

Outcome of the informal meeting of EU-27 leaders on 9 May 2019 in Sibiu

Just two weeks before the European elections, EU-27 Heads of State or Government met on 9 May 2019 in the Romanian city of Sibiu, to discuss the Union's common future. They adopted the Sibiu Declaration, recalling the achievements and values of the European Union. EU leaders reaffirmed their unity, and recognised the role they have to play to make the EU stronger and the future brighter. They also discussed the forthcoming Strategic Agenda for 2019-2024, which will outline policy priorities for the next five years. The European Council President, Donald Tusk, suggested a process for the forthcoming appointments to a set of high-level EU positions, and called a special summit for 28 May.

1. Background to the Sibiu Summit: The Future of Europe debate

The [Sibiu Declaration](#) and the preparation of the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 at the Sibiu Summit constitute the final stage of the Future of Europe debate, launched after the UK referendum on EU membership in June 2016. This process has seen milestones, such as the [Bratislava Declaration and Roadmap](#) in 2016 and the [Rome Declaration in 2017](#), and also triggered the Future of Europe [debates](#) in the plenary of the European Parliament throughout 2018 and early 2019.

This summit in Sibiu has been on the political agenda since the [2017 State of the Union](#) speech by the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker. His initial suggestion had been to schedule the meeting for 30 March, conceiving it as the first meeting after the UK's departure. It would thus be an opportunity for EU leaders 'to take first decisions by unanimity on the Future of Europe', and to choose one of the five options outlined in the European Commission's [white paper](#). However, the Commission and the European Council had a different [understanding](#) of the purpose of the Sibiu Summit. For the European Council, the Sibiu Summit was essentially designed to assess the implementation of previously set objectives and to reflect on future EU policy action in the upcoming five years. In its [contribution to the Sibiu Summit](#), the Commission, whilst recalling its white paper and the five scenarios, finally came into line with the European Council's approach and made 10 policy recommendations for the new strategic agenda. Following the extension of the Article 50 period until 31 October 2019 (at the latest) by the European Council (Article 50) on 15 April 2019, the UK remains a member of the EU although its prime minister did not attend this summit.

2. The Sibiu Summit

The 27 EU leaders adopted the Sibiu Declaration and discussed an outline for the 2019-2024 Strategic Agenda prepared by President Tusk. Following the address by the President of the European Parliament, Antonio Tajani, the first working session dealt with the EU's external dimension, with the EU High Representative/Vice-President of the Commission, Federica Mogherini, participating. A second session addressed the EU's internal dimension.

According to the Leaders' Agenda, the Heads of State or Government were also due to look at the implementation of the Agenda at the meeting in Sibiu. In the end, EU leaders decided not to carry out such an assessment of past action. [Analysis](#) by EPRS shows that the Leaders' Agenda can be assessed rather favourably, as it has enabled a more structured approach to work and better preparation by all actors concerned. However, it did not fulfil a core objective of enabling deadlocks on the most sensitive issues, such as migration and taxation, to be overcome.

High-level appointments

At the Sibiu Summit, President Tusk informed EU leaders on how he intends to proceed to reach agreement in a 'swift, smooth and effective way' on the new EU leadership. He underlined that the rules set in the Treaties were to be followed for the appointments of the President of the European Council (Article 15(5) TEU), the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (18(1) TEU) and the President of the European Central Bank (283(2) TFEU), as well as for the proposal of a candidate for the President of the European Commission (17(7) TEU). President Tusk added that the nominations for the new EU leadership should [reflect](#) the EU's demography and geographical balance, but also gender and political balances. Finally, he stressed that these decisions were to be taken by consensus, if possible, but that he 'would not shy away from putting [them] to the vote' if needed. To conclude the process in time for the June European Council, he has called a meeting of all 28 EU leaders on 28 May, just after the European elections.

Situation in Cyprus

At the summit, the President of Cyprus, Nicos Anastasiades, informed EU leaders about the Turkish drilling activities within the exclusive economic zone of Cyprus. Donald Tusk, speaking on behalf of the EU leaders, [underlined](#) that 'the European Union stands united behind the Republic of Cyprus and expects Turkey to respect sovereign rights of the EU Member State. The European Council will continue to follow these developments closely.'

Views of the European Parliament President: Antonio Tajani [stressed](#) that, to be able to meet the challenges of tomorrow, the EU needed institutional reforms that make 'decision-making processes more democratic and transparent and the EU and its institutions more accountable, as well as enhancing its efficiency and effectiveness'. The Parliament should be granted the right of legislative initiative, and its powers of scrutiny – in particular its right of inquiry – should be strengthened. The Council should be 'made a genuine legislative chamber, on an equal footing with Parliament, and increased transparency be injected into its decision-making processes'. Moreover, unanimous voting in the Council 'presents an almost insurmountable obstacle to major decisions at key times' and 'must be abandoned as soon as possible'. He also stressed that 'the European Council has extended its own rights of political initiative in response to recent crises, sometimes encroaching into the legislative field'. Many of these reforms can be achieved by exploiting the Lisbon Treaty to the full, while other reforms would require Treaty changes. He reiterated the EP's view that 'the Union must tackle the challenges of its future with greater and better political integration', and called on 'Heads of State or Government to pursue this path in a renewed spirit of solidarity and collaboration'.

3. Sibiu Declaration

The Sibiu Declaration, adopted by the 27 EU Heads of State or Government, outlines ten commitments which should help EU leaders to make the EU 'stronger and [the] future brighter, while recognising the European perspective of other European States'. The commitments are:

- Defending one Europe – from East to West, from North to South;
- Staying united, through thick and thin;
- Always looking for joint solutions;
- Protecting the European way of life, democracy and the rule of law

- Bringing the Union closer to its citizens;
- Reducing disparities [among Europeans];
- Providing the Union with the means to achieve its objectives;
- Safeguarding the future for the next generation;
- Protecting EU citizens;
- Being a responsible global leader.

The aim of the declaration was not to define specific objectives, but to list principles which summarise the spirit of European cooperation and integration. The Sibiu Declaration repeats pledges already part of the Bratislava Declaration and Roadmap and the Rome Declaration, without being [specific](#) on how they want to achieve them and therefore was [perceived](#) by some as 'empty'.

The ten commitments also reflect some core messages expressed by EU Heads of State or Government in the framework of the Future of Europe debates in the European Parliament, notably the added value of being a Member of the EU; the need for EU Member States to face the major challenges together, the need to preserve EU unity, the significance of common European values; and the important role of European citizens and the need to better communicate with them.

4. The forthcoming Strategic Agenda 2019-2024

In accordance with the European Council's role, as defined in Article 15(1) TEU, which is to 'provide the Union with the necessary impetus for its development' and to define its 'general political directions and priorities', the EU-27 Heads of State or Government intend to adopt the 2019-2024 Strategic Agenda at their next meeting, on 20-21 June 2019. To that end, they had a first informal debate on the direction for future EU action at their Leaders' Meeting in Sibiu. The new working method of the European Council, as introduced under the Leaders' Agenda, promotes open and informal debates among EU leaders, stimulated by the use of Leaders' Notes, with the aim of facilitating consensus on sensitive political issues. The outcome of these informal Leaders' Meetings is then translated into formal European Council conclusions at a subsequent meeting.

The Leaders' Agenda [note](#), 'Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 - outline', provides a first overview of the topics which could be part of the Strategic Agenda for 2019-2024. It is organised around four policy clusters:

- *Protecting citizens and freedoms;*
- *Developing our economic base: the European model for the future;*
- *Building a greener, fairer and more inclusive future; and*
- *Promoting Europe's interests and values in the world.*

Each policy cluster includes four general policy objectives, which again include two to four more specific policy objectives. But, as underlined by President Tusk, 'this debate ... will also be influenced by the European Parliament elections'. When comparing this outline with recent reflections by the Commission and the Parliament (see Table), one can see that the policy priorities outlined are quite similar, and reflect the concerns of EU citizens as emerging from recent [Eurobarometer polls](#)). Although many of these policy areas were already part of the [Strategic Agenda 2014-2019](#) and among the Commission's [ten priorities](#), one can observe a shift in orientation, reflecting the changing and more unpredictable international environment. Whilst President Tusk [stressed](#) that 'the rule of law will be in the centre of attention of the next strategic agenda', [eight Member States called](#) for the fight against climate change to be the cornerstone of future EU policy. The eight spoke in favour of phasing out GHG emissions by 2050, and advocated that at least 25 % of EU budget spending be earmarked for projects contributing to that objective.

Table: EU institutions' priorities for the forthcoming Strategic Agenda 2019-2024

European Council (Leaders' Agenda note on the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024)	European Commission (Europe in May 2019: <u>Contribution to the Sibiu Summit</u>)	European Parliament (Extracts from: European Parliament <u>resolution on the state of the debate on the Future of Europe</u>)
1) Protecting citizens and freedoms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring our security; Safeguarding our democracies (rule of law and disinformation); Tackling migration challenges; Protecting our values and freedoms (engaging citizens). 	1) Protective Europe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Security; Defence; Migration. 	A Europe that protects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Migration; Security; Defence; Combating anti-EU populism, intolerance and xenophobia; Citizens' engagement.
2) Developing our economic base: the European model for the future <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mobilising all relevant policies (single market, industrial policy, taxation, EMU); Investing in our future (skill and education, R&D) Promoting a level-playing field Embracing the digital transition. 	2) Competitive Union <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EMU Industrial Policy; Taxation; Single Market Research and innovation (R&D), Digital capacities, New transport regulations. 	Economic governance and the euro area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single market; EMU; Banking Union (including European Deposit Insurance); well-integrated capital markets; Taxation Fair competition
3) Building a greener, fairer and more inclusive future <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring sustainable, secure and affordable energy; Promoting inclusiveness (social protection and labour markets); Preserving environment and climate; Safeguarding our way of life (consumer protection, health, culture). 	3) Fair Europe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social protection; Social inclusion and equality, rule of law; Digital rights; Taxation policy; Health care; Housing. 	Developing the social pillar <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social standards of welfare states; European dimension of culture and education; EU mechanism on the rule of law; Economic and social convergence (equality); Data privacy rights.
	4) Sustainable Europe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climate change and environmental degradation; Agriculture policy; Circular economy; Clean energy framework; 	Environmental protection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climate change, environmental issues; Common agricultural policy; Renewable energy;
4) Promoting Europe's interests and values in the world <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defending our interests (coherent external policies, EU as a global player, defence investment and cooperation); Promoting global rules (Multilateral order, trade policy) Projecting our values (democracy and human rights) Tackling global challenges 	5) Influential Europe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for multilateral, rule-based order; Strong relations with close neighbours; Effective use of economic weight. 	Europe as a positive force in the world <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preserving the multilateral world order; Free, fair and rules-based international trade; Strengthening its partnership with Africa Faster and more effective CFSP

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