



GENERAL AFFAIRS Council

Tuesday 20 March in Brussels

Starting at 10.00, the Council will prepare the **European Council on 22-23 March 2018** by examining draft conclusions.

Ministers will then examine a presidency synthesis report on Council contributions to the 2018 **European Semester**. They will also look at a draft **recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area** to be transmitted to the European Council.

Under any other business the Commission will update the Council on the state of play with regard to **rule of law in Poland**.

Over a working lunch, ministers will discuss issues linked to the end of the institutional cycle.

A presidency press conference will be held at the end of the meeting (+/- 13.00).

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¹ This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the press office.

Preparation for the March European Council

The Council will examine draft conclusions for the European Council meeting to be held on 22-23 March, prepared by the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, in cooperation with the Bulgarian presidency and the Commission.

The European Council will focus on:

- jobs, growth and competitiveness: EU leaders will adopt conclusions on several issues relevant for jobs, growth and competitiveness, such as on progress made in delivering the Single Market strategy, the Digital Single Market strategy, the Capital Markets Union Action Plan and the Energy Union, on priorities for the 2018 European Semester and endorsement of the Recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area, and on social issues, notably implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the upcoming Commission proposal on a European Labour Authority
- trade: the European Council will address the state of play in trade issues
- taxation: under the Leaders' Agenda, EU leaders will hold a debate on taxation, in particular in the digital economy
- external relations: the European Council will be invited to adopt conclusions on Western Balkans, ahead of the May summit in Sofia; as a follow up to discussions at their informal meeting on 23 February, leaders will also discuss recent developments in relations with Turkey

The Bulgarian Prime Minister, who represents the state currently holding the rotating presidency, will brief other leaders on the implementation of earlier European Council conclusions, including ongoing work on the reform of the Common European Asylum System.

An [annotated draft agenda](#) was discussed by the Council on 27 February 2018.

European Semester

The Council will examine a presidency synthesis report (7210/18, still to be published) on the contributions of four Council configurations involved in the current European Semester exercise.²

The report notes that, according to the Commission's latest winter forecast, growth rates for the euro area and the EU beat expectations last year as the transition from economic recovery to expansion continues. It emphasises that decisive and coordinated policy action as well as swift reform implementation remain essential to strengthening the ongoing expansion, to contributing to job creation, and to achieving long-term sustainable and inclusive growth.

The European Semester involves simultaneous monitoring of the member states' fiscal, economic and employment policies during a six-month period every year. In the light of the guidance provided by the European Council, the member states will prepare their national reform programmes (economic and employment policies) and stability or convergence programmes (fiscal policies) for this year.

The Council is also expected to agree to forward a [draft recommendation](#) on the economic policy of the euro area to the European Council.

² Economic and Financial Affairs Council, Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council, Competitiveness Council and Environment Council

Any other business

Rule of law in Poland

The Commission is expected to provide an update on its dialogue with the Polish authorities on the rule of law in Poland.

On 20 December the Commission published its [reasoned proposal under Article 7\(1\)TEU](#) on the rule of law in Poland. In parallel it also highlighted its determination to pursue the dialogue with Poland and issued recommendations for action by 20 March. Should Poland take remedial action within this deadline, the Commission indicated that it would reconsider its reasoned proposal.
