

## **Presentation on the State of the European Union 2023 and the European Commission Work Programme 2024**

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(Draft opening statement, check against delivery)

- European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen delivered her **fourth State of the Union address**, titled '*Answering the call of history*' on 13 September to the European Parliament in Strasbourg.
- With **European elections** coming up in June next year, this was the last State of the Union address of the current Commission mandate, an opportunity to review what has been delivered and what remains to be done.
- In a wide-ranging speech, the President outlined how the European Commission had delivered on the commitments she made in her 2019 Political Guidelines, and she highlighted the **emerging challenges, priorities and flagship initiatives** for the year to come.
- On 17 October, the European Commission adopted its **work programme for 2024** and presented it to the European Parliament.
- The programme was developed against a backdrop of growing geopolitical tensions; not least Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and now the unfolding crisis in the Middle East.
- Despite the results achieved so far, key proposals are still pending agreement, so an important priority for the 2024 work programme will be supporting the European Parliament and Council to step up efforts to **find agreement on outstanding proposals** thus ensuring that Europe's citizens and businesses can take full advantage of EU policy actions.

### **Achievements**

The 2019-2024 mandate has delivered numerous milestones for European climate policy, most notably the **EU Green Deal** that set out Europe's ambition to become the first climate-neutral continent. All of the 'Fit for 55' proposals which aim to reach 55% emissions reductions by 2030 have now been agreed by the co-legislators and focus is now on implementation. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent energy crisis gave new impetus to the shift away from dependence on fossil fuels.

There has also been a strong emphasis on **ensuring industrial competitiveness**. The recently introduced EU Critical Raw Minerals Act seeks to reduce Europe's reliance on critical minerals

imported from outside its borders and the Net Zero Industry Act aims to bolster the manufacturing of green technologies.

This Commission has accelerated the digital transition. With the **Digital Markets Act** and the **Digital Services Act**, it has laid strong foundations for making the EU Single Market fair, competitive, consumer friendly and safe, especially for children.

**NextGenerationEU**, the EU's **€800 billion** instrument to support the economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic will make EU economies greener, digital and more resilient through a mixture of investments and reforms in the national recovery and resilience plans.

The European Commission has also enhanced the EU's role as global leader, building up the **EU-US relationship** and strengthening ties to Africa, Latin America and parts of Asia by combining tools from across the EU's trade policy, development assistance, infrastructure investment and more in the **EU Global Gateway** investment programme.

### 2024 Work programme

- This work programme puts a strong emphasis on reducing administrative burdens. The Commission aims to **reduce EU reporting requirements by 25%**, which is crucial to maintaining the **competitiveness** of European business and providing **relief for SMEs**.
- With over 90% of the commitments made in 2019 delivered and only 7 months left until the European elections, the Commission has proposed a limited number of focused new initiatives for 2024, aiming to **complete delivery** of commitments made but also to prepare for **emerging challenges**.
- I would now like to highlight some of these.

### European Green Deal

- Under the European Green Deal, which is Europe's growth agenda, we will work towards setting **climate targets for 2040**, to keep the EU on course towards climate neutrality by 2050. The Commission presented yesterday (24 October) a **Wind Power Package** to accelerate the deployment of wind turbines, improve access to finance and support the international competitiveness of European industry.
- It will present an initiative on **water resilience** to ensure access to water for citizens, nature and the economy, while also tackling catastrophic flooding (like we have seen in Cork last week) and water shortages.
- The Commission will continue to ensure that the green transition is **fair and inclusive**. For example, it will initiate a **series of green dialogues** in order to fully and directly engage with citizens, as well as **clean transition dialogues with industry and social partners**. The first clean transition dialogue on hydrogen has already taken place. We will also set up the **strategic dialogue on the future of agriculture** in the EU.

### A Europe fit for the digital age

- The **Digital Services Act** is now in force for very large online platforms and will apply across Europe from 17 February 2024.
- To continue making Europe fit for the digital age, the Commission will **open our high-performance computers to start-ups working on Artificial Intelligence**.
- It will propose a **European Space Law** that will set rules, for example for space traffic management, but also on how we will keep our critical space infrastructure safe.
- Many of our partners around the world want to work together and develop local industries for processing and refining to strengthen global supply chains of raw materials. That is why the Commission will convene the first meeting of the new **Critical Raw Materials Club** later this year.
- It will also work on a **European Defence Industrial Strategy** to support development of Member States' defence capabilities.

### An economy that works for people

- The **EU economy** has shown great resilience in the face of an unprecedented series of crises including the COVID pandemic, the Russian war on Ukraine and the subsequent energy and cost of living crises. In 2024, the Commission will focus on **challenges related to skills and labour shortages, education, social dialogue, inflation and the ease of doing business**.
- The Commission will convene a **Social Summit** in the first half of 2024, to discuss with social partners the challenges facing EU labour markets, workers and businesses including those stemming from Artificial Intelligence.

### Promoting our European way of life

- The Commission will present a proposal to **update the framework to fight smuggling of migrants**, strengthening efforts on **asylum and migration**.
- It will organise an **International Conference on fighting people smuggling**, considering the need for international cooperation and a **strong global alliance** to fight people smuggling and **prevent irregular migration**.
- The **New Pact on Migration and Asylum** remains the structural response the EU needs to tackle migration challenges in the future. The Commission will continue to work closely with the European Parliament and Council to finalise agreement by the end of this legislative mandate, as work needs to start already next year to prepare for its swift implementation.
- In higher education, the Commission will propose a blueprint for the future **joint European degree**, to be delivered jointly by higher education institutions from different

European countries and, automatically recognised across the EU. It will be supported by recommendations on quality assurance in higher education and on attractive academic careers.

### **A stronger Europe in the world**

- The Commission will push forward our **trade agenda** and will drive global efforts to reform the World Trade Organization. The reviewed trade strategy of the EU promotes an open, sustainable and assertive policy, which supports the green and digital transformations.
- It will act to ensure global competition remains fair e.g. the Commission launched an **anti-subsidy investigation into electric vehicles coming from China**.
- The Commission will continue to **stand with Ukraine** and provide **support** in 2024. So far, the Union and its Member States have provided, in a Team Europe approach, **EUR 82 billion** in total support. This includes humanitarian aid, military equipment and training, material goods for civilian use, including generators, school buses, medical items and evacuations, rebuilding cities, rehabilitating damaged schools, and economic support to ensure the continued functioning of the most critical functions of the Ukrainian state.
- To underscore the EU's commitment to stand by Ukraine as long as is necessary, the Commission proposes to create a **facility to provide support to the tune of up to EUR 50 billion in the period 2024-2027**. This funding will cater for Ukraine's immediate needs, bolster its recovery, and support its modernisation on the path towards EU membership.
- The EU's mutually beneficial **partnership with Africa** will remain high on the Commission agenda and we will present a Joint Communication on a strengthened partnership with Africa early next year.

### **A new push for European Democracy**

- The European Union must prepare for its successful **enlargement** in order to foster long-term peace and stability in Europe. The Commission will work closely with our partners as they prepare for this momentous step, including **opening the Commission's Rule of Law Reports** to those accession countries who get up to speed even faster.
- The EU also needs to be ready. The Commission will put forward a **Communication on pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews** to see how each policy would be affected by a larger Union and how the European institutions would work.
- We will adopt a Commission Recommendation on the development and strengthening of **child protection systems in the Member States**.

### **Mid-term review of the multiannual financial framework**

- The challenges of the past years have underlined the strengths and capabilities of our Union. But they have also pushed the EU budget to the point of exhaustion despite its in-built flexibilities and extensive reprogramming. To counter this, the Commission tabled a proposal to **reinforce the long-term EU budget**. The aim is to be able to address the most urgent needs. They include deepening our support for Ukraine, financing our action on migration, bolstering the Union's capacity to respond to heightened economic and geopolitical instabilities, humanitarian crises and natural disasters, and boosting investments in strategic technologies to foster long-term competitiveness.
- The Commission has put forward an **adjusted proposal for new own resources** to help finance the repayment of NextGenerationEU borrowing.

### **Conclusion**

- Against the backdrop of unprecedented geopolitical, economic, societal and technological challenges, **ensuring the EU's competitiveness and economic security** is of utmost priority. That is the aim of the EU's new policy initiatives for 2024.
- This Commission will work until the last day of its mandate to address common challenges. It will provide strong support to the European Parliament and Council to **facilitate agreements on remaining key proposals**, while tabling the **few new initiatives** still needed to deliver on our promises and preparing the Union for tomorrow.