

Possible Headlines: (open to amendments if it captures the essence of the article in a better and more snappy way)

MEC 2021 – An unconventional MEC in unusual times

MEC 2021 – A remarkable MEC, in unique circumstances

MEC 2021 – A MEC like no other

MEC 2021 – The future of the European Union prevails!

→ The annual Model European Council (MEC), involving all European Schools, has successfully taken place, even in times of such uncertainty.

Virtual MEC 2021- A great success

MEC 2021 – Mit Abstand!!!

The Model European Council is an event involving 15 European Schools, in which the participating students prepare for and eagerly look forward to a week of representing different member States of the EU and debating like some of the most influential politicians in the World. This Event is usually held in a City where a European School is located, however this year was different, as it had to be adapted to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. The result: the first ever MEC to be held online

At first, the overall consensus in all European Schools appeared to be sceptical of a MEC online instead of in person as it had never been done before as well as the successfulness of such a large virtual event being uncertain. These doubts however quickly became redundant as the week progressed and MEC 2021 established itself as a MEC like no other.

The week began on Monday, the 15<sup>th</sup> of March, with general preparations taking place at each school and in some homes, trying to figure out the different logistics for the entirety of the upcoming week of MEC. Once this had been generally sorted, the schools joined in the plenary opening for an introduction with the guest speaker Andreas Beckmann, the Deputy Secretary General of the European Schools, who shared his insight into what it takes when trying to cooperate successfully in a debate and praised how MEC was professionally organised online to give the best experience possible during the ongoing pandemic. Following this, every council moved into their own meetings to focus on the technical and procedural aspects of the upcoming week. Once everything had been explained and set straight, the first day came to a close.

On day two, MEC 2021 was officially announced open, upon which the Heads of State delivered their opening speeches, in which they laid down a brief summary of their country's goals and what they were hoping to achieve.

After this, the first press questions began, with everyone nervously anticipating a question that may be posed towards their own country. Spain received one question about the

mentioning of Health Cooperation in their opening speech and the implications of loosening Covid-19 restrictions and answered by saying that because of a promising looking

vaccination campaign there is a possibility of opening the country more, especially in order to try and tackle social problems like unemployment, which is very important. Lastly, in the final part of the answer, the concept of an EU wide vaccination passport was alluded to, while also trying to encourage EU states to implement this idea. After the press conference a small break of 15 minutes allowed for the rearrangement into everyone's own councils, upon which the first council meetings of the week began. These first council meetings were certainly the most reserved and muddled of the week, as everyone tried to get into their own rhythm and get a clear idea of many different processes of online MEC. This resulted in getting through a lot less than would have been originally set out and desired. Finally, a short span of press questions concluded the first day of debating and the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of MEC. A Plenary opening initiated the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, in which the three topics of discussion for the emergency debates were mentioned. Subsequently, all the ministers were ready to go into the longest day of debating, with two council meetings each. Certainly, a much more successful day than the previous one, everyone was beginning to show greater proficiency, coupled with smoother processing from the presidency and commission, making the debates and results a lot more efficient. Day 3 concluded once again with a set of press questions, after which the general consensus appeared to be much happier than the day before.

Following a brief plenary opening on day 4, the awaited urgent debates began, the first proposal being on whether Covid-19 vaccinations should be allowed to be exported out of the EU before every citizen in the EU is vaccinated, the second being on whether travel restrictions should be loosened in the summer (following June 1<sup>st</sup>) courtesy of the creation of an EU wide vaccination passport and the third and final proposal, being on whether the military coup in Myanmar should lead to the Myanmar government being sanctioned by the EU.

In a very interesting debate, the Czech Republic mentioned key aspects, such as their developing concern about the first proposal. The Czech concern emerged due to the fact that if the EU would stop exporting to other countries, then they would stop receiving vaccines from the rest of the world. Passing this proposal could result in not receiving the 2 million awaited Russian vaccines, threatening the already crucial situation, delaying the vaccination process of the population, and pushing the economic recovery from the virus further away. Much to their relief proposal one was denied, measuring the recovery of the country and its citizens.

Spain made it their priority to focus on the second proposal in order to try and ensure their economy's sustainability, by allowing for tourism again, which in turn would combat current pressing social problems, like unemployment, since the tourism sector in Spain accounts for approx. 12 % of Spain's GDP. Upon voting the first proposal did not pass, as many countries found the implications negative in terms of how the EU would be presented.

In an incredibly close QMV vote for the second proposal, to Spain's disappointment, the vote lacked only 0.90 % of the EU's population in order to have been passed, highlighting, for Spain, the greatest loss of the week.

The Czech Republic, however, was once again pleased with the denial of the second proposal, as a vaccination passport for people vaccinated with only EMA approved vaccines

would exclude the 20% of the Czech population planning on receiving Sputnik V and those considering the Chinese vaccine, Sinopharm.

Resembling the outcome of the first two proposals, the unanimous third proposal regarding sanctioning the government of Myanmar was also denied. Although the vast majority of the EU member states, including both Spain and the Czech Republic, were keen on passing this proposal, the firm disagreement of one individual country (Cyprus) resulted in the denial of proposal three.

Following a short break after the urgent debates, the council meetings proceeded again, where the tempo slowed down in comparison to the day before, due to conflicting topics in the proposals being present at this point. A relatively mixed day 4 then ended at 17:30, at the close of the press conference.

Finally, on the last day the sentiment and motivation was in high spirits as all the ministries tried get across the best outcomes for their respective countries in each of the last council meetings. Spain pushed for moving towards the creation of a truly European Army in order to try and establish the EU as a credible power on the world stage and to show that the European Union is a soft power by choice and not due to weakness. In order to do so, Spain successfully made a significant amendment that would enable this. On this rare occasion the Czech Republic supported Spain by voting for their amendment, and also pushed for the establishment of a European army to enable the EU to defend itself if necessary, and to ensure the safety of all European citizens. As the final council meetings then concluded everyone involved moved back into the plenary meetings for the closing statements by each country and after this awaited the most anticipated part of the week:

The speech from the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen.

As everyone waited in suspense, the bitter-sweet moment of MEC 2021 closing came to mind and just as the opportunity to dwell on this more and more presented itself, Dr. Ursula von der Leyen had joined the call. With no further wasting of time, the MEC representative of the EU President introduced her, and she began by saying that it was “the highlight of her week” that she could be here, due to it being very demanding before this. She introduced that she, herself, also went to a European School, namely Brussels 1 in Uccle, and that attending such a school was a “fantastic experience”, as it promotes values like diversity and unity. When asked a question about the advice she’d give to a student who recently graduated, she gave a very inspiring response that focused on the encouraging quote to “live your dreams”, even if they may seem distant at the time. She ended by thanking and bidding good luck to everyone involved and expressed in a sentence of Pro-Europeanism, with a bright outlook on to the future, “to stay European” and that “we are counting on you” and “need you!”, directed at all of the students, which officially marked the end of MEC 2021.

Upon consideration and hearing from a lot of people who participated in the last MEC that was held in person, it became clear that MEC 2021 certainly did not fall short of managing to reach a very enjoyable and similar atmosphere to as if it had been held in person. This was in large thanks to all of the participants and ministers engaging in fruitful, constructive and active debates, along with the organizational planning of all Schools, including Brussels

1 (UCC) as the host, that allowed the week to, at most times, be seamless and structured in layout.

While this MEC still certainly managed to transcend sceptical expectations, there remained the element of not being able to reach the same level of social exchange and active discussion on proposals vis-à-vis active cooperation, resulting in the overall efficiency being inferior and the process slightly more strenuous, so that it appeared that less proposals were able to be worked through, in comparison to if it were to have been carried out in person. This, in all reflection, appeared to be the greatest downside and most disappointing part about this MEC being held online.

Despite this however, everyone realized the importance of not dwelling on this, so that this MEC could be thoroughly enjoyed and so it could be acknowledged that it was certainly of sanguine quality to even be able to have an inter-European School event like this take place in 2021 amidst a global pandemic.

Ultimately, the week of MEC 2021 was constructive, pragmatic and principally successful for the experience and worldliness of all participants, especially when considering the fact that, as of now, it has been the only possible cross-school event to have been held this year.

Finally, the speech from Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission, was unequivocally worth the wait and was a truly inspiring and gratifying moment for everyone, as the last constituent of this year's MEC, and it will undoubtedly make MEC 2021 a great deal more memorable and remarkable, especially when looking back.

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Along with the MEC ministers of Spain and the Czech Republic