

Background brief*22 January 2026*

General Affairs Council

26 January 2026, Brussels

PRESS**EN****Chair:** Marilena Raouna, Deputy Minister for European Affairs of Cyprus**Commission representatives:** Henna Virkkunen, European Commission's executive vice-president for technological sovereignty, security and democracy**Starting time:** 10.00**Media opportunities:**

- Doorstep Marilena Raouna: 26 January 2026, 09.40
- Press conference General Affairs Council: 26 January 2026, +/- 14.15

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Main agenda topics:

In public session, the Cyprus presidency will present its **priorities** with a focus on those falling within the remit of the General Affairs Council.

As part of the annual **rule of law dialogue**, the Council will hold a country-specific discussion on the rule of law situation in Denmark, Estonia, Greece and Spain.

Ministers will also hold an exchange of views on the **European Democracy Shield**.

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[General Affairs Council, 26 January 2026 - meeting page](#)[Press conferences, doorsteps and other public events in video streaming](#)[High quality photo and video material](#)

Presidency priorities (in public session)

The Cyprus presidency will present the priorities for its term of office. Ministers will have an opportunity to present their comments.

Under the motto, 'An Autonomous Union. Open to the World', the Cyprus presidency will work to ensure that the challenges the EU is currently facing are transformed into opportunities and that the EU's ambition is matched with action and tangible results, based on the following priorities:

- autonomy through **security, defence readiness and preparedness**
- autonomy through **competitiveness**
- an autonomous Union, **open to the world**
- an autonomous **Union of values** that leaves no one behind
- a **long-term budget** for an autonomous Union

As regards the **General Affairs Council** configuration, work will focus on ensuring a balanced and forward-looking **EU budget**, driving the EU's **simplification** agenda forward, defending and promoting the Union's fundamental **values**, democracy and the **rule of law**, reinforcing citizens' trust in the European project and strengthening **democratic resilience**, delivering concrete progress on the **enlargement** process, further enhancing **EU-UK relations**, and strengthening **cooperation with EFTA countries** and other non-EU Western European partners.

[Cyprus presidency programme](#)

Annual rule of law dialogue

Ministers will hold a country-specific discussion in the framework of the annual rule of law dialogue, focusing on the rule of law situation in **Estonia, Denmark, Greece and Spain**.

This will be the **first round** of country-specific discussion this year. For each country, the Commission will first present the main findings of the respective country-specific chapter in its 2025 rule of law report. The delegations concerned will then be asked to present **key national developments** and particular aspects of their national rule of law framework. This will be followed by a round of comments and questions in which other delegations can share their experiences and best practices about the developments mentioned. Afterwards, the delegation whose situation is being discussed may present additional remarks.

The Council's annual rule of law dialogue was initiated by the Council conclusions of 16 December 2014. Its aim is 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 presidency conclusions of 12 December 2023 consolidated the approach to the Council's annual rule of law dialogue followed since 2020, including its structuring into horizontal and country-specific discussions. They also envisaged three country-specific discussions per year, each focusing on the situation in four member states.

[2025 Rule of Law Report: Country Chapter Estonia](#)

[2025 Rule of Law report: Country Chapter Denmark](#)

[2025 Rule of Law Report: Country Chapter Greece](#)

[2025 Rule of Law Report: Country Chapter Spain](#)

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

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

European Democracy Shield

Over a working lunch, ministers will hold an exchange of views on 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. A presentation was provided at the **General Affairs Council** in November 2025, where the Commission highlighted the need for a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. 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 of 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.

Ministers will be invited to discuss 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](#)

Other points

Over an informal breakfast, ministers will hold an exchange of views on **simplification** and **better regulation** with the Chair of the European Parliament’s Conference of Committee Chairs, Mr Bernd Lange.

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