



GENERAL AFFAIRS Council

Tuesday, 19 February 2019 in Brussels

Chair: George Ciamba, Romanian Minister Delegate for European Affairs

Ministers will hold, in public session, a policy debate on the **multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027**.

The Council will discuss the draft annotated agenda of the meeting of the European Council which will take place on 21 and 22 March 2019.

Over lunch and in formal session, ministers will have a first exchange of views on the basis of the reflection paper "**Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030**" published by the European Commission on 30 January 2019. The reflection paper focuses on how the EU can best contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

The Council will also review the state of play of the procedures under Article 7(1) TEU on the **rule of law in Poland** and on **respect for the EU values in Hungary**.

A presidency press conference will be held at the end of the meeting (+/- 16.30).

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

Next multiannual financial framework

In public session, the Romanian presidency will give a state of play on the multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2021-2027. It will also present the [provisional working programme](#) until 1 April.

Ministers will be invited to present their views on the proposed working programme.

The shared objective is to provide the June European Council with a streamlined draft Negotiating Box, with a view to achieving an agreement in the European Council in autumn 2019.

The draft Negotiating Box brings together those elements which are most likely to require political guidance from the EU leaders with a view to the Council reaching its position. It is a tool for structuring and facilitating the negotiations on the MFF. Early versions are prepared under the responsibility of the presidency. The draft Negotiating Box is constantly discussed and updated when needed, as negotiations move forward.

At the same time intensive work will also continue on the various sectoral proposals MFF-related.

Preparation of the meeting of the European Council on 21 and 22 March

The Council will examine an [annotated draft agenda](#) for the European Council meeting to be held on 21-22 March. The annotated draft agenda will serve as the basis for draft conclusions, to be prepared in the run-up to the meeting.

At their meeting in March, EU leaders will discuss the future development of the Single Market, the Capital Markets Union, industrial policy and European digital policy in preparation for the next Strategic Agenda. They will also address priorities for the 2019 European Semester and will be invited to endorse the Recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area.

The European Council will also discuss the climate. Leaders will provide guidance on the overall direction and political priorities, to enable the European Union to submit a long term strategy by 2020 in line with the Paris Agreement.

Leaders will prepare the EU-China summit to be held on 9 April 2019, and may discuss other foreign policy topics in the light of events.

Finally, the European Council will review progress in tackling disinformation and the need to protect the democratic integrity of the European and national elections across the EU.

Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030

Ministers will exchange views on the steps to be taken in order to ensure a sustainable Europe by 2030.

The discussion follows the publication of a Commission reflection paper ["Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030"](#) on 30 January.

The reflection paper focuses on the key policy foundations for the transition towards a sustainable Europe, based on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These include moving from linear to circular economy, correcting the imbalances in our food system, future-proofing our energy, buildings and mobility, and making sure that this transition is fair, leaving no one and no place behind. The paper also concentrates on the horizontal enablers, which need to underpin the sustainability transition, including education, science, technology, research, innovation and digitisation; finance, pricing, taxation and competition; responsible business conduct, corporate social responsibility and new business models; open and rules-based trade; governance and policy coherence at all levels. Finally, it emphasises the importance of blazing the trail for the sustainability transition globally as our policies will only have a limited impact on the planet if others pursue opposing policies.

Three illustrative scenarios are put forward to stimulate the discussion on how to follow up on SDGs within the EU:

- An overarching EU SDGs strategy to guide all actions by the EU and member states;
- Continued mainstreaming of the SDGs in all relevant EU policies by the Commission, but not enforcing member states' action;
- Putting enhanced focus on external action while consolidating current sustainability ambition at EU level

Ministers will be invited to present their views on the Commission's reflection paper and next steps in the Council.

The discussion will serve as input into the preparation of Council conclusions, which would contain the Council's response to the Commission's reflection paper and feed into the preparation of the sessions of the High-Level Policy Forum on Sustainable Development due to take place in July and September 2019.

Rule of law in Poland

The Commission will provide member states with an update on the latest developments regarding the rule of law situation in Poland, after which member states will have an opportunity to discuss the state of play.

The discussion follows the hearing of Poland at the meetings of the General Affairs Council held on 26 June, 18 September and 11 December.

The Article 7(1) TEU procedure was triggered for Poland on 20 December 2017 when the Commission published its reasoned proposal on the rule of law in Poland. The reasoned proposal contains a detailed explanatory memorandum and a proposal for a Council decision which (i) determines that there is a clear risk of a serious breach by Poland of the rule of law and (ii) sets out recommendations for Poland.

On 19 October 2018, the Court of Justice of the European Union granted the Commission's request for interim measures and - provisionally - ordered that Poland must immediately suspend the application of the provisions legislation relating to the lowering of the retirement age for Supreme Court judges. This was confirmed by the Court's definitive ruling on interim measures of 17 December 2018. Following these interim measures, Poland has implemented amendments to its legislation which are currently being assessed by the European Commission.

Respect for EU values in Hungary

Ministers will exchange views on the state of play of the Article 7(1) TEU procedure concerning Hungary and will discuss the next steps within the Council.

The procedure was triggered on 12 September 2018 when the European Parliament's plenary adopted a resolution with a [reasoned proposal](#) asking the Council to determine whether there was a clear risk of a serious breach by Hungary of the values referred to in Article 2 TEU. The reasoned proposal was submitted to the Council on 18 September.