

Background brief

13 March 2026

General Affairs Council

17 March 2026, Brussels

PRESS

EN

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

Commission representatives: Marta Kos, European Commissioner for enlargement

Piotr Serafin, European Commissioner for budget, anti-fraud and public administration

Starting time: 10.45

Media opportunities:

- Press conference after informal breakfast with Ukraine: 17 March 2026, 08.45
- Press conference after informal breakfast with Moldova: 17 March 2026, 10.15
- Doorstep Marilena Raouna: 17 March 2026, 10.40
- Press conference General Affairs Council: 17 March 2026, +/- 17.30

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Main agenda topics:

The Council will continue preparations for the **March European Council** meeting by discussing draft conclusions.

In a public session, ministers will hold a policy debate on the next **Multiannual financial framework** (MFF) 2028-2034, with a focus on governance aspects.

Also in a public session, the Council will be invited to agree on an amendment to the **European Electoral Act**.

The Council will hold an exchange of views on a synthesis report regarding the **2026 European Semester**, and the presidency will present an updated roadmap.

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[General Affairs Council, 17 March 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 continue preparations for the March European Council meeting by discussing draft conclusions. 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**
- **multilateralism**

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

Multiannual financial framework (MFF)

In a public session, the Council will hold a policy debate on the next **MFF 2028-2034** with a focus on governance aspects. The MFF is the EU's long-term budget, covering a period of seven years.

On 16 July and 3 September 2025, the Commission presented its proposals for the **next MFF** amounting to **almost €2 trillion**. Since then, work has continued at both political and technical level with a view to achieving a unanimous agreement between member states by the end of 2026.

The Commission's proposals put forward a more streamlined structure than that seen in previous frameworks, with a reduced number of headings and programmes. The proposed structure also foresees enhanced **flexibility** within and between MFF programmes through mechanisms such as reprogramming possibilities, financial buffers, special instruments and increased unallocated margins.

A debate on **governance** is therefore especially timely given that member states seem to currently agree on the need for flexibility in the next MFF, while ensuring adequate predictability for long-term investments.

During the discussion, and on the basis of a presidency steering note, ministers will be asked to reflect on the governance arrangements pertaining to the **three main funds** under the next MFF – namely, the National and Regional Partnership Plans, the European competitiveness fund, and the Global Europe instrument.

Separately, ministers will hold an exchange of views on the next MFF with members of the European Parliament over an informal lunch.

[*Multiannual financial framework \(MFF\) 2028-2034: governance aspects, Presidency steering note, 9 March 2026*](#)

[*General Affairs Council meeting, 16 December 2025*](#)

[*General Affairs Council meeting, 17 November 2025*](#)

[*General Affairs Council meeting, 21 October 2025*](#)

[*The 2028-2034 EU budget for a stronger Europe, Commission background information, September 2025*](#)

[*The EU long-term budget \(background information\)*](#)

European Electoral Act

In a public session, the Council will be invited to agree in principle on a decision amending the **European Electoral Act** concerning the election of the members of the European Parliament (MEPs) by direct universal suffrage, which aims to introduce the possibility for MEPs who are pregnant or recently gave birth to delegate their vote, and forward the agreed text to the European Parliament for its consent.

[Council decision amending the act concerning the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, 11 March 2026](#)

[Proposal for a Council decision amending the European Electoral Act, European Parliament, 13 November 2025](#)

European Semester

Ministers will hold an exchange of views on a synthesis report on Council contributions on the 2026 **European Semester** and the presidency will present an updated roadmap. The Council is also expected to agree to forward a draft recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area to the European Council for endorsement.

[European Semester 2026 - Synthesis report, 6 March 2026](#)

[Draft Council recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area 2026](#)

[Explanatory note to the draft Council recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area 2026](#)

[European Semester 2026 – Revised Roadmap](#)

[European Semester in 2026 \(timeline\)](#)

[The European Semester explained \(background information\)](#)

Other points

During consecutive informal meetings over breakfast, ministers will hold an exchange of views on reform and integration efforts, take stock of the results achieved so far and share reflections on the next steps with the **Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister**, Taras Kachka, and the **Moldovan Deputy Prime Minister**, Cristina Gherasimov.