



Council of the European Union

PRESS
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BACKGROUND¹
Brussels, 14 November 2019

GENERAL AFFAIRS Council

Tuesday 19 November 2019 in Brussels

Chair: Tytti Tuppurainen, Finnish minister for European affairs

The meeting will **start at 10.00**.

The presidency will inform ministers about progress in the work on **the multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027** and present the plan for the coming weeks. This item will be taken in public session.

Ministers will start preparations for the **European Council meeting on 12-13 December** by discussing an annotated draft agenda.

There will be two points under the agenda item on **enhancing respect for the rule of law in the EU**. Ministers will first hold an exchange of views with Michael O'Flaherty, Director of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights. This item will be taken in public session. The ministers will then focus on conclusions on the evaluation of the Council's annual rule of law dialogue.

The Council will also discuss the state of play on **enlargement and the stabilisation and association process** following the October European Council.

A presidency press conference will be held at the end of the meeting.

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

Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027

The Council will take stock of the work on the multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2021-2027.

The presidency is expected to recall the work done so far, refer to the restart of negotiations with the European Parliament on sectoral files, and explain its plans for the coming weeks.

In its October 2019 conclusions, the European Council called on the presidency to submit a Negotiating Box with figures ahead of the European Council meeting in December. Finland's presidency is working intensively towards this end.

The Negotiating Box forms the basis for negotiations on the MFF. It includes all elements which are to be given political guidance and priority setting from the EU leaders at the European Council level.

Following the December European Council, the President of the European Council will take forward the work with a view to preparing future draft European Council conclusions on the MFF.

December European Council

Ministers will examine an [annotated draft agenda](#) for the European Council meeting to be held on 12-13 December. The annotated draft agenda will serve as the basis for draft conclusions, to be prepared in the run-up to the meeting.

In line with its June conclusions, the European Council is expected to return in December to the issue of climate change. Leaders will focus in particular on the target of achieving climate neutrality by 2050. The aim is to finalise the guidance for the adoption and submission of the EU's long-term strategy to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in early 2020.

Leaders are also expected to hold a substantial discussion on the next MFF following the submission by the presidency of a Negotiating Box with figures.

In the light of events, the European Council may address specific foreign policy issues.

Enhancing respect for the Rule of Law in the Union

a) Exchange of views with the Director of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency

In public session, the Council will hold an exchange of views with Michael O'Flaherty, Director of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights.

Mr O'Flaherty is expected to elaborate on the links between democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights.

The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights was established in 2007 to provide EU and national decision-makers with independent, evidence-based advice in order to help promote and protect fundamental rights more effectively across the EU.

To do this, the agency performs the following main tasks:

- collecting and analysing information and data;
- providing assistance and expertise;
- communicating and raising awareness.

b) Conclusions on the evaluation of the Rule of Law dialogue

The Council will review its annual rule of law dialogue and discuss a set of conclusions on the issue.

The rule of law dialogue was established in [December 2014](#) to promote and safeguard the rule of law within the framework of the treaties. It was agreed at the time that the dialogue would be based on a set of principles, including objectivity, non-discrimination, equal treatment of all member states, and a non-partisan and evidence-based approach. The dialogue would take place once a year in the Council, in its General Affairs configuration.

Since then, four dialogues have taken place, dedicated to specific themes (held in November 2015, May 2016, October 2017 and November 2018). The dialogue was [reviewed in 2016](#). At the time of this evaluation, member states discussed how to improve the process, including the possibility of taking a more structured approach. It was agreed that a new evaluation should be made by the end of 2019.

The aim of the discussion in the Council is to carry out this evaluation in the light of the developments since 2016.

In order to prepare for the 2019 review, Finland's presidency organised a [policy debate](#) at the General Affairs Council meeting in September on how the Council could contribute to strengthening the rule of law in the EU. The presidency also sent a questionnaire to the member states.

The draft conclusions submitted to the Council have been prepared on the basis of the input received from the member states as part of this preparatory process.

The discussions on the review of the Council's rule of law dialogue have built on the [Commission communication](#) of 17 July on strengthening the rule of law. In this communication, the Commission proposes, among other things, to set up a Rule of Law Review Cycle, including an annual rule of law report covering all EU member states. The Commission also calls for a dedicated follow-up on the annual report with the Parliament and the Council.

The General Affairs Council will also hear an update from Belgium and Germany on their initiative to set up a peer review mechanism for the rule of law. The mechanism would enable the monitoring of how the rule of law is implemented, secured and strengthened in the member states. Designed as a positive and inclusive mechanism, it would serve to enhance mutual understanding and unity between member states.

See also the presidency's [background document on strengthening the rule of law](#)

Enlargement and the stabilisation and association process

Following the October European Council, the Council will discuss the state of play on enlargement and the stabilisation and association process.

At their meeting on 17-18 October, EU leaders discussed the opening of accession negotiations with Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia. They decided to revert to the issue of enlargement before the EU-Western Balkans summit in Zagreb in May 2020.

Ministers are expected to discuss the way forward towards this new discussion among the leaders. No Council conclusions on this topic are to be adopted by the Council at this stage.