



GENERAL AFFAIRS Council

Tuesday 16 December in Brussels

*Starting at 10.00, the Council is due to discuss and adopt conclusions on the **enlargement and the stabilisation and association** process.*

*The Council and the member states meeting within the Council will also discuss and adopt conclusions on the **respect for the rule of law**.*

*It will have an exchange of views on the **Commission's 2015 work programme**. The Council is invited to adopt conclusions on multiannual programming and **legislative planning**.*

*The Council will take note of a presidency report on the friends of the presidency group which explores ways for **improving the functioning of the EU**.*

*Over lunch, ministers will prepare the **European Council** meeting on 18-19 December. They will also take note of a synthesis report on the Europe 2020 mid-term review.*

*The Commission will present its **annual growth survey** and the Council will also take note of the 2015 **European Semester roadmap** planned by the incoming Latvian presidency.*

*Finally, the Council will complete its review on the implementation of the EU's strategic agenda, adopted at the European Council in June 2014 by dealing with the item **EU as a strong global actor**, one of the five overarching priorities of the Strategic Agenda.*

A presidency press conference will be held after the end of the meeting at +/-17.30.

Event in the margin

*In the margin of the General Affairs Council the **EU-Montenegro** accession conference will take place, starting at 18.00, with a separate press conference at +/-19.00.*

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*Press conferences and public events by video streaming: <http://video.consilium.europa.eu>
Video coverage in broadcast quality (MPEG4) and photo gallery on: www.eucouncil.tv*

¹ This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the press office.

Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process

Based on the Commission's [2014-2015 enlargement strategy](#) and the [progress reports](#) on Turkey, Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, the Council will discuss the EU enlargement and the stabilisation and association process.

The Council is expected to reaffirm its commitment to the enlargement process and emphasise the three pillars of enlargement strategy: rule of law, economic governance and public administration reform. The Council should underline the necessity of progressive alignment with the EU's foreign policy positions, as well as other challenges that require serious attention such as judicial reform, the fight against organised crime and corruption, the freedom of expression and the media and the rights of persons belonging to minorities. The Council is furthermore expected to highlight the importance, during the enlargement process, of a constructive, inclusive and sustainable dialogue within the national parliaments and with civil society.

Ensuring the respect for the rule of law

The Council and the member states meeting within the Council are expected to adopt conclusions on ensuring the respect for rule of law.

The Treaty provides for a hard mechanism in the article 7 of the Treaty on the EU, which allows for the suspension of voting rights in the case of a serious and persistent breach of EU values.

Reminding that the rule of law is one of the key values on which the EU is founded the draft conclusions seek to establish a dialogue among member states within the Council to promote and safeguard the rule of law.

The issue was discussed at the General Affairs Council on 18 November on the basis of a [presidency note](#), which took account the [Conclusions on fundamental rights and the rule of law](#) adopted by the Justice and Home Affairs Council in June 2013.

Legislative programming

Ministers will exchange views on the Commission's 2015 work programme on the basis of an oral presentation by the Commission. This follows the Council's discussion on the Commission's priorities at the General Affairs Council on 18 November.

Ministers will be invited to adopt a Council conclusions on multiannual programming and legislative planning. Subject to the completion and positive outcome of the consultations with the European Parliament and the Commission the Council may also be invited to endorse a joint declaration on the same issue. This declaration, which reflects the political will of the three institutions to work closely together, is aimed at establishing a solid basis guiding the three institutions in their programming and legislative planning in the coming years.

Improving the functioning of the EU

The Council will take note of a presidency report summarising the work of the Friends of the Presidency Group on improving the functioning of the EU.

The Friends of the Presidency Group was activated by the Italian presidency in September following the broad support of the General Affairs Council of 23 July to the idea of examining the current functioning of the EU.

The Friends of the Presidency Group has met four times and examined horizontal questions including the role of national parliaments, inter-institutional relations, the work within the Council and the unexploited potential of the Lisbon Treaty.

Preparations for the December European Council

The Council will over lunch examine draft conclusions for the European Council meeting to be held on 18-19 December, prepared by the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, in cooperation with the Italian presidency and the Commission.

The European Council is due to focus on:

- Improving the investment framework in Europe; in particular leaders will discuss the Commission's initiative of mobilising 315 billion euro of investment over the period 2015-2017.
- The situation in Ukraine

An annotated draft agenda was discussed by the Council on 18-19 November 2014 ([14866/14](#)).

Report on the Europe 2020 mid-term review

Ministers will take note of a summary report prepared by the presidency on the discussions and the main political messages of the different Council configurations in relation to the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy.

The Europe 2020 Strategy is the EU's strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The strategy is implemented and monitored in the context of the European Semester, the yearly cycle of coordination of economic and budgetary policies (with its specific aspects: budgetary, macroeconomic and structural reforms). Through this process, the Commission evaluates notably whether and to what extent the commitments undertaken by the Member States allow for the delivery of the Europe 2020 objectives.

Annual growth survey

The Commission will present to the Council its Annual Growth Survey for 2015, in which it outlines the main features of its new jobs and growth agenda.

The Annual Growth Survey sets out what more can be done at EU level to help member states return to higher growth levels. To strengthen and sustain the recovery, the Commission proposes to pursue an integrated approach to economic policy built around three main pillars – boosting investment, accelerating structural reforms and pursuing responsible growth friendly fiscal consolidation.

The adoption of the Annual Growth Survey kicks off the European Semester of economic and budgetary policy coordination.

2015 European Semester roadmap

The Council will hear a presentation and take note of the 2015 European Semester as planned by the forthcoming Latvian presidency. The roadmap sets out how work will be taken forward under the Latvian presidency in the first semester of 2015. The objective of the roadmap is to ensure that all relevant Council formations work in a coordinated manner and to enable the General Affairs Council to oversee the process.

European Council strategic agenda - EU as a global actor

The Council will discuss the EU's role on the international arena, which is one of the five priorities of the strategic agenda adopted by the European Council in June 2014.

The discussion of ministers will be based on a presidency report setting out a strategic overview of the state of play, the main issues and priorities for the EU's action in this area.

The [*Strategic Agenda for the Union in Times of Change*](#) sets out five overarching priorities: stronger economies with more jobs; societies enabled to empower and protect; a secure energy and climate future; a trusted area of fundamental freedoms; and effective joint action in the world.

At the July General Affairs Council the presidency proposed to improve the follow-up to European Council orientations and to focus it on the priorities set out in the strategic agenda. The idea is to complement the comprehensive implementation reports that are published every six months and which cover all sectors, by issuing monthly reports focused each time on a pillar of the strategic agenda.
