under Saxony's Presidency. Chemnitz shares the award with the city of Nova Gorica in Slovenia, together with its neighbouring Italian city of Gorizia. With its motto "C the unseen", which convinced the international judges for the award, Chemnitz will focus in 2025 on things unseen: the unseen of the "silent centre", the unseen city, the unseen European neighbourhood, unseen localities and biographies, the unseen talents in every individual. It also aims to highlight for European eyes a Chemnitz "which is not on everybody's radar".

Chemnitz offers a constantly renewing industry, a unique architectural mix and a vibrant cultural landscape. The city saw rapid growth in the 19th century during the industrial era, especially in textiles, machinery and transport equipment. Among the best-known entrepreneurs were Richard Hartmann, the "Saxon King of Locomotives", and the Esche family firm, renowned makers of socks. And car manufacturers like "Wanderer" and "Auto Union" helped the city become one of the richest municipalities in Germany. Following its almost total destruction after the Second World War, Chemnitz was rebuilt as "Karl-Marx-Stadt" by the former East Germany. Today's cityscape is a living testament to this, symbolised by the bust of Marx, nicknamed "Nischel" by the locals. Today, Saxony's third largest city is once again a thriving technological hub. Chemnitz also epitomises art and culture, particularly with its international art collection and the Gunzenhauser Museum.

## Germany and the Czech Republic: Bringing together in a united Europe

We strongly support the conclusions of the 83rd EMK meeting that cross-border cooperation at regional level is a core element of European integration and represents an indispensable contribution to preserving the European ideal. Specifically, Saxony's Presidency will focus on cooperation with its neighbouring countries, Poland and the Czech Republic. As recommended at the 83rd EMK meeting, cooperation between Germany and the Czech Republic will be coordinated in Chemnitz.

Cooperation with Poland and the Czech Republic is of crucial importance. Located at the heart of Europe, sharing a 600-kilometre border with the two nations, and as one of four designated Euroregions, Saxony serves as a bridge – a kind of “Europe in miniature”. The already close cross-border and bilateral relations with its immediate neighbours remain a high priority and will be intensified in the coming years as the need for more exchanges at all levels grows. Close cooperation and progressive integration at regional level also provide an opportunity for border areas once thought of as peripheral to become new European centres. The eastern German border regions are especially well placed to attract closer attention from European institutions.

In the long term, there is a need to strengthen cooperation in different areas – culture, science and business, common security, environmental protection and education. The dovetailing of issues around border regions and the theme of European citizenship became particularly noticeable after borders were tightened or even closed in the struggle against Covid-19. It became clear that, beyond existing cooperation between police administrations, cross-border rescue and healthcare systems needed to be promoted, established and developed, especially with regard to setting up effective transport links between different regions. In addition to education in neighbouring languages, further support will also be given to encounters between people from different social groups and generations. These forms of exchange are a vital contribution to a vibrant and citizen-centred Europe and a pillar that strengthens our pan-European society.

Good neighbourly relations are also maintained through “best practice” exchange, involving a range of bodies alongside the Federal Government and the Länder administrations, such as the Liaison Offices of the State of Saxony and the State of Bavaria, the Euroregions, partnerships between cities, municipalities and districts, various chambers of commerce and non-governmental organisations.

## The future of the EU: A European democracy

Exchanges and encounters are by their nature closely linked to European citizenship, which is at the heart of the European project. Facilitating them strengthens the democratic participation of citizens, the protection of their rights and their freedom of movement. An EU citizen means anyone with the nationality of a member state – this does not override but supplements national citizenship. EU citizens have the right to freely move and live within any member state; they have the right to vote and to be candidates in municipal and European elections in the member state where they live (Article 20 of the TFEU). Although the European Commission, in its report on EU citizenship, acknowledges that the term “EU citizenship” is meaningful to many, the rights that come with this status are seldom exercised. Especially in border regions, being an EU citizen has significant value. Further developing European citizenship towards equal rights for all citizens based on their citizenship of a member state would be an important building block for the democratic strengthening of European integration. The European Commission wants to address democratic deficits within the EU by means of “a new impetus for democracy in Europe” as one of its six goals for the current legislative period. Various instruments are intended to help make democracies more resilient within the EU, such as the triennial report on the implementation of EU citizenship provisions (Dec. 2020) and the European Democracy Action Plan. With Saxony’s Presidency of the EMK, we intend to contribute to the further development of European democracy by seeking an EMK decision to strengthen European citizenship.

### Shaping Europe’s future together

European policy aims to involve citizens in shaping the future of the EU by launching the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE). The EMK intends to play an active role and to make the voices of the Länder heard. It is time to go beyond the status quo when it comes to European integration and to develop a positive vision for the future of European society. We are committed to ensuring that the proposals made by citizens for the future of the EU are seriously examined and, where possible, put into practice. Robust democracy demands a stable yet flexible foundation, as well as empowered citizens who know and exercise their democratic rights. Unlike its market and currency, democracy in Europe has not yet been unified. For this reason too, it is important to strengthen European citizenship and make its benefits and responsibilities more tangible.

## The European Green Deal: Innovation, climate and energy for a climate-neutral EU

Europe has no future if we neglect climate action. The damage to our livelihoods brought about by the climate crisis is an existential threat to nature and humanity. With its Green Deal, the European Commission has set out a path towards a climate-neutral continent by 2050. Consistent climate action is being repeatedly postponed because of financial or social constraints. Numerous economic studies, as well as the latest report by the International Energy Agency, show that climate neutrality is possible in Europe and will lead to job creation and increased economic prosperity. However, this is only the case if the 1.5°C aim of the Paris Climate Agreement is followed consistently. To do otherwise would irreversibly damage our environment and significantly reduce any positive economic effects.

Earth's fate will be decided over the next five years. Our actions by 2026 will be crucial in preventing climate-related tipping points and irremediable damage caused by global heating. In summer 2021, the EU plans to take an important step forward by adopting the "Fit for 55" initiative, comprising regulatory proposals that should contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gases by over 55%. The innovative capacity of the economy and society must now be harnessed to actively work on this climate objective and to ensure a green recovery from coronavirus and a smooth and transparent transition. This requirement is also in line with the 29 April 2021 ruling by Germany's Federal Constitutional Court, calling on the legislature to respect fairness between generations and not to kick emissions-reduction targets down the road. For example, the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2021 made sustainability a key issue.

As current chair of the EMK, we are working towards an EMK decision that outlines the German and regional roadmaps of the European Green Deal. Saxony's representatives will not ignore the climate crisis, even while struggling against Covid-19. Reconstruction aid must be linked to stringent criteria that govern measures for protecting our environment and climate.

2021 is a crucial year internationally for climate and environmental protection. Joe Biden has put climate action back on the US agenda and in November 2021 the 26th UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) takes place in Glasgow. With the help of a decision of the EMK, we intend to confirm that Europe (including of course Germany) stands with the US in the vanguard of climate neutrality at the UN Climate Change Conference, defending European ideals to safeguard our continent and care for our common home.

## The EU: Governed by the principle of the rule of law

Freedom, equality, democracy and the rule of law are essential pillars of European society. We have the responsibility to preserve and protect these fundamental values, as the EU is an area of freedom, security and justice. In all member states, the Covid-19 pandemic has put these values at risk. In the years before the pandemic, populist and reactionary parties and movements have attacked and increasingly undermined the principle of the rule of law. This is why we are even more intensively focused on our commitment to strengthening this principle within the EU, as well as to upholding human rights and European societies without discrimination in the context of our EMK Presidency. Safeguarding and developing the rule of law in our society are of vital importance for the EU – this is the only way to shape a more free, just and democratic Europe. Only as a society based on the principle of the rule of law can Europe address questions of fairness in a world of ever faster ecological, digital and demographic change. The rule of law and respect for human rights are guiding European principles to which we must commit.

### Protection of the principle of the rule of law and strengthening the appreciation of law

European history has repeatedly shown that freedom, democracy and the principle of the rule of law need to be constantly asserted and restored. We must continue to stand up for our fundamental values, as the Rule of Law Report and the ongoing rule of law cases have led to concerns that the principle of the rule of law could be irreparably eroded. We are therefore committed to ensuring that the EU remains a society based on the principle of the rule of law. The aim of our EMK Presidency is to formulate the political stance of the Länder to protect this principle more effectively, particularly by using existing legal instruments. Setting conditions for protecting the Union's budget must not become a political bargaining tool wielded by the Council of the EU and the European Commission. The principle of the rule of law requires existing EU law to be put into practice – not just by member states but also by EU institutions.

The principle of the rule of law can only be safeguarded if the EU serves as a union of political values and if EU citizens perceive and appreciate law as a basic pillar of their societies. The EMK is a promoter of the European ideal and has always advocated common European values. A key focus of the EMK under Saxony's Presidency is therefore to enhance citizens' perceptions of the rule of law.



We intend to convey the key importance of law for our coexistence in Europe on the occasion of the conference and through accompanying events and exhibitions in a variety of formats. Together with citizens, we aim to share and communicate the values, morals and leading role that the principle of the rule of law plays for freedom, equality, peace and prosperity in Europe.

#### *Common values are based on mutual understanding*

The State of Saxony, as a political entity in the east of Germany, serves as a bridge between the constitutional traditions of western European member states and how constitutions can sometimes be perceived – shaped by the experience of socialism – in eastern European ones. Legal values can only be developed together on the basis of mutual understanding. As part of Saxony’s Presidency of the EMK, we want to use our excellent contacts with the Polish and Czech legal professions, justice systems and academia to discuss, shape and strengthen our common values. To this end, we will hold a tripartite conference on the rule of law in Leipzig, with the results to be presented at the EMK meeting in Brussels.

#### *Society of freedom and protection*

The European Commission has reacted to the lack of formal guidelines for protecting minorities through its EU initiative on equality and has taken an important step towards reducing inequalities within the EU by putting in place the European Pillar of Social Rights. This is taking place against a backdrop of racist violence, hate speech towards ethnicities and open discrimination against women and LGBTIQ\* people. In particular, the State of Saxony wants to present the EMK as a symbol of openness to the world, respect for human dignity and equal rights for all. Building on the “EU Action Plan against Racism 2020-2025”, the “Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025” and the related “Strategy for Equality” of LGBTIQ\* people in the EU, we, together with our neighbouring countries and regions, aim to improve protection against discrimination based on gender, colour, origin or religion, as well as to enhance the freedom of LGBTIQ\* people and the situation of rainbow families. This also helps to strengthen the EU as a society based on the rule of law and to promote its values throughout the bloc.

## The Union's values: Human rights as the basis for a European refugee and integration policy

For the EU as a union of law and values, there is a need to focus on dealing with flight and migration. While the number of registered refugees is decreasing in the EU, including in Saxony, huge migration flows and, above all, refugee migration are taking place globally. There are still inhumane situations at the EU's external borders. Action needs to be taken at all levels to improve the distressing conditions of refugees at these borders.

The migration and asylum package presented by the European Commission in 2020 includes new or amended directives, regulations and recommendations. It is important to support the objective set out in the "Political Guidelines of the Commission 2019-2024": redistributing the burden on member states in terms of flight and asylum while upholding European values, human rights and respect for the rule of law.

As current chair of the EMK, we intend to be a key player in helping to shape European asylum and migration policy and we will seek a common decision reflecting our European society of values.

The core issue is how Germany and its Länder can play their part in creating as broad a humanitarian alliance as possible, built on solidarity in the reception and distribution of refugees. Such an approach would represent not only a political alliance but a human one. Principles underpinning the rule of law must be respected, not only in receiving and distributing refugees but also in how effectively institutions meet these challenges.

In view of the shortage of skilled workers and demographic trends in some member states, as well as in regions like Saxony, we also intend to address European migration policy as part of EMK's work, especially when it comes to immigration, particularly for study, training and work. Our goal is fair and sustainable migration, both in terms of countries of origin and with regard to working conditions.

**On the basis of these priorities, we, together with the representatives responsible for European affairs within the governments of the Länder, intend to shape our year at the helm of the EMK. We look forward to many personal meetings and fruitful exchanges with you.**



If you have any questions or suggestions, please do not hesitate to contact the EMK office.

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