



GENERAL AFFAIRS Council

Thursday 18 July in Brussels

Chair: Tytti Tuppurainen, Finnish minister for European affairs.

The Council will hear a presentation on the **priorities of the Finnish presidency** for the next six months.

The presidency will inform ministers about its plans for work on the **multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027**.

Ministers will also exchange views on **the implementation of the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024**.

All these three items will be taken in public session.

On rule of law, the Commission is expected to present its new **communication on further strengthening the rule of law in the EU**, if adopted by the college in time for the Council meeting (tbc).

The Council will also take stock of the state of play on the **rule of law in Poland** following the judgment of the European Court of Justice on Poland's Supreme Court law.

A presidency press conference will be held at the end of the meeting (+/- 15.00).

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[*Press conferences and public events by video streaming*](#)

[*Video coverage in broadcast quality \(MPEG4\) and photo gallery*](#)

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

Priorities of the Finnish presidency

The Council will hear a presentation on the **priorities of the Finnish presidency** for the next six months. In the second half of 2019, ministers will focus on the following topics:

- multiannual financial framework
- rule of law
- enlargement
- hybrid threats

Finland will be the first presidency to integrate the new priorities of the strategic agenda for 2019–2024 into the Council's work. It will ensure a smooth transition to the next legislative cycle and build up close and constructive relations with the new institutional actors.

[General Affairs Council configuration](#)

[Finnish presidency priorities and programme \(Presidency website\)](#)

Multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027

The presidency will inform ministers about its work plan on the multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027.

In its June 2019 conclusions, the European Council called on the Finnish Presidency to pursue work on the MFF and develop the Negotiating Box. On that basis, EU leaders will hold an exchange of views in October, aiming for an agreement before the end of the year.

The Negotiating Box is a tool used for structuring and facilitating the negotiation process on the MFF. It brings together those elements which are most likely to require political guidance from the leaders with a view to the Council reaching its position. Its aim is to facilitate preparations for the future draft European Council conclusions on the MFF to be tabled by the President of the European Council.

In July and September, the Presidency will continue thematic discussions at technical level. Discussions have already taken place in a number of areas including climate, migration, cohesion policy, the common agricultural policy and the funding instruments in the field of external action.

In order to prepare for the political exchanges, the Presidency is sending a questionnaire to delegations over the summer break. In addition, bilateral meetings at ministerial level will be organised ahead of the September GAC.

In parallel, the Presidency will seek to make the greatest possible progress in negotiations on the MFF-related sectoral proposals, following the work carried out by previous presidencies.

The Presidency will continue the established practice of meeting with European Parliament representatives before and after each GAC.

[Multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027: negotiations \(background information\)](#)

Implementation of the strategic agenda 2019-2024

Ministers will exchange views on the implementation of the strategic agenda 2019-2024.

At their meeting on 20-21 June 2019, EU leaders agreed on an agenda intended to guide the work of the institutions over the next five years.

The strategic agenda focuses on four main priorities:

- protecting citizens and freedoms
- developing a strong and vibrant economic base
- building a climate-neutral, green, fair and social Europe
- promoting European interests and values on the global stage

It also sets out how to achieve those objectives.

The Finnish Presidency will start integrating the priorities of the strategic agenda into the Council's work and ensuring that they are discussed in the relevant Council configurations and informal meetings. In a paper to be presented to the Council the Finnish Presidency provides a tentative indication as to when and in which configuration the main issues will be examined.

The European Council is expected to discuss the follow up to the strategic agenda at its meeting in October 2019.

[Implementation of the strategic agenda](#)

[A new strategic agenda 2019-2024](#)

Rule of law

Rule of law in Poland

The Council will take stock of the state of play on the rule of law in Poland following the judgment of the European Court of Justice on Poland's Supreme Court law.

In its judgment of 24 June 2019, the European Court of Justice determined that the Polish legislation lowering the retirement age of judges of the Supreme Court is contrary to EU law, as it breaches the principles of irremovability of judges and judicial independence.

This point on the agenda also follows the hearing of Poland at the meetings of the General Affairs Council held on 26 June, 18 September and 11 December 2018 as part of the Article 7(1) TEU procedure.

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 of the rule of law by Poland and (ii) sets out recommendations with a three-month deadline for Poland to bring its judicial reform into line with rule of law standards by:

- restoring the independence of the Constitutional Tribunal,
- publishing and implementing specific judgments of the Constitutional Tribunal,

- amending the four recently adopted laws (on the National Council of the Judiciary, Supreme Court, National School of the Judiciary, and ordinary courts) in order to restore the independence of the judiciary,
- ensuring that any justice reform is prepared in close cooperation with the judiciary and all interested parties, including the Venice Commission, and
- refraining from further undermining the judiciary.

[Judgment of the European Court of Justice \(press release\)](#)

[European Commission reasoned proposal on the rule of law in Poland](#)

Strengthening rule of law in the EU

The Commission is expected to present its new **communication on further strengthening the rule of law in the EU**, if it is adopted by the college in time for the Council meeting (tbc).

In April 2019, the Commission presented a first communication on further strengthening of the rule of law in the EU. The aim of that communication was to launch a process of reflection on the rule of law in the EU and to set out possible avenues for future action.

[Communication on further strengthening the rule of law in the EU \(European Commission, April 2019\)](#)

- Standard modalities for hearings referred to in Article 7(1) TEU

The Council is expected to approve as a point without discussion the standard modalities for hearings under Article 7(1) TEU procedures. Following the experience gained from ongoing Article 7(1) TEU procedures, the aim of this text is to add predictability and a more solid structure to the hearings.
