

Background brief

12 September 2025

General Affairs Council

16 September 2025, Brussels

PRESS

EN

Chair: Marie Bjerre, Minister for European Affairs of Denmark

Commission representatives: Henna Virkunnen, Executive Vice-president for tech sovereignty, security and democracy

Marta Kos, European Commissioner for enlargement

Maroš Šefčovič, European Commissioner for trade and economic security, interinstitutional relations and transparency

Starting time: 10.00

Media opportunities:

- Doorstep Marie Bjerre: 16 September 2025, 09.45
- Press conference General Affairs Council: 16 September 2025, +/- 16.40

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Main agenda topics:

The Council will start preparations for the 23-24 **October 2025 European Council** by discussing an annotated draft agenda.

In public session, the Commission will present a letter of intent on **legislative programming** and ministers will hold an exchange of views.

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

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

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[General Affairs Council, 16 September 2025 - meeting page](#)

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

[High quality photo and video material](#)

October European Council

The Council will start preparations for the European Council meeting of October 2025 by discussing an annotated draft agenda. EU leaders are expected to discuss:

- Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine
- latest developments in the Middle East with a focus on Gaza
- European defence and security
- competitiveness and twin transition
- housing, and
- migration

The preparatory work will continue at the next General Affairs Council on 21 October 2025.

Legislative programming (in public session)

The Commission will present its **letter of intent** of 10 September 2025 following the State of the Union speech by the Commission president. In its letter, the Commission sets out the initiatives of major political importance for the coming year, in advance of the adoption of its **2026 work programme**.

This will be followed by an exchange of views among ministers. The presidency will summarise this exchange of views in a **letter to the president of the Commission** to provide the Commission with indications from ministers on the envisaged priorities. The 2026 work programme will be presented to the General Affairs Council (GAC) on 17 November 2025.

The three institutions will then work towards preparing the **joint declaration** on the EU legislative priorities for 2026, to be approved by GAC on 16 December 2025 and signed by the three presidents in the margins of the December European Council meeting.

[Letter of intent with regard to the preparation of the Commission work programme for 2026, 10 September 2025](#)

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 situation in the EU.

The discussion will use the **Commission's 2025 rule of law report**, published on 8 July 2025. This sixth edition of the report maintains the exact structure of previous editions: a chapeau on general trends, structured along four pillars (justice systems; the anti-corruption framework; media pluralism; other institutional issues linked to checks and balances) and 27 country-specific chapters, reviewing the situation along the same four pillars in each member state. The most significant novelty in the 2025 report is the integration of a structured assessment of the rule of law's **impact on the single market**.

Finally, regarding the **recommendations** addressed by the Commission to member states, this edition of the report does not provide figures on their exact degree of implementation since the 2024 report. The Commission instead adopts a longer-term perspective, indicating that member states have been following up – to varying extents – on more than two-thirds of recommendations made in 2022, 2023 and 2024.

The Council's annual rule of law dialogue aims 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. Since 2020, the dialogue 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 Bulgaria, Czechia, Germany, and Ireland.

[2025 Rule of Law Report: the importance of the rule of law for Europe's democracy, security and economy, Commission press release, 8 July 2025](#)

[2025 Rule of law report \(European Commission\)](#)

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

[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 Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Ministers from the countries concerned will take part in the discussion.

The methodology and the structure of the report are the same as for member states, except that **no recommendations** are addressed to the candidate countries. The report's country chapters are structured around four pillars: 1) the justice system, 2) the anti-corruption framework, 3) media pluralism, and 4) other institutional issues related to checks and balances. This year's novelty is that the report gives particular emphasis to the **single market** dimension. While candidate countries are not yet part of the EU's single market, their country chapters include relevant considerations to support their future participation - ensuring the timely and effective creation of a level playing field for businesses and investors.

The inclusion of the candidate countries in the rule of law report aims to put them on **equal footing** with member states and support their reform efforts and accession process.

[2025 Rule of law report \(European Commission\)](#)

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

Other points

The French delegation will draw attention on the upcoming Commission proposal regarding the EU **democracy shield** with a focus on digital regulations and cooperation between member states.