



General Affairs Council Luxembourg, 25 June 2024

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

The meeting will begin at 9.00.

Ministers will continue preparations for the European Council meeting on 27 and 28 June 2024 by discussing draft conclusions.

In public session, they will hold a policy debate on the directive on transparency of interest representation on behalf of third countries.

As part of the Article 7(1) TEU procedure concerning Hungary, the Council will hold a hearing.

A press conference will take place at the end of the meeting (+/- 14.15).

* * *

In the margins of the General Affairs Council:

On 25 June 2024 (in Luxembourg)

15.30 - Accession Conference with Ukraine, followed by press conference (+/- 17.30)

18.00 - Accession Conference with Moldova, followed by press conference (+/- 20.00)

On 26 June 2024 (in Brussels)

14.30 - Accession Conference with Montenegro, followed by press conference (+/- 16.00)

[General Affairs Council, 25 June - meeting page](#)

[Accession Conference with Ukraine, 25 June 2024](#)

[Accession Conference with Moldova, 25 June 2024](#)

[Accession Conference with Montenegro, 26 June 2024](#)

[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.

June European Council

Ministers will continue preparations for the European Council meeting on 27 and 28 June 2024 by discussing draft conclusions.

At their upcoming meeting, EU leaders will address Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the EU's support to Ukraine and its people.

They will also discuss the latest developments in the Middle East.

The European Council will focus on issues related to security and defence, including Europe's need to increase its overall defence readiness and capabilities and to further strengthen its defence technological and industrial base. In this context, leaders will review progress on mobilising more funding for the European defence industry.

The European Council will also revert to the Capital Markets Union and review progress on enhancing the EU's competitiveness, securing its economic resilience, and developing the single market.

As part of other items, it will address migration, the latest developments in Georgia, and an EU strategic approach to the Black Sea.

The European Council will also address appointments for the next institutional cycle. It will adopt the 2024-2029 Strategic Agenda and conclusions on a roadmap for future work on internal reforms.

[Annotated draft agenda](#)

Interest representation on behalf of third countries

In public session, ministers will hold a policy debate on the directive on transparency of interest representation on behalf of third countries, based on a presidency discussion paper.

The Commission proposed this directive on 12 December 2023 as part of the 'Defence of Democracy' package.

Ministers held an orientation debate on this package, including the proposed directive, at the meeting of the General Affairs Council on 29 January 2024.

Discussions at technical level have helped to make progress on the understanding of the file and on key policy issues, in particular with regard to the scope and objectives of the directive, the level of harmonisation, and the registers.

Some of the key operational conclusions are the following:

- Article 114 TFEU provides the appropriate legal basis for the proposed directive, which should thus apply to interest representation services and comparable interest representation activities.
- The proposed directive should cover entities carrying out interest representation activities on behalf of third countries.
- Further flexibility needs to be introduced in various provisions to address specific national circumstances and approaches as well as to allow for stricter national measures when desired.
- Registers should be maintained at national level, possibly based on a common structure, and linked through a portal at the EU level.
- While this functionality requires some level of harmonisation, there should still be the possibility for member states to collect additional information, should they deem it necessary.

In addition, the presidency has noted that while all delegations agree that the proposed directive can help address the risk of foreign interference in democratic processes, concerns have also been raised as regards the risk of stigmatisation of civil society and the possible impact of the proposed directive on the freedom of speech and the freedom of association.

Against this background, ministers will be invited to indicate:

- whether they agree with the outlined operational conclusions,
- what safeguards against stigmatisation and for protecting fundamental freedoms would be needed in the proposed directive, and
- in what other ways which are complementary to the proposed directive could civic space be promoted.

[Presidency discussion paper](#)

[General Affairs Council, 29 January 2024](#)

[Commission proposal for a directive on transparency of interest representation on behalf of third countries](#)

[Defence of Democracy package \(European Commission\)](#)

[Electoral rights and democratic participation \(background information\)](#)

Article 7 procedure

As part of the Article 7(1) TEU procedure regarding Hungary, the Council will hold a hearing.

This will be the seventh hearing of Hungary as part of this procedure. It will cover all the issues raised in the European Parliament's reasoned proposal, which triggered the procedure. The aim is to provide the Council an up-to-date picture of the situation in Hungary.

The six previous hearings of Hungary were held in the Council on 16 September and 10 December 2019, on 22 June 2021, on 23 May and 18 November 2022, and on 30 May 2023.

In its reasoned proposal, adopted on 12 September 2018, the European Parliament describes several issues that, in its view, justified the triggering of the Article 7 procedure:

- (1) the functioning of the constitutional and electoral system,
- (2) the independence of the judiciary and of other institutions and the rights of judges,
- (3) corruption and conflicts of interest,
- (4) privacy and data protection,
- (5) freedom of expression,
- (6) academic freedom,
- (7) freedom of religion,
- (8) freedom of association,
- (9) the right to equal treatment,
- (10) the rights of persons belonging to minorities, including Roma and Jews, and protection against hateful statements against such minorities,
- (11) the fundamental rights of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, and
- (12) economic and social rights.

On 15 September 2022, the European Parliament adopted an interim report, in which it finds that in all 12 areas of concern highlighted in its original reasoned proposal either serious issues remain to be solved or further issues have arisen.

Some of the issues raised in the European Parliament's reasoned proposal are also being addressed as part of other procedures, including infringement procedures launched by the European Commission.

- As part of the budget conditionality procedure, launched against Hungary in 2022, the Hungarian government committed to adopting and implementing remedial measures to address serious shortcomings in the areas of anti-corruption, audit and public procurement.
- Hungary's Recovery and Resilience Plan also includes 27 so-called 'super-milestones' to be fulfilled before any disbursement of funds under the Recover and Resilience Facility, including four super-milestones related to judicial independence and 21 super-milestones which correspond to the remedial measures under the budget conditionality mechanism.
- In addition, the horizontal enabling conditions for access to cohesion funds include a condition related to effective application and implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

In its rule of law report issued on 13 July 2023, the Commission noted the introduction of some reforms in the fields of justice and anti-corruption in Hungary in response to the conditionality procedure and other relevant procedures. At the same time, it highlighted that important shortcomings persist in various areas, in particular as regards media freedom and pluralism, the extensive use of government's emergency powers and pressure on civil society organisations.

On 13 December 2023, the Commission adopted two decisions related to the rule of law situation in Hungary:

- The Commission considered that due to legislation which significantly strengthens the independence of the judiciary in the country, Hungary has fulfilled the horizontal enabling condition on the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in what concerns judicial independence (and the corresponding four super-milestones in its Recovery and Resilience Plan). This meant part of the cohesion funding would no longer be blocked. Concerns remained as regards other relevant areas, related to Hungary's so-called child-protection law, serious risks to academic freedom and the right to asylum.
- The Commission also decided that it is not in a position to propose as part of the budgetary conditionality procedure that the measures against Hungary be adapted or lifted.

On 7 February 2024, the Commission decided to launch an infringement procedure against Hungary for violating EU law with its law on the Defence of National Sovereignty, adopted by the Hungarian Parliament on 12 December 2023.

On 24 April 2024, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on "ongoing hearings under Article 7(1) TEU regarding Hungary to strengthen rule of Law and its budgetary implications", which highlighted "persistent serious deficiencies" in most of the fields of its reasoned proposal.

[Reasoned proposal triggering the Article 7 procedure for Hungary](#)

[Interim report of the European Parliament](#)

[2023 Rule of Law Report - Country Chapter Hungary](#)

[Commission considers that Hungary's judicial reform addressed deficiencies in judicial independence, but maintains measures on budget conditionality \(European Commission press release, 13 December 2023\)](#)

[Rule of Law: Commission decides to launch infringement procedure against Hungary for violating EU law on the Defence of Sovereignty \(European Commission press release, 7 February 2024\)](#)

[European Parliament resolution of 24 April 2024 on ongoing hearings under Article 7\(1\) TEU regarding Hungary to strengthen the rule of law and its budgetary implications](#)

[Standard modalities for hearings referred to in Article 7\(1\) TEU](#)

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