



Council of the European Union

PRESS
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BACKGROUND¹
Brussels, 15 March 2024

General Affairs Council **Brussels, 19 March 2024**

Chair: Hadja Lahbib, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Belgium

The meeting will begin at 9.30.

Ministers will continue preparations for the European Council meeting on 21 and 22 March 2024 by discussing draft conclusions.

They will address the 2024 European Semester.

The Council will also exchange views on the future of Europe.

A press conference will take place at the end of the meeting (+/- 16.15).

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[General Affairs Council, 19 March - meeting page](#)

[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.

March European Council

Ministers will continue preparations for the European Council meeting on 21 and 22 March 2024 by discussing draft conclusions.

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

The European Council will revert to the matter of security and defence, including Europe's need to increase its overall defence readiness and further strengthen its defence technological and industrial base, with a view to agreeing on further steps to make the European defence industry more resilient, innovative and competitive.

EU leaders will address the situation in the Middle East. They will also return to the issue of enlargement.

The European Council will address specific foreign policy issues in the light of events, review the state of play on migration and revert to the current challenges in the agricultural sector.

Leaders will take stock of preparations for the new Strategic Agenda and internal reforms.

The European Council will also address priorities for the 2024 European Semester and will be invited to endorse the recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area.

[Annotated draft agenda](#)

European Semester

The Council will also focus on the European Semester.

Ministers will examine a synthesis report on the Council contributions on the 2024 European Semester. The report, drawn up by the Belgian presidency, summarises Council conclusions concerning the autumn package of the 2024 European Semester, published in November last year. The results of the related discussions in the various relevant Council configurations are also reflected in the document.

The presidency will present an updated roadmap for the 2024 European Semester, which outlines the key steps of the 2024 European Semester cycle.

The Council is also expected to agree to forward a draft recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area to the European Council. The text will be formally adopted by the Council after endorsement by the European Council.

[Synthesis report on Council contributions on the 2024 European Semester](#)

[European Semester 2024 - Updated roadmap](#)

[Draft Council recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area](#)

[How the European Semester works \(background information\)](#)

Future of Europe

Ministers will discuss the future of Europe.

They will be invited to share their views on reforms and improvements to the EU's working methods that should ensure the EU's capacity to act, including in view of EU enlargement. The discussion will focus on internal reforms related to EU policies and the related communication aspects.

Discussions on the future of Europe and more particularly on EU internal reforms in view of enlargement started during the Swedish presidency in spring 2023. During the Spanish presidency,

European affairs ministers discussed the issue at their informal meeting in Murcia on 28-29 September 2023 and over several ministerial lunches in the margins of the General Affairs Council. The discussions focused on the different aspects of the EU's absorption capacity, such as EU policies, EU budget and the EU's capacity to act, and on the organisation of the reflection and reform process to prepare the EU for future enlargements.

EU leaders addressed the EU's internal preparations for enlargement at their informal meeting in Granada on 6 October 2023. In the Granada declaration, they affirmed that enlargement is a geo-strategic investment in peace, security, stability and prosperity, and stated that in parallel with the reform efforts of the aspiring members, the EU needs to lay the necessary internal groundwork and reforms.

At the European Council meeting on 14 and 15 December 2023, EU leaders recalled the Granada declaration and the need for work on accession and on internal reforms to advance in parallel. They also underlined that the European Council will address internal reforms at its upcoming meetings with a view to adopting by summer 2024 conclusions on a roadmap for future work.

The presidency intends to continue the discussions on the future of Europe in the General Affairs Council in the coming months, in support to and preparation for the work of the European Council, covering also other issues, such as governance, EU budget, and the process of further work in the Council.

[European Council conclusions, 14 and 15 December 2023](#)

[Informal meeting of heads of state or government, Granada, 6 October 2023](#)

[Informal ministerial meeting on general affairs, Murcia, 28 September 2023](#)