

Background brief

21 May 2026

General Affairs Council

26 May 2026, Brussels

PRESS

EN

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

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

Maroš Šefčovič, European Commissioner for trade and economic security

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

Glenn Micallef, Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport

Starting time: 10.00

Media opportunities:

- Doorstep Marilena Raouna: 26 May 2026, 09.45
- Press conference General Affairs Council: 26 May 2026, +/- 18.15

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Main agenda topics:

The Council will start preparations for the **June 2026 European Council** by discussing the annotated draft agenda.

In public session, ministers will hold a policy debate on the next **multiannual financial framework** (MFF) 2028-2034, with a focus on its contribution to the integration of the EU's single market.

Ministers will also hold an exchange of views on the state of play of **EU-UK relations**.

Finally, the Council will hold a country-specific discussion in the framework of the **annual rule of law dialogue**, focusing on the rule of law situation in France, Croatia, Italy, and Latvia.

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[General Affairs Council, 26 May 2026 - meeting page](#)

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

[High quality photo and video material](#)

June EUCO preparation

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

- Russia's war of aggression against **Ukraine**
- latest developments in the **Middle East**
- the next Multiannual financial framework (**MFF**) 2028-2034
- global **economic challenges**
- European **defence** and **security**
- **migration**
- **illicit drugs**
- **European Semester**

[*European Council \(18-19 June 2026\), annotated draft agenda*](#)

Multiannual financial framework MFF (in public session)

The Council will hold a policy debate on the next **MFF 2028-2034** with a focus on its contribution to the integration of the EU's **single market**. 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 an agreement between member states by the end of 2026.

The European Commission's proposal for the next MFF covers several elements that will support the integration of the single market. The **National and Regional Partnership Plans** aim to encourage investments and reforms addressing barriers to the single market. The new **European Competitiveness Fund** is designed to support strategic industries and technologies. **Global Europe** seeks to develop external partnerships as a way to advance the strategic interests of the Union. Finally, specific funds, such as the Connecting Europe Facility, will finance cross border infrastructure, while targeted instruments such as the Single Market and Customs Programme, will focus on enforcement, standardisation, and administrative cooperation.

[*General Affairs Council meeting, 17 March 2026*](#)

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

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

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

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

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

EU-UK relations

The Council will hold an exchange of views on the state of play of **EU-UK relations**. The EU and the UK have committed to strengthening relations at the 19 May 2025 Summit in London, out of which emerged a renewed agenda for reinforced cooperation in several areas of shared interest. As a matter of principle for the EU, the pursuit of closer EU-UK relations must be based on the foundation of existing agreements, the Withdrawal Agreement and Trade and Cooperation Agreement, which must be implemented fully, faithfully and timely.

The Commission and the EEAS are expected to update ministers on the **implementation of the existing agreements** and post-Summit developments. The Council will be able to take note of progress inter alia as regards the ongoing negotiations on a common sanitary and phytosanitary area (**SPS** agreement), an agreement to link the EU-UK

greenhouse gas emissions trading systems (**ETS** agreement) and an agreement on a **Youth Experience Scheme**, Ministers will also be updated on the implementation of the **Security and Defence Partnership**, as well as the upcoming negotiations on an agreement on the UK's participation in the EU's internal electricity market (electricity agreement), and the agreement on the UK's financial contribution to the EU's economic, social and territorial cohesion.

The new areas of strengthened cooperation are foreseen in the Commission's **Common Understanding** with the UK and in the EU-UK **Security and Defence Partnership**. Concerning the Common Understanding, intense work is ongoing in various thematic negotiating tables. As for the Security and Defence Partnership, the first foreign and security policy dialogue between the High Representative and UK Foreign and Defence Secretaries was held on 22 October 2025 in London.

[EU-UK Summit, 19 May 2025](#)

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

[Relations with the UK \(background information\)](#)

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 **France, Croatia, Italy, and Latvia**.

This will be the **second 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 France](#)

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

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

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

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

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

EU mobile citizens in municipal elections and EP proxy voting (in public session)

In a public session, the Council will be invited to adopt a directive on the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in **municipal elections** by EU citizens residing in a member state of which they are not nationals. It will be also invited to

adopt a decision to amend the European electoral law allowing **proxy voting** at the European Parliament (EP) during late pregnancy and early motherhood.

Other points

During breakfast, ministers will hold an informal exchange of views on **strategic foresight**, with the Commission also briefly presenting its intergenerational fairness strategy.
