



Council of the European Union

PRESS
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BACKGROUND¹

Brussels, 23 September 2024

General Affairs Council Brussels, 24 September 2024

Chair: János BÓKA, Minister for European Union Affairs of Hungary

The meeting will begin at 9.30.

In public session, the Hungarian presidency will present the priorities for its term of office.

Ministers will start preparations for the European Council meeting on 17-18 October 2024 by discussing an annotated draft agenda.

As part of the Council's annual rule of law dialogue, ministers will hold a horizontal discussion.

Ministers will also exchange views on general trends of the rule of law situation in selected candidate countries.

A press conference will take place after the meeting (+/- 15:00).

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[General Affairs Council, 24 September 2024 - meeting page](#)

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

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

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

Presidency priorities

In public session, the Hungarian presidency will present the priorities for its term of office. Ministers will have an opportunity to present their comments.

The Hungarian presidency has established the following overall priorities for its semester:

- new European Competitiveness Deal
- the reinforcement of European defence policy
- a consistent and merit-based enlargement policy
- stemming illegal migration
- shaping the future of cohesion policy
- a farmer-centered EU agricultural policy
- addressing demographic challenges

As regards the General Affairs Council configuration, the Presidency will take forward work on the implementation of the Strategic Agenda, rule of law, transparency and integrity, democratic resilience, the future of Europe, enlargement, fighting antisemitism and fostering Jewish life, EU-UK relations, EU-Switzerland relations, and Association Agreements with Andorra and San Marino.

[Programme and priorities of the Hungarian presidency](#)

Annual rule of law dialogue

As part of the Council's annual rule of law dialogue, ministers will hold a horizontal discussion on general developments related to the rule of law in the EU.

The discussion will make use of the Commission's 2024 rule of law report, published on 24 July 2024. The report examines developments across all member states in four key areas for the rule of law: the justice system, the anti-corruption framework, media pluralism and freedom, and other institutional issues related to checks and balances. It also includes recommendations for member states, which either build on last year's recommendations, where they were not fully implemented, or address new challenges.

According to the Commission's assessment, two thirds (68%) of the recommendations issued in 2023 have been fully or partially addressed. However, in some member states systematic concerns remain and the situation has further deteriorated.

The Council's annual rule of law dialogue was initiated by the Council conclusions of 16 December 2014. Its aim is to allow for an open exchange of comments and best practices based on the Commission's annual rule of law report, while ensuring objectivity, non-discrimination, and equal treatment of all member states. It is organised in two different types of political discussions: a horizontal discussion covering general rule of law developments in the EU, and country-specific discussions addressing key developments in each member state.

The Council is expected to hold a country-specific discussion at the General Affairs Council meeting in November, focusing on developments in Malta, the Netherlands, Austria and Poland.

[2024 Rule of law report \(European Commission\)](#)

[Rule of Law Report 2024: with the 5th edition, the EU is better equipped to face rule of law challenges \(European Commission press release, 24 July 2024\)](#)

[Evaluation of the Council's rule of law dialogue – Presidency conclusions \(press release, 12 December 2023\)](#)

[Rule of law \(background information\)](#)

Rule of law in candidate countries

Ministers will also exchange views on the general trend of the rule of law situation in selected candidate countries, namely Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania and Serbia. Ministers from the countries concerned have been invited to take part in the discussion.

The EU attaches great importance to the requirement for aspiring member states to uphold the rule of law as a condition for EU membership, as reaffirmed by the Council conclusions of 12 December 2023 on enlargement and by the European Council conclusions of 14 and 15 December 2023.

This year, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania, and Serbia, as the most advanced candidate countries in the enlargement process, were included for the first time in the Commission's rule of law report. The report covers these countries in both its horizontal chapter and individual country-specific chapters. However, it does not provide recommendations for these countries, as such recommendations are issued exclusively within the framework of the enlargement process.

The Council's discussion takes this development into account, offering the candidate countries an opportunity to exchange on rule of law issues with all member states in an inclusive setting. In doing so, it supports their reform efforts and helps them prepare for EU membership, while also fostering a better understanding among member states of the rule of law situation in the candidate countries.

The exchange at the Council meeting will focus solely on general rule of law trends in the selected candidate countries, in line with the horizontal chapter of the 2024 Commission report. It will not interfere with the annual rule of law dialogue among member states, the enlargement process, or other existing formats. No formal conclusions will be issued following the debate.

Discussions on the rule of law in individual candidate countries will continue to take place in the framework of the enlargement process, including as part of the "fundamentals" cluster of negotiating chapters once the accession negotiations have started.

[2024 Rule of law report \(European Commission\)](#)

[Rule of Law Report 2024: with the 5th edition, the EU is better equipped to face rule of law challenges \(European Commission press release, 24 July 2024\)](#)

[Rule of law \(background information\)](#)

October European Council

The Council will start preparations for the European Council meeting on 17-18 October 2024 by discussing an annotated draft agenda.

At their meeting in October, EU leaders will address Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine in all its dimensions and the EU's comprehensive support to Ukraine and its people.

The European Council will also address the situation in the Middle East.

Leaders will take stock of the report by Mario Draghi on 'The future of European competitiveness' and have a first exchange on this report.

Additionally, leaders may address migration, and security and defence.

The European Council will be invited to endorse the integrated Country-Specific Recommendations and conclude the 2024 European Semester.

Under 'Other items', leaders will take stock of preparations for the meetings of COP29 on climate change in Baku, Azerbaijan, and of COP16 on biological diversity in Cali, Colombia.

In the light of events, the European Council may also address specific foreign policy issues, including developments in Georgia and Moldova.

[Annotated draft agenda](#)