

Background brief

19 February 2026

General Affairs Council

24 February 2026, Brussels

PRESS

EN

Chair: Marilena Raouna, Deputy Minister for European Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus

Commission representatives: Maroš Šefčovič, European Commissioner for trade and economic security

Michael McGrath, European Commissioner for democracy, justice, the rule of law and consumer protection

Starting time: 10.00

Media opportunities:

- Doorstep Marilena Raouna: 24 February 2026, 09.40
- Press conference General Affairs Council: 24 February 2026, +/- 14.15

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Main agenda topics:

The Council will start preparations for the **March European Council** meeting by discussing an annotated draft agenda.

Over an informal lunch, ministers will hold an exchange of views on the launch of the European Centre for Democratic Resilience, as part of the **European Democracy Shield**.

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[General Affairs Council, 24 February 2026 - meeting page](#)

[Press conferences, doorsteps and other public events in video streaming](#)

[High quality photo and video material](#)

March EUCO preparation

The Council will start preparation for the March European Council meeting by discussing an annotated draft agenda. Leaders are expected to discuss:

- Russia's war of aggression against **Ukraine**
- latest developments in the **Middle East**
- **competitiveness** and the **single market**
- the next Multiannual Financial Framework (**MFF**) 2028-2034
- European **defence** and **security**
- **migration**

[*European Council \(19-20 March 2026\), annotated draft agenda*](#)

[*Informal EU leaders' retreat, 12 February 2026*](#)

European Democracy Shield

Over an informal lunch, ministers will hold an exchange of views on the same day's launch of the European Centre for Democratic Resilience, as part of the **European Democracy Shield**. Together with an EU strategy for civil society, the Democracy Shield forms part of a 'Democracy package' presented by the Commission on 12 November 2025. The actions announced in the initiative should be gradually implemented by 2027.

The aim of the Democracy Shield is to provide a strategic approach to safeguard, strengthen and promote democracy in the long run. The proposed actions are grouped in three areas: reinforcing situational awareness and support response capacity to safeguard the integrity of the information space; strengthening democratic institutions, free and fair elections and free media and boosting societal resilience and citizens engagement. Additionally, the initiative proposes a new **European Centre for Democratic Resilience** and refers to EU funding for 'investing in democracy' as part of the Commission's proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework for 2028-2034.

At the **General Affairs Council** in January 2026, ministers discussed topics and actions that the presidency should prioritise when advancing work in the Council on the **implementation** of the European Democracy Shield and more broadly for strengthening democratic resilience.

[*Joint Communication on the European Democracy Shield, 12 November 2025*](#)

[*General Affairs Council, 26 January 2026, main results*](#)

Other points

The Council is expected to adopt without discussion:

- the regulation implementing enhanced cooperation on the establishment of the **Ukraine Support Loan** for 2026-2027
- the regulation amending the **Ukraine Facility**
- the directive simplifying **corporate sustainability reporting** and **due diligence** requirements (Omnibus I),
- a decision authorising the signature of a broad package of agreements with **Switzerland**.

[*Simplification of EU rules \(background information\)*](#)

[*EU financial assistance to Ukraine*](#)