

Competitiveness Council Brussels, 7 and 8 December 2023

Internal market and industry (Thursday 7 December)

The meeting of ministers responsible for internal market and industry will start at 09:30.

During the meeting, ministers are expected to adopt a general approach on the Net Zero Industry Act, hold a discussion on the Forced Labour Regulation based on a document prepared by the Presidency, and have an exchange of views on SME policy. There will be six AOBs.

The first day of the Council will conclude with a press conference led by the Spanish Industry and Tourism Minister, Jordi Hereu, and Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton.

Chair: Jordi Hereu, Spanish Minister for Industry and Tourism

Press conference: Thursday 7 December at +/- 15:30 (JUSTUS LIPSIUS press room)

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Research (Friday 8 December - Morning)

The Council will resume on Friday at 09:30

During the morning session, ministers responsible for research are expected to approve conclusions on the impact of research and innovation in policy making. They will also adopt a Council recommendation on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talent in Europe. Ministers will then have a policy debate entitled 'Research valorisation as a tool for economic and industrial recovery and resilience'. Over lunch, ministers will discuss the topic "Fostering policies for youth and gender equality in research and innovation" based on a reflexion document prepared by the Spanish presidency. There will be six AOBs.

The research half day of the Council will conclude with a press conference led by Diana Morant, Spanish Minister for Science and Universities, and Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth Iliana Ivanova.

Chair: Diana Morant, Spanish Minister for Science and Universities

Press conference: Friday 8 December at +/- 14:30 (JUSTUS LIPSIUS press room tbc.)

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¹ This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the Press Office.

Space (Friday 8 December - Afternoon)

The last session of the Competitiveness Council will start at around 15:00 and ministers responsible for space are expected to approve Council conclusions on space traffic management. This will be followed by an exchange of views on the future of EU policy on space in a changing world. There will be two AOBs.

The Council will conclude with a press conference led by Spanish Minister Morant and Commissioner Breton.

Chair: Diana Morant, Spanish Minister for Science and Universities

Press conference: Friday 8 December at +/- 17:15 (JUSTUS LIPSIUS press room)

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[Competitiveness Council \(Internal market and industry\) – meeting page](#)

[Competitiveness Council \(Research and Space\) – meeting page](#)

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

[Competitiveness Council \(Internal market and industry\) - Video coverage in broadcast quality \(MPEG4\) and photo gallery](#)

[Competitiveness Council \(Research and Space\) - Video coverage in broadcast quality \(MPEG4\) and photo gallery](#)

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Internal market and industry

Net Zero Industry Act – General Approach

Ministers are expected to reach a general approach on the Net Zero Industry Act. This session will be public.

Ministers are expected to agree a negotiating position (general agreement) on the regulation to strengthen Europe's net-zero technology products manufacturing sector, better known as the Net Zero Industry Act. The general agreement will enable the Council to start negotiations with the European Parliament. The latter adopted its own negotiating position on 21 November 2023.

The Net Zero Industry Act sets out the indicative benchmark of reaching 40% of production to cover the EU's needs in strategic technology products, such as photovoltaic panels, wind turbines, batteries and heat pumps. The proposal also sets out a specific target for CO₂ carbon capture and storage, with an annual injection capacity of at least 50 million tonnes of CO₂ to be achieved by 2030.

This proposal, which was presented by the Commission on 16 March 2023, is a crucial piece of legislation to strengthen the competitiveness of the European industries, help reach common environmental targets and enhance the open strategic autonomy of Europe. This is one of the main priorities of the Spanish presidency of the Council.

The act proposes to facilitate the conditions for investment based on a list of key technologies by simplifying permit granting procedures and prioritizing strategic projects. It also proposes to facilitate market access for strategic technology products, enhance the skills of the European work force in these promising sectors (notably through the launch of net-zero industry academies) and create a platform to coordinate EU action in this area. To foster innovation, the Net Zero Industry Act proposes the creation of specific regulatory frameworks for the development, testing and validation of innovative technologies (known as regulatory sandboxes).

In their conclusions of 26 and 27 October 2023, the heads of state and government called on the Council and the European Parliament to reach a prompt agreement on the Net Zero Industry Act.

[Net Zero Industry Act – draft Council general approach](#)

[European Commission proposal for a regulation to strengthen the net-zero technologies manufacturing sector in Europe \(Net Zero Industry Act\)](#)

[EU industrial policy \(background information\)](#)

Forced labour – Policy debate

Ministers will then continue with a policy debate on the proposal for a Regulation on prohibiting products made with forced labour on the Union market. This session will be public.

The proposal was presented by the Commission on 14 September 2022, and aims at prohibiting products made with forced labour on the internal market as well as their export from the EU. The European Parliament adopted its negotiating mandate at the plenary session of 8 November 2023.

All member states support the overall objective of the proposed Regulation to combat forced labour. They highlighted the need to streamline the EU's efforts in this area by aligning the proposed regulation with both international standards and with the EU legislation, in particular with the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive.

Ministers will exchange views on the basis of a policy debate note prepared by the Spanish Presidency. They will focus in the debate mainly on the level of involvement of the Commission in different phases of investigating and proving the use of forced labour, such as gathering information submissions, pre-investigation, investigation, decision making, implementation and sanctions.

[European Commission Regulation on prohibiting products made with forced labour on the Union market](#)

Lunch debate - SME policy – Exchange of views

Over lunch, ministers will discuss SME policy and hold an exchange of views. On 12 September 2023 the Commission presented a package of measures to relieve small and medium enterprises. Following this communication, Ministers will discuss measures to support SMEs. The discussion will be based on a document prepared by the presidency.

[European Commission's communication 'SME relief package'](#)

Any other business

a) Current legislative proposals

The Presidency will inform member states about the state of play of the different legislative initiatives that are currently under discussion.

b) Communication on Enhancing the European Administrative space

The European Commission will inform member states about the Communication on Enhancing the European Administrative space (ComPact) that the College adopted on 23 October 2023. In this document, the Commission proposes a set of actions to support member states' administrations in becoming more resilient, innovative and skilled, and to strengthen administrative cooperation.

[Enhancing the European administrative space \(ComPact\)](#)

c) Implementation of the single digital gateway

The European Commission will inform member states about the state of implementation of the single digital gateway, which is a digital portal that facilitates online access to information, administrative procedures, and assistance services that EU citizens and businesses may need in another EU country. Access to the gateway is via a search function in the Your Europe portal, which has been providing EU and national information on the rights of citizens and businesses, as well as access to assistance services, since 2006.

d) Preparedness for the digital services act enforcement

The European Commission will inform member states about the situation of the enforcement of the digital services act, which will be applicable on 17 February 2024. However, the DSA applies to providers of online platforms and of online search engines whose services have been designated as Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) and Very Large Online Search Engines (VLOSEs) as from four months following notification of the decision designating those services as such.

e) Reducing administrative burdens for companies in unprecedented times

The Danish, French, and German delegations will inform ministers about how to reduce administrative burdens for companies. This issue of reducing the administrative burden has been raised recently on several occasions (i.e. the March and June European Councils).

In its 2024 Work Programme, the Commission announced 41 proposals concerning reporting obligations with the aim of reducing the administrative burden by 25%. The European Council of October called for a reduction of the administrative burden.

[Reducing administrative burdens for companies in unprecedented times - Information from the Danish Delegation](#)

[Joint initiative on reducing bureaucracy - Information by the French and German delegations](#)

f) Entry into operation of the Unified Patent Court

The Austrian, Belgian, Bulgarian, Danish, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Luxembourg, Maltese, Portuguese, Slovenian and Swedish delegations will inform ministries about the entry into operation of the Unified Patent Court. The Unified Patent Court (UPC) is a Court with judges from all participating Member States which decides on the

infringement and validity of both Unitary Patents and classic European Patents. The Agreement on a Unified Patent Court (UPCA) entered into force on 1 June 2023.

g) 2023 Report on the SME Envoy Network

The European Commission will inform member states about the 2023 report of the SME Envoy Network. The network of SME envoys was set up in 2011 as part of the review of the small business act. It entails the appointment of one SME envoy per member state to complement the role of the EU SME envoy who chairs the network.

h) Incoming presidency programme

The Council will be informed by the Belgian delegation of the work programme of the incoming Belgian presidency in the field of internal market and industry.

Research

The impact of research and innovation in policy making – Council conclusions

Ministers are expected to approve Council conclusions on the impact of research and innovation in policy making, a priority file for the Spanish presidency. This session will be public.

The conclusions reflect on how appropriate design, research and innovation can improve policymaking through the inclusion of scientific evidence and knowledge. The approval of these conclusions is a priority for the Spanish presidency in the field of research and innovation. The Council conclusions highlight three key dimensions: the importance of research and innovation for the policymaking process in the Union; the importance of the regional research and innovation ecosystems; and the policy impact of the Recovery and Resilience Facility on the Union's research and innovation policy and on the European Research Area.

[Draft Council conclusions on the impact of research and innovation in policy making](#)

European framework to attract and retain research innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe – Council recommendation

Ministers are invited to reach a political agreement on a Council recommendation for a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talent in Europe. This session will be public.

In 2005 the Council adopted a recommendation on the European Charter for Researchers and on a Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, which provided support for researchers and research careers in the Union over several years. For many years, these two documents were the reference points for researchers and employers or funders of researchers.

However, researchers (especially early-career researchers) often find themselves in a precarious position regarding employment and working conditions, which often depend on sponsoring funding bodies. There has been limited progress in supporting the professional transition of researchers to employment sectors outside academia, including the creation of start-ups and the development of innovation. Furthermore, most PhD candidates have only academic training which leaves them ill-equipped for alternative careers in other sectors. Geographical origin and gender also have an impact on their professional progress and employability.

This recommendation aims at supporting researchers and research careers in the EU, as well as for developing a more attractive, open and sustainable European labour market for researchers that is also appealing to foreign talent. The recommendation also includes the new 'European Charter for Researchers', which replaces the currently applicable text.

[Proposal for a Council recommendation on a European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talents in Europe](#)

Research valorisation as a tool for economic and industrial recovery and resilience - Policy debate

Ministers will also have a policy debate entitled 'Research valorisation as a tool for economic and industrial recovery and resilience'. This session will be public.

Knowledge valorisation is the process of creating social and economic value from knowledge by linking different areas and sectors and transforming data and research results into products and solutions that benefit society (economic prosperity, environmental benefits, societal progress and better policymaking).

On August 2022, the Commission proposed a Council Recommendation to converge policy principles and measures for improving knowledge valorisation in the EU, broadening the scope to the whole R&I ecosystem and intellectual asset management. The Council adopted the recommendation on the guiding principles for knowledge valorisation on 2 December 2022 under the Czech Presidency.

Ministers will be invited to share best practices on how research results can be used to revitalise the Union's economy and industry responding to three themes presented by the presidency in a note: Challenges of the valorisation of research results to revitalise the EU industry and economy; how to ensure that research and innovation valorisation responds to EU and national priorities in line with citizen's needs; national measures to promote research valorisation from the demand side and skills and learning for the understanding of knowledge valorisation from industry perspective.

[Council recommendation on the guiding principles for knowledge valorisation](#)

[Presidency note on 'Research valorisation as a tool for economic and industrial recovery and resilience'](#)

Any other business

a) Partnership for research and innovation in the Mediterranean area

The Spanish delegation will inform ministers about the continuation of the partnership for research and innovation in the Mediterranean area (PRIMA). PRIMA's main aim is to pool the knowledge and financial resources of the EU and the participating states to build R&I capacities and develop innovative solutions for water provision and food systems in the Mediterranean area. PRIMA has 20 participating states: 12 EU member states, 3 associated countries to Horizon 2020 and 5 third countries. PRIMA's active term will end in 2024. The envisaged continuation of PRIMA will ensure the continuity of the partnership and will give the participating states the time they need to design calls for the new period between 2025 and 2027.

b) Events and activities during the Spanish presidency

The Spanish delegation will inform ministers about the research-related events organised by Spanish Presidency during its semester, including the informal Ministerial Meeting in Santander, the Tenerife Declaration on "Global Dimension and Sustainability of Research Infrastructures" and the senior officials' meetings and meetings with neighbouring and Latin American countries.

c) ERA Monitoring 2023: 18-month review of the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda ('EU level Report')

The European Commission will inform member states about the first edition of the European Research Area (ERA) EU-level monitoring report. The Commission has prepared this report in close cooperation with the European Research Area Forum, following the request in the Recommendation on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe adopted by the Council in 2021. The EU-level report is the first 18-month review of the progress toward the priority areas for joint action in the ERA laid down in the "Pact for R&I".

d) Progress with research assessment reforms and actions

The European Commission will inform member states about the progress made with research assessment and actions. This information point follows the request in the June 2022 Council conclusions on "Research assessment and implementation of Open Science" for the Commission to inform the Council about progress made by the end of 2023. The Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment was co-designed by research organisations with the support of the Commission and has now been signed by close to 650 research organisations from 48 countries.

e) AOB: Advanced materials for industrial leadership

The European Commission will inform member states about the new initiative on advanced materials for industrial leadership that has been included in the Work Programme for 2024. Advanced materials have specific properties fit for specific applications and have numerous benefits, including increased efficiency, cost savings, and reduced environmental impact.

f) Incoming presidency programme

The Council will be informed by the Belgian delegation of the work programme of the incoming Belgian presidency in the field of research.

Lunch debate - Fostering policies for youth and gender equality in Research and Innovation

Over an informal lunch, ministers will discuss how to best foster policies for youth and gender equality in Research and Innovation.

The Council conclusions on the future governance of the European Research Area, adopted in 2021, reiterated the importance of mainstreaming gender equality in R&I policies. Likewise, the 2021 Council conclusions on "Deepening the European Research Area: Providing researchers with attractive and sustainable careers and working conditions and making brain circulation a reality" called for the improvement of skills and training for early-stage careers and for measures to provide early-career researchers with sustainable, predictable and attractive careers to be promoted.

The debate will be based on a presidency note and will focus on four issues: challenges in the implementation of policies that support women in science and research; measures to circumvent gender bias in evaluating scientific performance or appointing leadership and decision-making positions; obstacles for young talent starting a career in science and innovation and how to give them a more sustainable and predictable career path; and possible support measures to raise the attractiveness of scientific careers for early-career researchers.

Space

Space traffic management – Council conclusions

Ministers are expected to approve the Council conclusions on ‘Space traffic management: state of play’. This session will be public.

The number of satellites and the amount of debris in space is steadily increasing and the resulting congestion in space puts at risk the security and resilience of EU and member states’ space policies and assets.

The conclusions stress the urgency of developing an EU space traffic management approach and acknowledge the importance of proposing EU legislation related to space that covers safety, security and sustainability aspects. The presidency has put forward these draft Council conclusions in order to highlight the significant contribution of space traffic management to the main political priorities of the EU, including the EU Green Deal and the EU Digital Transformation, as well as to Europe’s autonomous, secure and cost-efficient access to space.

[Draft Council conclusions on “Space traffic management: state of play”](#)

Future of EU policy on space in a changing world - Exchange of views.

Ministers will hold an exchange of views on the future of EU policy on space in a changing world on the basis of a document prepared by the presidency containing background information and two questions to steer the debate. This session will not be public.

The discussion will address a series of risks that have emerged in recent years and that have shown the need to protect EU space assets and to preserve space-based services which are essential for EU’s economy, security and strategic autonomy. These risks were highlighted by the EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence (SSSD) presented last March by the Commission and the EEAS. The presidency paper puts the accent on three issues:

- Sustainability of space
- Security and defence
- EU strategic autonomy

Ministers will debate the SSSD and the impact of security and defence dimensions on systems that are managed by civil organisations. They will also give their opinion on how the EU can ensure autonomous access to space, beyond acting as a customer, in the long term.

[Presidency note on "The future EU policy on space in a changing world"](#)

[Council Conclusions on the EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence](#)

Any other business

a) Events and activities of the Spanish presidency

The Spanish presidency will give a presentation on the events and activities during the six months of its mandate.

b) Incoming presidency programme

The Council will be informed by the Belgian delegation of the work programme of the incoming Belgian presidency in the field of space.