



The European Council in 2015

Overview of Decisions and Discussions

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service

Authors: Suzana Elena Anghel, Izabela Cristina Bacian,
Ralf Drachenberg and Susanna Tenhunen

European Council Oversight Unit

PE 581.406 – July 2016

The European Council in 2015

Overview of Decisions and Discussions

In-Depth Analysis

**by Suzana Elena Anghel, Izabela Cristina Bacian,
Ralf Drachenberg and Susanna Tenhunen**

Abstract

Designed to be the first in a series of annual publications, this In-Depth Analysis by the European Council Oversight Unit of the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) examines in detail the activity of the European Council in 2015 in all of the six policy areas which have most attracted the attention of the Heads of State or Government: namely migration, economic governance, foreign and security policy, terrorism, and work towards a new settlement for the United Kingdom in the European Union.

Although European Council's principal mission is meant to be strategic, in 2015 the institution mainly engaged in crisis management, due principally to the outbreak of the migration crisis. This led to an increase in the number of meetings: eight meetings of the Heads of State or Government were held, two of which were of an informal nature. Except for one informal meeting, the European Council President, Donald Tusk, reported to the European Parliament on the outcome of the meetings of the Heads of State or Government as required by the Treaties.

AUTHOR(S)

Suzana Elena Anghel, Izabela Cristina Bacian, Ralf Drachenberg and Susanna Tenhunen

To contact the Unit, please email: EPRS-EuropeanAddedValue@ep.europa.eu

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

This paper has been drawn up by the European Council Oversight Unit of the Directorate for Impact Assessment and European Added Value, within the Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services of the Secretariat of the European Parliament.

LINGUISTIC VERSIONS

Original: EN

This document is available on the internet at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank>

DISCLAIMER

The content of this document is the sole responsibility of the author and any opinions expressed therein do not necessarily represent the official position of the European Parliament. It is addressed to the Members and staff of the EP for their parliamentary work. Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy.

Manuscript completed in June 2016. Brussels © European Union, 2016.

PE 581.406

ISBN: 978-92-823-9437-3

DOI: 10.2861/19522

QA-04-16-501-EN-N

Contents

Contents.....	3
List of figures	4
List of tables	4
I. Background	5
II. Meeting frequency and typology	5
III. Main topics and meeting attendance.....	6
IV. The European Council and the 2015 migration crisis	7
V. Economic governance and competitiveness.....	11
VI. Foreign and security policy.....	14
VII. The fight against terrorism.....	18
VIII. Energy and climate.....	20
IX. A new settlement for the UK in the European Union.....	22
X. The European Parliament's involvement and views.....	22
XI. Annexes	25
Annex I: Timeline of meetings of the European Council in 2015.....	25
Annex II: Participation in European Council meetings in 2015*	26
Annex III: Overview of the different phases of the migration crisis, the foci of the European Council and its decisions in this regard, in 2015	28
Annex IV: Selected European Council decisions on migration in 2015 and their follow-up in 2015.....	29
Annex V: State of play of commitments	32

List of figures

Figure 1 – European Council meetings in 2015.....	6
Figure 2 – Topics addressed by the European Council in 2015.....	6
Figure 3 – Number of European Council meetings in 2015 addressing migration	8
Figure 4 – Key developments on migration in 2015.....	9
Figure 5 – Foreign and security policy topics addressed by the European Council, 2015.....	14
Figure 6 – Number of 2015 European Council meetings addressing the issue of terrorism	18

List of tables

Table 1: Comparison between the annotated draft agendas and the conclusions adopted by the European Council at its regular meetings in 2015	15
--	----

I. Background

The European Council, comprising Heads of State or Government of the EU Member States, fulfils multiple roles, the most important of which is giving strategic direction to the European Union ([Articles 15, 22 and 26 TEU](#)). However, at its eight meetings held in 2015, the unfolding migration crisis gave rise to deliberations and decisions in the European Council of a sometimes far more operational nature and with a shorter-term perspective.

In May 2016, the European Council published its own activity [report](#) covering the first part of President Donald Tusk's term in office, from December 2014 to April 2016, and concentrating on the main issues discussed by the European Council in that period. This paper aims to provide a detailed overview, both quantitative and qualitative, of the activity of the European Council in 2015. In doing so, it considers the frequency of meetings, their nature – regular, extraordinary or informal – as well as the topics addressed by the Heads of State or Government.

II. Meeting frequency and typology

The European Council met eight times in 2015, in two informal, two extraordinary and four regular meetings (Figure 1 and Annex I).¹ [Article 15.3 TEU](#) stipulates that Heads of State or Government convene for regular meetings four times a year, while 'special meetings' can be organised 'when the situation so requires'. There is a gap between existing practices and the Treaty terminology, which does not distinguish between informal and extraordinary meetings. Scholars argue that '[T]hough there is some overlap with the category of extraordinary meetings, the two [extraordinary and informal] are not identical'.²

Informal meetings are convened with the [aim](#) of facilitating orientation debates and building consensus on certain topics ahead of regular European Council meetings. Commenting on the different types of meetings, President Tusk, in his February 2015 [address](#) to the European Parliament, stated that '[T]he main purpose of informal summits is to discuss and consult, not to negotiate'.

Extraordinary meetings respond to exceptional situations which require a response from the Heads of State or Government. They are defined by [Article 26.1 TEU](#), within Chapter 2 - Specific Provisions on the Common Foreign and Security Policy, which specifies that the European Council may convene 'extraordinary meetings' in cases where 'international developments so require'. The extraordinary meetings organised in [April](#)

¹ The extraordinary September 2015 European Council meeting was different to the extraordinary April 2015 European Council, as it was of an informal nature.

² See Puetter, U. (2014), *The European Council and the Council: New Intergovernmentalism and Institutional Change*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 107-111.

and [September 2015](#) took place within the remit of Justice and Home Affairs, as a result of the migration crisis, which has both internal and external implications. In the case of regular European Councils, an annotated draft agenda is circulated ahead of each meeting, indicating the topics for discussion.³ Ahead of each meeting, European Council President Donald Tusk sends invitation letters to the Heads of State or Government, outlining the main topics, regardless of whether they are of a regular, extraordinary or informal nature.

Figure 1 – European Council meetings in 2015

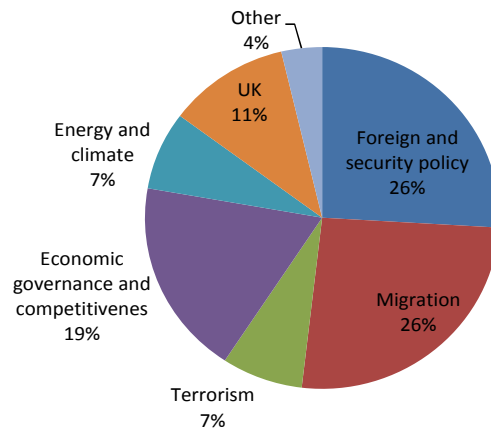


Source: EPRS

III. Main topics and meeting attendance

The topics that featured most prominently in the European Council's conclusions in 2015 were migration, foreign and security policy, economic governance and competitiveness, energy and climate, and the new settlement for the UK in the European Union. Figure 2 shows the topics discussed by the European Council in 2015.⁴

Figure 2 – Topics addressed by the European Council in 2015



NB: 'economic governance and competitiveness' includes the internal market, jobs, growth and competitiveness and the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). Source: EPRS

³ On the preparation of the European Council meetings and how meeting agendas are defined, see the January 2015 EPRS Briefing on [The European Council and its President](#).

⁴ The percentage calculation is based on the presence or absence of topics in the European Council conclusions. It does not reflect the share of each topic in the European Council conclusions or time spent by the Heads of State or Government in discussing the topic.

Member States are represented in European Council meetings by the Heads of State or Government ([Article 15\(2\) TEU](#)), depending on national constitutional provisions. An overview of meeting attendance is given in Annex II of this report. A Head of State or Government may be represented at a meeting by one of the other members of the European Council (representing a Member State). Neither the [Treaty on European Union](#) nor the [Rules of Procedure of the European Council](#) describe how members should be represented when unable to attend.⁵ Representation occurred three times in 2015. Nicos Anastasiades, President of the Republic of Cyprus was represented by Alexis Tsipras, Prime Minister of Greece, at the [September](#) and [October 2015](#) European Council meetings. A Head of State may also be represented by his Prime Minister at European Council meetings, based on national legal provisions. Klaus Werner Iohannis, President of Romania, [delegated](#) participation in the [December 2015](#) meeting to Dacian Cioloş, Prime Minister of Romania.

Although rather extensive when considering both internal and external security challenges (migration and its implications for the EU's external borders, economic governance, new security threats, energy security and climate, crises in the EU's neighbourhood (Syria, Libya and Ukraine), and a new settlement for Britain within the European Union), the [report](#) remains silent on the progress achieved on the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and on the mandate entrusted to the High Representative/Vice President (HR/VP) of the Commission, Federica Mogherini, to present a new Global Strategy to the European Council by June 2016.

IV. The European Council and the 2015 migration crisis

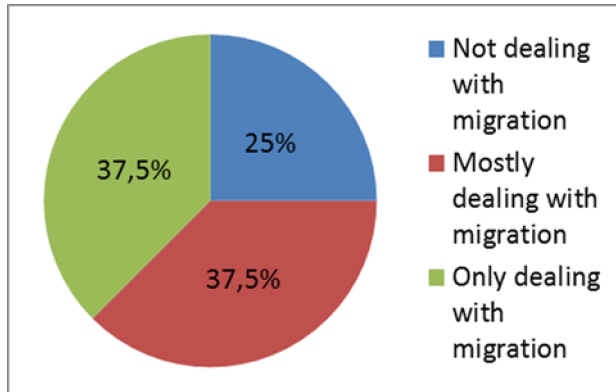
The migration crisis has been the dominant issue at all European Council meetings held since the spring of 2015.⁶ Both [German Chancellor Angela Merkel](#) and European Council President Donald Tusk have repeatedly [stated](#) that the refugee crisis 'is perhaps the biggest challenge Europe has faced for decades and it has the potential to change the European Union as we know it'.

⁵ Article 4 of The Rules of Procedure of the Council allows for representation by a counterpart in cases where a member of the Council is prevented from attending the meeting.

⁶ Eurocomment Pre-summit Briefing 2016/3.

1. Quantitative analysis

Figure 3 – Number of European Council meetings in 2015 addressing migration



Source: EPRS.

2015 saw a long series of crisis summits on migration. Six European Council meetings have taken place since April 2015, three of which were extraordinary meetings ([23 April 2015](#), [23 September 2015](#) and [12 November 2015](#)) dedicated exclusively to migration, while the other three ([25-26 June 2015](#), [15-16 October 2015](#) and [17-18 December 2015](#)), focused primarily on migration.

Moreover, EU leaders discussed migration with leaders of third countries and strategic partners at the [High-level Conference on the Eastern Mediterranean-Western Balkans Route](#) on 8 October 2015, the [Valletta summit](#) on 11-12 November 2015, and the [EU-Turkey summit](#) on 29 November 2015.⁷

2. Phases in European Council activity on migration

The activities of the European Council in 2015 on the migration crisis can be divided into three different phases (see Figure 4 and Annex III).

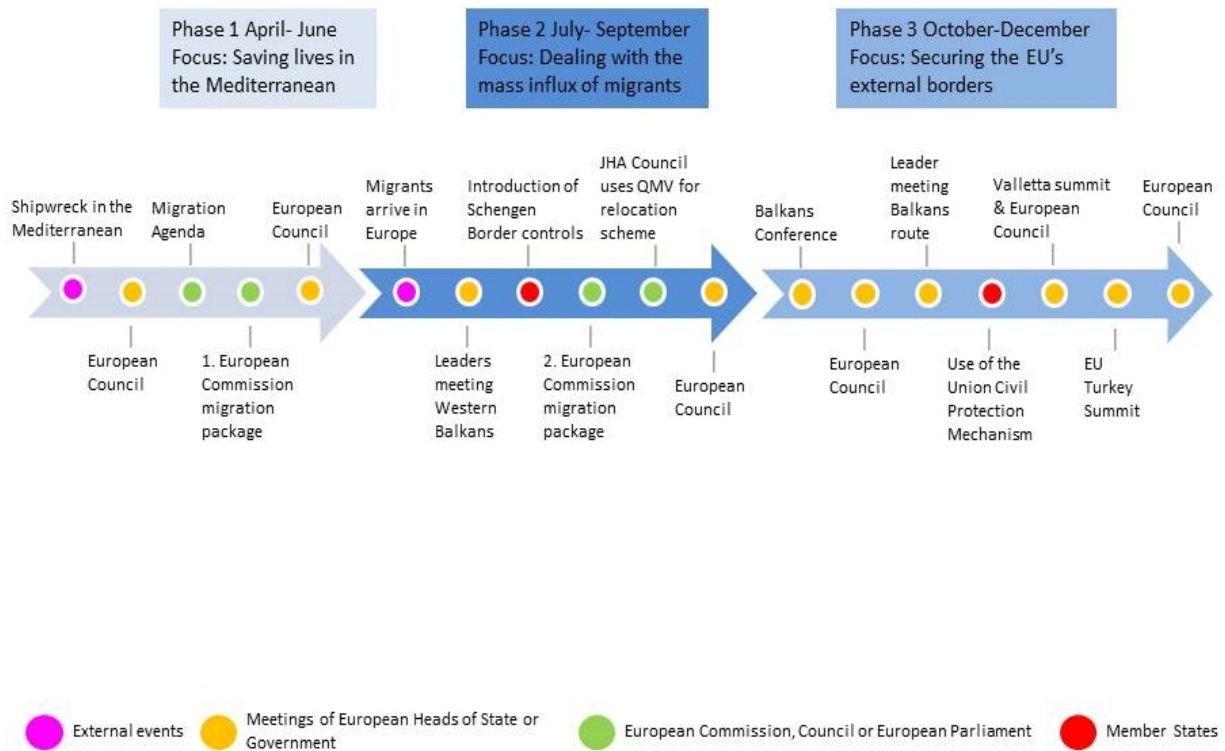
Initially, in phase one (April-June 2015) the focus was clearly on 'saving lives' in the Mediterranean Sea. During this phase, some of the more prominent commitments made by the European Council included increasing the financial resources available to operations Triton and Poseidon; the objective of disrupting people-trafficking networks, including the destruction of traffickers' vessels; a pledge to provide frontline Member States with additional resources; and a proposal to create relocation and resettlement schemes and the establishment of 'hotspots'.

During the second phase (July-September 2015), the focus shifted to dealing with the unprecedented number of migrants arriving in Europe, in particular via the [Western Balkans route](#). The main commitments of the European Council during this period were to increase financial assistance to EU external-relations initiatives and United Nations programmes; make further commitments regarding the setting up of hotspots; step up dialogue and cooperation with Turkey; organise a conference on the Western Balkans

⁷ Various other meetings on migration, including either the European Council President and/or the European Commission President with a group of EU Heads of State or Government also took place.

route; and also attempt to ensure the correct implementation of existing rules and regulations (in particular, the Dublin and Schengen *acquis*).

Figure 4 – Key developments on migration in 2015



Source: EPRS.

In the third phase (October-December 2015), the focus shifted again to protecting the EU's external borders. Consequently, the European Council's main decisions in that phase were to create an integrated border management system; strengthen Frontex's capacity by enhancing its mandate; consider the development of a European Border and Coast Guard System; and to continue to set up hotspots and ensure the rapid and full implementation of prior relocation and resettlement decisions.

At the European Parliament's plenary debate following the 16-17 December 2015 European Council, many political groups [observed](#) that the European Council conclusions on migration strongly resembled previous conclusions made throughout 2015. European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker argued that this is normal, and indeed necessary, as some Member States did not implement the European Council's decisions. The European Council's 2013 and 2014 conclusions already included many of the points found in the most recent European Council statement. At the European Council meeting on 24-25 October 2013, immediately following the Lampedusa tragedy, the Heads of State or Government had already stressed the need for 'the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility' and called for 'determined action ... to avoid that such human tragedies happen again'. At that time, the European Council underlined

'the importance of addressing [the] root causes of migration flows by enhancing cooperation with the countries of origin and transit, including through appropriate EU development support and an effective return policy' and called for 'the reinforcement of Frontex activities in the Mediterranean'.

3. Challenges

The most significant challenge for the European Council in 2015 was to reach consensus on a common approach to policy on the migration crisis. By the end of 2015, divergent national positions led Member States to temporarily suspend the [Schengen rules](#), erect physical barriers along national borders, and refuse to apply the [Dublin rules](#) on processing asylum applicants. At the April 2015 European Council, divergent opinions surfaced regarding mandatory quotas for the relocation of migrants. The European Council avoided a stalemate because the common approach took the form of a specific legislative proposal, meaning it could be [decided](#) in the Council of Ministers using qualified majority voting (QMV), rather than in the European Council, where unanimity is required.

A more recent alternative to circumvent blockages in the European Council is the use of so-called [mini summits](#), where a limited number of European Council members meet prior to European Council meetings to make progress (such as with the meeting on the Balkans route, and the meeting with the Turkish Prime Minister), where agreement cannot be reached among all European Council members. Furthermore, although the [primary role of the European Council](#) is strategic,⁸ as outlined above, many of these recent commitments have been operational in nature.⁹

Another challenge in this area was the limited implementation of European Council decisions. [For European Council President Donald Tusk](#) 'it is too easy to reach compromise [in the European Council], as afterwards almost nobody is ready to respect our common decisions.' and 'it is difficult [for the European Council] to discipline Member States'. Annex IV shows that the majority of [follow-up activities](#) are in the hands of the Member States and/or the Commission. The relevant follow-up activities by the EU institutions were [dealt with rapidly](#) and comprehensively. At the same time, Member States' [implementation](#) of European Council commitments has often been rather slow and limited. For example, Member States' response to the commitment made by the European Council to support the United Nations' World Food Programme with at least an additional billion euros of financial assistance [was so disappointing](#) that at the next European Council meeting they had to be reminded to deliver on their pledge. Calls for implementation of European Council conclusions were a constant feature of European Council meetings in 2015. European Council President Donald Tusk [identified](#) a 'clear delivery deficit on many fronts, from hotspots and security screening in frontline countries to relocation and returns.'

⁸ Article 68 TFEU: 'define the strategic guidelines for legislative and operational planning within the area of freedom, security and justice'.

⁹ Eurocomment Preliminary Evaluation 2015/8.

President Tusk repeatedly [stated](#) that 'Europe will need to deal with this challenge for many years to come' and that 'the situation will get even worse'. Europe is still in the eye of the storm as far as the migration crisis is concerned, and the issue has already featured prominently on the agenda of the two European Council meetings so far in 2016. It will most likely continue to be debated by the Heads of State or Government throughout the remainder of 2016.

V. Economic governance and competitiveness

In 2015, the European Council's attention continued to shift from management of the sovereign debt crisis to fostering fragile growth and accelerating economic recovery. EU leaders, joined by the European Central Bank President Mario Draghi, discussed economic affairs and competitiveness in five meetings during 2015. The main items on the agenda included the Five Presidents' Report on completing Europe's Economic and Monetary Union (EMU); the establishment of the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI) as part of the Investment Plan; the completion of the Banking Union; and the European Semester. The European Council also addressed the following issues related to competitiveness and international trade together with economic governance aspects: the state of play of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP); endorsement of the Commission's Action Plan on the Capital Markets Union; and strategies for the Digital Single Market and the Single Market in the context of completing and better exploiting the full potential of the internal market.

1. Five Presidents' Report

The Euro Summit of October 2014 and the European Council of [December 2014](#) invited four Presidents – the Commission President in cooperation with the Presidents of the Euro Summit, the European Central Bank (ECB) and the Eurogroup – to prepare a report on further economic policy coordination, convergence and solidarity in the context of the EMU. Following [concerns](#) raised by the European Parliament on the democratic legitimacy of the process and on the importance of involving the only directly elected EU institution in the discussion of the future of the EMU, the President of the European Parliament was invited to contribute to the report. [The Five Presidents' Report](#) on completing the EMU, published in June 2015 as envisaged, builds on previous work and progress achieved in line with the strategic views expressed in the Four Presidents' Report [Towards a Genuine Economic and Monetary Union](#) and the Commission's [Blueprint for a Deep and Genuine EMU](#) of 2012. The Report proposes a roadmap of short and long-term actions to complete Europe's Economic and Monetary Union within the next decade (2025). It focuses on strengthening economic, financial and social cooperation in four key areas, with the aim of building an Economic Union, a Financial Union, a Fiscal Union and a Political Union.

[In December 2015](#), EU leaders discussed the completion of the EMU on the basis of the Five Presidents' Report, and a subsequent package of implementation measures put forward by the Commission in the autumn. In this context, the European Council reaffirmed its commitment to completing the EMU. More specifically, it invited the

Council to make quick progress on the Commission's proposals, including [more effective economic and fiscal governance](#), the establishment of [National Competitiveness Boards within the euro area](#), an [advisory European Fiscal Board](#), as well as more [unified external representation of the euro area in international organisations](#). The Commission's proposals also included a revised approach to the European Semester, already streamlined in 2015 with adjusted timing and improved structure. With regard to the Banking Union, the Commission proposed the establishment of a [European Deposit Insurance Scheme](#) (EDIS), also referred to as 'the missing pillar'. The European Council tasked the Council with assessing the Commission's proposals and reporting back by June 2016. In view of long-term actions introduced in the Five Presidents' Report, the European Council promised to respond after further examination, at the latest by the end of 2017.

2. European Semester

The cycle of the European Semester is a cornerstone of fiscal and economic policy coordination at EU level. In accordance with the annual cycle, EU leaders endorsed the priorities of the [2015 Annual Growth Survey \(AGS\)](#) in March, and the [country-specific recommendations \(CSRs\)](#) in June 2015. This AGS had a three pillar approach to recommendations for the EU's economic and social policy in 2015 - boosting investment, implementing structural reforms and pursuing growth-friendly fiscal consolidation.

The [revamped European Semester](#) was introduced in October 2015 as part of the Commission's proposals for concrete steps [towards Completing Economic and Monetary Union](#). One of its key objectives is to enhance dialogue among the main stakeholders – Member State governments, European and national parliaments and the social partners – in order to increase ownership of the structural reforms and to increase the low [implementation rate of Country Specific Recommendations \(CSRs\)](#). European Council President Donald Tusk has repeatedly emphasised the importance of structural reforms and their ownership at national level in his reports to the Parliament on European Council meetings, notably in [February](#), [March](#) and [July 2015](#).

3. European Fund for Strategic Investment

As a response to the fall in investments in Europe caused by the economic and financial crisis, the Commission launched an Investment Plan as one of its key priorities. The [Investment Plan](#), presented in November 2014, is aimed at mobilising €315 billion in additional investment during 2015-17, to stimulate growth and create employment. EU leaders called on the co-legislators to adopt the regulation for the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI) before June 2015 in order to activate the fund from mid-2015. In June, EU leaders [welcomed](#) the new [regulation on EFSI](#) adopted by the European Parliament and the Council on 24 and 25 June 2015, respectively. In addition, the European Council called on the EIB Group and national promotional banks to cooperate more closely in order to boost the impact of the Investment Plan on the real economy. The value of total investment related to EFSI approvals amounts to [€100 billion by May 2016](#).

4. Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

The [Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership](#) (TTIP) aims to remove trade barriers between the United States and the European Union. If concluded, it would create an integrated market of over 800 million people. The European Council has highlighted the importance of a successful outcome in the TTIP negotiations, twice during 2015 alone. The initial deadline of concluding an 'ambitious, comprehensive and mutually beneficial agreement' by the end of 2015 was reiterated in March 2015. Despite substantial development, progress has been [slower](#) than originally expected. Various issues [remain](#) controversial, such as product standards, the ability of EU firms to bid for public contracts in the USA, and investment protection rules. The negotiations, launched in July 2013, continue in 2016 with two additional rounds in April and July. In [December 2015](#), the European Council updated its earlier call by urging the parties to increase efforts to reach an agreement as soon as possible.

5. Completion of the Internal Market

The European Council has kept a close eye on the development of the internal market. A deeper and fairer single market for products and services plays a key role in securing the EU's competitiveness. Boosting growth and creating jobs by better exploiting the [potential of the internal market](#) are cornerstones of both the Commission's priorities and the European Council's long-term strategic objectives. In June 2015, the Heads of State or Government endorsed the Commission's [Digital Single Market Strategy](#) and in December they welcomed the communication on [Upgrading the Single Market: more opportunities for people and business](#), together with calls on ambitious implementation of the Digital Single Market Strategy and rapid early action on the Capital Markets Union.

Fact box: Situation in Greece

Although not on the agenda, the Greek situation was discussed at the European Council level [in February](#) and [June 2015](#), accompanied by a debriefing of Eurogroup meetings by President Jeroen Dijsselbloem. In addition, European Council President Donald Tusk organised an informal meeting on the topic, at the request of Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, during the [March 2015](#) European Council meeting.

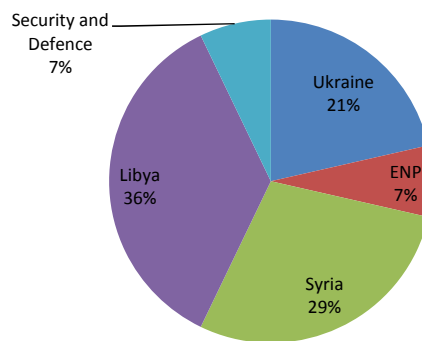
The negotiations on the [third financial assistance programme for Greece](#) were handled mainly at the Eurogroup level and in a series of Euro Summit meetings during the summer of 2015.

A political agreement was [reached](#) at the Euro Summit on 12 July 2015, following a deadlock in the Eurogroup. It paved the way for further negotiations on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Greece and the EU Institutions, with input from the IMF. The agreement on a new ESM macroeconomic adjustment programme was [endorsed](#) in the Eurogroup meeting of 14 August 2015.

VI. Foreign and security policy

In 2015, the European Union faced increased instability in its neighbourhood. This led the European Council to dedicate particular attention to the situation in Libya, Syria, and Ukraine, as shown in Figure 5 below. Foreign and security policy issues were discussed throughout the year in seven meetings held by the European Council.

Figure 5 – Foreign and security policy topics addressed by the European Council, 2015



Source: EPRS

The annotated draft agenda, circulated ahead of regular meetings, already includes references to foreign and security policy topics. However, there are still significant disparities between the items announced in the annotated draft agenda and the conclusions adopted by the Heads of State or Government, as shown in Table 1 below. As an example, relations with Russia and the situation in Ukraine were announced three times in the annotated draft agendas issued ahead of the March, June and December 2015 meetings, but European leaders discussed Russia and Ukraine only at their March 2015 meeting, when they made the lifting of sanctions conditional on full implementation of the [Minsk agreements](#). The Council then monitored the situation in Ukraine and, in the absence of the full implementation of the Minsk agreements, decided on the renewal of sanctions against Russia in [June](#) and [December 2015](#). The European Council did not revert to this item again in 2015.

Table 1 – Comparison between the annotated draft agendas and the conclusions adopted by the European Council at its regular meetings in 2015

Annotated draft agenda		European Council conclusions	
Date	Items	Date	Items
2 February 2015	- 'relations with Russia and the situation in Ukraine'; - 'Eastern Partnership Summit'.	19-20 March 2015	- European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP); - Eastern Partnership Summit; - Russia/Ukraine; - Libya.
11 May 2015	- mandating the HR/VP 'to prepare a review of the 2003 European Security Strategy'; - 'will also look at progress made in the area of security and defence since its December 2013 meeting and provide guidance for further work'; - 'relations with Russia and the situation in Ukraine'.	25-26 June 2015	- mandating the HR/VP to prepare by June 2016 an EU Global Strategy; - CSDP progress and further steps.
7 September 2015	- 'the European Council may address specific foreign policy issues'.	15 October 2015	- Syria; - Libya.
9 November 2015	- 'relations with Russia and the situation in Ukraine'.	17-18 December 2015	- Syria; - Libya.

Source: EPRS

The annotated draft agenda may be left vague, to allow for greater flexibility. As an example, the annotated draft agenda released ahead of the October 2015 meeting stated that 'the European Council may address specific foreign policy issues'. The [March 2015 European Council conclusions](#) outlined that a discussion on the Southern Neighbourhood was to be expected in October 2015 within the broader context of the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Finally, the Heads of State or Government considered Libya and Syria at their October 2015 meeting and let the Ministers of Foreign Affairs endorse the [review](#) of the European Neighbourhood policy

at their [December 2015](#) meeting. The European Council chose to focus on the two crises in the spotlight, delegating the more technical aspects of the ENP to the ministerial level.

1. Libya

The European Council has [monitored](#) the evolution of the Libyan crisis¹⁰ since its inception in early 2011. Libya featured in the European Council conclusions five times in 2015, at one extraordinary, one informal and three regular meetings. In the case of the extraordinary and the informal summits, Libya was discussed only as part of the broader debate on migration.

In 2015, the Heads of State or Government [outlined](#) the need to have the different Libyan parties rapidly agree on a Government of National Unity aimed at ensuring the political stability of the country. Political stability as a prerequisite to post-conflict reconstruction, democratic transition, countering trafficking activities, counter-terrorism fighting and stemming migration flows from third countries in Africa was the European Council's key message.

Throughout the year, the European Council repeatedly acknowledged the role and efforts of the UN in striving for a political solution in Libya. On 23 March 2015, the then Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in Libya, Bernardino Leon, [raised](#) the possibility of an agreement on a National Unity Government within one week, with the caveat that negotiations might take longer. The process ultimately proved lengthier. A [political agreement](#) was concluded with UN support in July 2015, but not implemented. Negotiations, welcomed by the European Council, [continued](#) under the UN's lead, but did not materialise as a lasting political agreement until [December 2015](#). The EU [repeatedly](#) stressed its willingness to work closely with a newly appointed Libyan government on capacity-building projects, fighting trafficking and countering terrorism.

2. Syria

In 2015, the Heads of State or Government discussed Syria¹¹ at five meetings – two regular, one informal and two extraordinary. The European Council recognised the complex political and military situation in Syria and outlined that [fighting terrorist groups](#), in particular ISIL/Da'esh, is a priority for the European Union. The Heads of State or Government underlined that only a 'political process' conducted along the lines of the [Geneva Communiqué of 2012](#) could bring stability to the country. They repeatedly committed to working closely with the UN and countries neighbouring Syria to find a lasting [political solution](#) to the conflict. They reiterated their [support](#) for the [International Syria Support Group's](#) efforts, aimed at ensuring dialogue between the parties in conflict and striving for a negotiated solution to the Syrian crisis.

¹⁰ For an overview of the European Council monitoring of the crises in Libya, Syria and Ukraine see the EPRS In-depth analysis on '[The European Council and Crisis Management](#)'.

¹¹ For a comprehensive analysis on the evolution of the situation in Syria see the EPRS Briefing on '[Conflict in Syria: Trigger factors and the EU response](#)'.

3. Ukraine

The European leaders discussed the situation in Ukraine at their informal February 2015 summit. On this occasion, President François Hollande and Chancellor Angela Merkel informed their counterparts of the [Minsk II agreement](#), concluded hours before the beginning of the summit. President Tusk, in his post-summit remarks, underlined that the situation in Ukraine is of concern for the international community, as it throws into question the post-1989 geopolitical order.

Developments in Ukraine continued to attract the attention of the Heads of State or Government, who again considered the matter at the [March 2015 summit](#). The European Council condemned, once again, the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol and reaffirmed the EU's support for the reform process in Ukraine. The Heads of State or Government [agreed](#) to link the lifting of sanctions on Russia to the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. They stated that '[t]he necessary decisions will be taken in the coming months' and that '[t]he European Council stands ready to take further measures if necessary'. This wording allowed for a certain degree of flexibility, with the European Council choosing to react to new developments on the basis of need. It also allowed the Council (Ministers of Foreign Affairs or Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) formations) to decide on the prolongation of the different sets of sanctions in the absence of the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. This showed the European Council's willingness to have the Council carry out the day-to-day monitoring of the crisis, while retaining the right to react further if needed.

4. Eastern Partnership

The March 2015 European Council offered an opportunity to discuss the Eastern Partnership ahead of the [21-22 May 2015 summit in Riga](#). The Heads of State or Government restated the European Union's commitment to the Eastern Partnership and called for a strengthening of relations with the six participating countries, favouring a tailor-made approach taking into consideration individual country needs, and a focus on capacity-building.¹² The European Council called for the ratification of the Association Agreements/Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (AAs/DCFTAs) with Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. The national level ratification process of the AAs/DCFTAs with [Georgia](#) and the [Republic of Moldova](#) was finalised in early 2016. Ratification by the Netherlands of the AA/DCFTA with [Ukraine](#) is still pending, and remains uncertain, as the Dutch people rejected the agreement in a [referendum](#) held in April 2016.

¹² Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine take part in the Eastern Partnership.

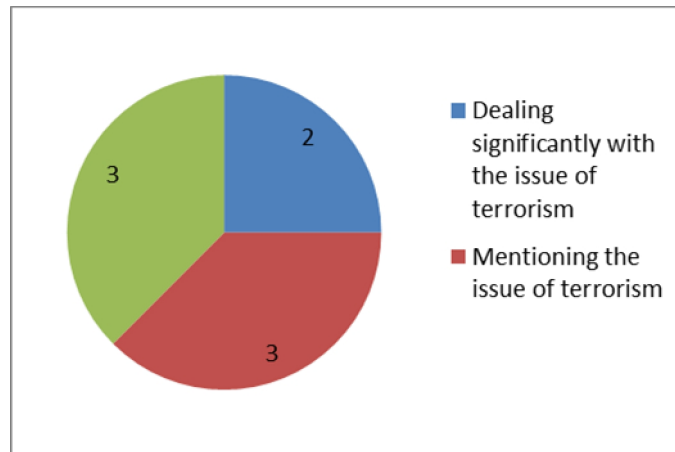
5. Common Security and Defence Policy

In June 2015, the Heads of State or Government discussed progress in CSDP for the [third](#) time since the entry into force of the [Lisbon Treaty](#). They confirmed that work will continue on strengthening the CSDP's visibility, further developing civilian and military capabilities and developing the defence market and defence industry. They reiterated their call to strengthen defence cooperation and cooperate more closely with international organisations (including the UN and NATO). They encouraged Member States to allocate [sufficient budgetary means](#) to defence and to spend existing resources more effectively, including through increased cooperative programmes. The European Council mandated the HR/VP Federica Mogherini to draft a [Global Strategy](#) for the European Union by June 2016.¹³ The document should identify and address the global challenges facing the EU.

VII. The fight against terrorism

At five out of eight European Council meetings in 2015, Heads of State or Government discussed the issue of terrorism (see Annex V). These include all four regular meetings (19-20 March 2015, 25-26 June 2015, 15 October 2015 and 17-18 December 2015) as well as one informal meeting ([12 February 2015](#)). Those meetings, which did not address terrorism, were all extraordinary and/or informal meetings on migration.

Figure 6 – Number of 2015 European Council meetings addressing the issue of terrorism



Source: EPRS

Several European Council meetings started with a minute of silence, to remember the victims of terrorist attacks.

¹³ For a comprehensive analysis on the strategic review process see the EPRS Briefing on ['A Global Strategy on foreign and security policy for the EU'](#).

1. Activities of the European Council

At their 12 February 2015 European Council meeting, EU Heads of State and Government [vowed](#) to do more to counter terrorist threats in the coming months, by ensuring the security of citizens, preventing radicalisation and defending values, as well as cooperating with the European Union's international partners. This would include detecting and disrupting the activities of [foreign terrorist fighters](#); increased cooperation and information sharing between Member States' law enforcement, judicial authorities and their national security services; measures to cut off terrorists' financial resources; and combatting the illegal trafficking of firearms. Measures to prevent radicalisation and safeguarding values should include detecting and removing internet content promoting terrorism or extremism, communication strategies to promote tolerance, as well as initiatives regarding education, social integration and rehabilitation in the judicial context to address factors contributing to radicalisation. International cooperation should focus on the alignment of the internal and external policies of the European Union in the fight against terrorism and radicalism. The European Union should engage more with third countries on security issues and counter-terrorism, as well as with the UN and the [Global Counterterrorism Forum](#). EU leaders also called on EU legislators to urgently adopt a strong and effective European Passenger Name Record directive, including solid data protection safeguards. One important initiative anticipated by the European Council was the European Commission proposal for a comprehensive [European Agenda on Security](#).

Regarding the threat posed by terrorism, in particular by [ISIL/Da'esh](#), EU leaders pledged at the March 2015 European Council meeting, to step up the European Union's engagement in counter-terrorism actions 'with relevant partners'. As announced at the February meeting, the June 2015 European Council took stock of the [implementation](#) of the previously agreed orientations. Heads of State or Government decided that work would be undertaken on the European Union's Security Agenda and that the full implementation of the orientations on the fight against terrorism agreed at the February 2015 meeting remains a priority.

At the December European Council meeting, Heads of State or Government reaffirmed their resolve to continue the fight against terrorism and stressed that the measures agreed at the informal European Council of 12 February 2015 urgently needed to be [implemented](#). Leaders also stressed the need to enhance cooperation and information sharing between Member States, their security services and European agencies (Europol and Frontex).

Due to the recent terrorist attacks across Europe in 2015 and 2016, it can be expected that the fight against terrorism will continue to be part of the European Council agenda for some time to come. This is also confirmed by the [Council conclusions](#) on the renewed European Union Internal Security Strategy 2015-2020.

VIII. Energy and climate

In the area of energy and climate, the main issues the European Council dealt with in 2015 were the [Energy Union](#) and the [Paris COP 21](#) under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), marking a turning point in global efforts to tackle climate change. These interconnected topics were discussed by the EU leaders in the regular European Council meetings of March and December. In addition, French President François Hollande addressed preparations of the Paris COP 21 at the October European Council meeting.

1. Energy Union

In [March 2015](#), the European Council committed to building an Energy Union with a forward-looking climate change policy based on the [framework strategy](#) launched by the European Commission. The Energy Union aims to provide sustainable, secure and affordable energy to EU citizens through its five interconnected dimensions of: energy security, solidarity and trust; a fully integrated European energy market; energy efficiency contributing to moderation of demand; decarbonising the economy; and research, innovation and competitiveness. It follows the objectives set in the strategic planning of both the European Council and the Commission. EU leaders committed also to giving political guidance in this field and to monitoring progress, which they did in [December 2015](#). On both occasions, parallel to the endorsement of the general framework strategy for the Energy Union, EU leaders highlighted specific policy issues of priority importance, such as energy security, full implementation of existing legislation on energy efficiency and renewable energy, the development of climate-related technology and the implementation of infrastructure projects in the internal energy market. On some of these policy issues, the European Council gave more detailed guidelines and objectives, entailing actions by EU institutions or Member States. As a follow up, the Commission has launched several initiatives and tabled legislative and non-legislative proposals, such as the [energy summer package](#) of July 2015 and the [energy security package](#) of February 2016. The first annual report on the [state of the Energy Union](#) took stock of progress achieved by November 2015. According to [Vice-President for Energy Union Maroš Šefčovič](#) and as outlined in the [Energy Union roadmap](#), 2016 should be the year of delivery. The intention is to introduce 90 per cent of the initiatives mentioned for building of the Energy Union.

The issue of the [Nord Stream 2 pipeline project](#) between Russia and Germany, which continues to [divide opinions](#) among Member States, was discussed in the December 2015 European Council. The main concerns raised in the context of the project relate to the risks for energy security in Central and Eastern Europe, modifications of the landscape of EU gas markets and to the unstable geopolitical situation in Ukraine following the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014. The European Council conclusions did not mention the exchange of views on the Nord Stream 2 project, but underlined that any new infrastructure project should be in line with EU legislation and with the objectives of

the Energy Union. In his report to the European Parliament, [European Council President Donald Tusk](#) addressed the political and legal aspects of the situation by underlining that compliance with EU laws and Energy Union objectives, such as energy security and diversification of routes, sources and suppliers, is an essential condition for receiving ‘political, legal or financial’ support from EU institutions or any Member State.

2. Paris COP 21

The global December 2015 [Paris Agreement](#) to fight climate change, under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, establishes a new post 2020 climate regime. It sends a strong signal of global commitment to a low-carbon future by aiming to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius, with an aspiration to keep the temperature rise to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels. The agreement, which was opened for signature on 22 April 2016 and signed on the first day by 175 parties including the EU, will [enter into force](#) after at least 55 parties representing at least 55 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions have ratified it.

Ahead of the Paris COP 21, the European Council supported coordinated EU climate diplomacy actions in order to highlight the strategic importance of climate change in the global political dialogue. At an early stage, the EU and its Member States submitted their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) to the global agreement, and urged other parties to follow their example. The INDC of the European Union and its Member States reflected the [2030 climate and energy policy framework](#) agreed by the European Council in October 2014 and the [Commission Communication on the Paris Protocol](#), which is a part of the Energy Union framework strategy. They were approved by the Environment Council, subsequently submitted to the UNFCCC and endorsed by the European Council in March 2015. During the negotiations, the broad ‘high ambition coalition’ of developed and developing countries, where EU negotiators and the French COP 21 presidency [played a key role](#), proved to be of major importance in terms of reaching a positive outcome. The Presidents of the [European Council](#), the [Parliament](#) and the [Commission](#) all praised the outcome of the Paris COP 21 and the EU's ability to show political purpose by acting together.

In December 2015, EU leaders welcomed the ‘historic outcome’ of the Paris COP 21. They also tasked the Council and the Commission to examine the implications of the Paris Agreement for EU policies with a specific focus on the 2030 climate and energy framework by March 2016. As indicated in the March 2016 Commission Communication [‘The Road from Paris’](#), the Paris Agreement implies short, medium and long-term actions starting from the signature and ratification of the agreement by the EU and its Member States to preparations of a long-term mid-century decarbonisation strategy. In terms of follow-up to the Paris Agreement, the European Council of [March 2016](#) set the implementation of the 2030 energy and climate framework as a priority, and invited the Commission to make quick progress on the remaining relevant proposals, initiatives and legislative processes.

IX. A new settlement for the UK in the European Union

The June 2014 European Council noted in its [conclusions](#) that the United Kingdom had raised concerns regarding the future development of the European Union and that these needed to be addressed. On this occasion, EU leaders recognised that the concept of an 'ever closer union' allowed for the development of different paths of integration for different countries.

One year later, at the [June 2015 European Council](#) meeting, the UK's Prime Minister, David Cameron, outlined his vision on the renegotiation of his country's relationship with the European Union, including his plans for an 'in/out' referendum. This initial exchange was followed by a letter from Mr Cameron, on 10 November 2015, where he laid out the [United Kingdom's priorities](#) for reform in four key areas: economic governance, competitiveness, sovereignty and immigration. The President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, replied to the British Prime Minister's letter on 7 December 2015, setting out his first [assessment](#) of the proposals made:

- On economic governance, Mr Tusk argued that a set of principles could be found to allow the euro area to develop further while avoiding discrimination against Member States outside the euro area.
- On competitiveness, he acknowledged an overall agreement among Member States on the need to have better regulation, to reduce burdens on business, and to reaffirm the importance of trade for the EU.
- On sovereignty, he recognised that the principle of an 'ever closer union' was sufficiently flexible to accommodate different paths of integration for the various Member States. He stressed the importance of national parliaments within the Union as well as of the principle of subsidiarity.
- On immigration, he pointed to the lack of a consensus among Member States on the issue of social benefits and called for further discussions before proceeding further.

EU leaders agreed at the [December 2015 European Council](#) meeting to work together on finding mutually satisfactory solutions, to these four key areas, in view of reaching an [agreement](#) at their next meeting in February 2016. Indeed a deal was reached at that meeting, but the subsequent referendum result in the UK rendered it null and void.

X. The European Parliament's involvement and views

The European Council is [not formally accountable](#) to the European Parliament and relations between the two institutions represent a fine balance between formal and informal governance mechanisms. The President of the European Council presents a report to Parliament after each meeting of the Heads of State or Government ([Article 15.6\(d\) TEU](#)). This reporting takes the form of a speech by the President of the European Council, followed by a debate in the plenary of the European Parliament.

In 2015, seven plenary debates took place in the presence of President Donald Tusk, who reported on the outcome of European Council meetings. Six of these plenary debates took place after the four regular meetings and the two extraordinary meetings (see Annex I). President Tusk reported to Parliament after only one out of the two informal meetings. The Treaty requires the President of the European Council to 'present a report to the European Parliament after each of the meetings of the European Council' regardless of their nature ([Article 15.6\(d\)TEU](#)).

In his reports to Parliament, President Tusk *inter alia* [stressed](#) that the European Council gave its 'cautious support' to the 'fragile [agreement](#)' reached in Minsk in February 2015. He [outlined](#) that there 'is a balance to be struck between national sovereignty and action at the European level' when addressing the migration crisis. He [emphasised](#) that the EU's 'dependence on external suppliers [gas] is a major weakness' which needs to be addressed collectively. He also [pointed](#) to the work conducted by his team and Commission services, in close cooperation with the British side, in seeking to find a satisfactory solution for all sides. The outcome of the British referendum made the 'New settlement for the UK in the European Union' null and void.

The European Parliament's President 'may be invited to be heard' by the European Council ([Article 235\(2\) TFEU](#)). This is where the fine balance between formal and informal governance lies. Although there is in theory no formal obligation to systematically invite the European Parliament's President to European Council meetings, in practice, the President always addresses the Heads of State or Government at the beginning of each meeting.¹⁴ More recently, in February 2016, President Schultz, in addition to formulating his opening remarks, also [attended](#) the informal working session on a 'new settlement' for the UK.

In his opening speeches, President Schulz called for 'a comprehensive EU migration policy', [stressed](#) the European Parliament's support for 'a multidimensional approach to combatting terrorism, based on three pillars: prevention, protection and prosecution' and argued that external border controls should be strengthened without curtailing freedom of movement in the Schengen area. He sent a strong message that the Parliament was working towards finalising the EU-Passenger Name Record directive [adopted](#) in early 2016.

In the economic governance and competitiveness area, the European Parliament [called](#) for enhanced coordination of economic policies and warned against the increased use of the intergovernmental method to the detriment of the Community method, through [several](#) resolutions. President Schulz [argued](#) that '[E]xperience shows that the Community method is not only more democratic, it is also more effective'.

The European Parliament welcomed the Five Presidents' Report and the Commission's Package of October 2015. Moreover, the Parliament has expressed its will to play a

¹⁴ On the practice to invite the President of the European Parliament for an exchange of views before the start of the European Council meetings, see the January 2015 EPRS Briefing on ['The European Council and its President'](#).

stronger role in the revamped European Semester. However, it would like to see more ambitious actions concerning democratic scrutiny and accountability of the issues of economic governance. A particular matter of concern is the timing of the revised European Semester. President Schulz raised these issues in his speeches at the European Council of [June](#), [October](#) and [December 2015](#).

With respect to the energy union, the European Parliament [called](#) for diversification of oil and gas suppliers, and urged Member States to seek a united position vis-à-vis third parties. The European Parliament welcomed the Paris climate agreement and [underlined](#) that '[T]o reach the goals laid down in the Paris agreement we will have to change the ways we use and produce energy'.

Within the foreign and security policy realm, the European Parliament repeatedly called for political solutions to the [Ukrainian](#), [Syrian](#) and [Libyan](#) crises. The European Parliament considered that in an increasingly complex world, where conflicts multiply, '[S]ecurity in and around Europe is indivisible'. The Parliament [perceives](#) the drafting of a new Global Strategy as an opportunity to reconsider the EU's security and reflect upon the EU's ambitions as a global player.

With regard to the United Kingdom government's request for a new settlement for the country in the European Union, President Schulz, on behalf of the European Parliament, [stated](#) that 'together we can all come to a suitable agreement which takes into account the sensitivities of all sides and also the legal constraints'. The British request was considered in detail at the [February 2016 European Council](#) where an agreement was concluded. The British people subsequently voted to leave the EU in the referendum on 23 June 2016, thus rendering the February agreement null and void.

The European Parliament monitors progress undertaken in different policy areas between European Council meetings, and may call for further action. In its December 2015 [resolution](#) on the Energy Union, issued several days ahead of the meeting of the Heads of State or Government, Parliament 'acknowledge[d] the European Council's weak 2030 targets for climate and energy' and 'recall[ed] that Parliament has repeatedly called for binding 2030 climate and energy targets of at least a 40 per cent domestic reduction in GHG emissions, at least 30% for renewables and 40 per cent for energy efficiency, to be implemented by means of individual national targets'.

In addition, the European Parliament often uses resolutions to express its views on specific matters ahead of the discussion by Heads of State or Government. The [resolution](#) issued in January 2015 where it 'calle[d] on the EU and its Member States to effectively help Italy in its laudable efforts to tackle the spiralling migration and refugee flows from North Africa, particularly from Libya' represents such an example.

Further reading:

European Council (2016), The European Council December 2014 to April 2016: Report by the President of the European Council, Brussels.

Puetter, U. (2014), The European Council and the Council: New Intergovernmentalism and Institutional Change, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

XI. Annexes

Annex I: Timeline of meetings of the European Council in 2015

Date	Nature of the meetings	Annotated draft agenda/ Invitation letter	Speech of the EP President at the European Council	Conclusions of the European Council	EP Plenary Debate	Outcome of the European Council
12 February 2015	Informal	Letter	Speech	Statement Remarks	Speech	Outcome
19-20 March 2015	Regular	Annotated draft agenda Letter	Speech	Conclusions	Speech	Outcome
23 April 2015	Extraordinary	Letter	Speech	Statement	Speech	Outcome
25-26 June 2015	Regular	Annotated draft agenda Letter	Speech	Conclusions	Speech Remarks	Outcome
23 September 2015	Extraordinary	Letter	Speech	Statement	Speech	Outcome
15-16 October 2015	Regular	Annotated draft agenda Letter	Speech	Conclusions	Speech	Outcome
12 November 2015	Informal	Letter	Speech	Remarks	-	Outcome
17-18 December 2015	Regular	Annotated draft agenda Letter	Speech	Conclusions	Speech	Outcome

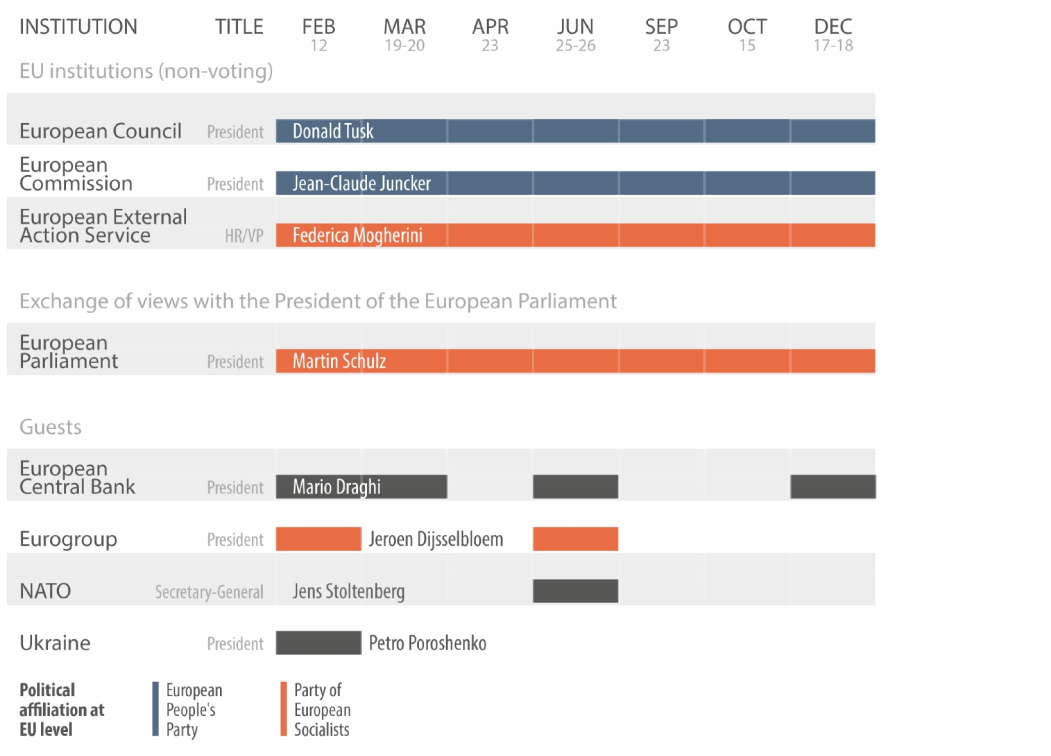
Annex II: Participation in European Council meetings in 2015*

MEMBER STATE	TITLE	FEB 12	MAR 19-20	APR 23	JUN 25-26	SEP 23	OCT 15	DEC 17-18	ELECTIONS 2015
Austria	Federal Chancellor	Werner Faymann							
Belgium	Prime Minister	Charles Michel							
Bulgaria	Prime Minister	Boyko Borissov							
Croatia	Prime Minister	Zoran Milanović							Legislative elections 8 Nov **
Cyprus	President of the Republic	Nicos Anastasiades				Represented by Greek PM			
Czech Republic	Prime Minister	Bohuslav Sobotka							
Denmark	Prime Minister	Helle Thorning-Schmidt					Lars Lokke Rasmussen		General elections 18 Jun
Ireland	The Taoiseach, Prime Minister	Enda Kenny							
Estonia	Prime Minister	Taavi Rõivas							Parliamentary elections 1 Mar
Finland	Prime Minister	Alexander Stubb					Juha Sipilä		Parliamentary elections 19 Apr
France	President of the Republic	François Hollande							
Germany	Federal Chancellor	Angela Merkel							
Greece	Prime Minister	Alexis Tsipras							Legislative elections 25 Jan and 20 Sep
Hungary	Prime Minister	Viktor Orbán							
Italy	Prime Minister	Matteo Renzi							
Latvia	Prime Minister	Laimdota Straujuma							
Lithuania	President of the Republic	Dalia Grybauskaitė							
Luxembourg	Prime Minister	Xavier Bettel							
Malta	Prime Minister	Joseph Muscat							
Netherlands	Prime Minister	Mark Rutte							
Poland	Prime Minister	Ewa Kopacz					Beata Szydło		Parliamentary election 25 Oct
Portugal	Prime Minister	Pedro Passos Coelho					António Costa		Legislative election 4 Oct
Romania	** President/ Prime Minister	Klaus Werner Iohannis**					Dacian Cioloş		
Slovakia	Prime Minister	Robert Fico							
Slovenia	Prime Minister	Miro Cerar							
Spain	Prime Minister	Mariano Rajoy Brey							General election 20 Dec
Sweden	Prime Minister	Stefan Löfven							
United Kingdom	Prime Minister	David Cameron							General election 7 May

Political affiliation at EU level	European People's Party	Party of European Socialists	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party	Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists	Party of the European Left	Independent
--	-------------------------	------------------------------	---	---	----------------------------	-------------

* The informal 12 November 2015 meeting of Heads of State or Government on migration in Valetta is not included in this table.

** Klaus Iohannis, President of Romania, campaigned for the office as the candidate of the National Liberal Party PNL. According to the Romanian Constitution, the President may not be a member of a party.



Main sources: European Council meeting calendar and European Council photo directory, Parliaments and governments database ParlGov, Parties and Elections in Europe database.

Infographic by Christian Dietrich, EPRS.

Annex III: Overview of the different phases of the migration crisis, the foci of the European Council and its decisions in this regard, in 2015

Phase/Time period	European Council Focus	Main European Council decisions
1 April-June 2015	Saving lives in the Mediterranean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increase financial resources to operations Triton and Poseidon; -Disrupt traffickers' networks, including the destruction of their vessels; -Providing frontline Member States with additional resources; -Relocation and resettlement schemes; -Setting up hotspots;
2 July-September 2015	Dealing with the mass influx of migrants, Cooperation with countries of origin and transit, in particular regarding the western Balkans route.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increase financial assistance to EU external-relations initiatives and United Nation programmes; -Set up hotspots, -Reinforce the dialogue with Turkey at all levels, -Organise a conference on the Western Balkans route, Implementation of existing rules (e.g. Dublin and Schengen <i>acquis</i>)
3 October-December 2015	Securing the EU external Borders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Work on an integrated border management system; - Strengthen Frontex and enhancing its mandate; -Consider the development of a European Border and Coast Guard System - Continuation of setting up hotspots -Rapid and full implementation of the relocation and resettlement decisions

Annex IV: Selected European Council decisions on migration in 2015 and their follow-up in 2015

European Council	Main Request/ Commitment	Followed up by	Action taken
23/04/2015	Triple the budget for Triton and Poseidon	European Commission, European Parliament and Council	2015 Budget amendments
	Increase emergency aid to the frontline member states	European Commission, European Parliament and Council	2015 Budget amendments
	Organise a summit with African partners on migration	European Commission and Council presidency	Valletta conference took place
	Disrupt trafficking networks	Member States	Some individual initiatives
	Develop a more systemic and geographically comprehensive approach to migration	European Commission	Migration agenda
	Prepare for a possible CSDP mission	High Representative, Council	EUNAVFOR MED operation Sofia was launched on 22 June 2016
25-26/06/2015	Setting up hotspots	Member States, European agencies	Limited
	All Member States will participate in the relocation of 20 000 displaced persons from frontline Member States	European Commission, European Parliament, Council	Proposal on provisional measures in the area of international protection Proposal for a structured solidarity mechanism

European Council	Main Request/Commitment	Followed up by	Action taken
			EP and Council adopted both proposals
		Member States	Less than 400 relocations have taken place
	Set out measures as to how Frontex will support frontline Member States on returns	European Commission	Proposal for a 'Returns Handbook'; EU Action Plan on returns
	Fully implement the Returns Directive	Member States	683 returns by end of December 2015
	Establishing an EU list of safe countries of origin	European Commission	Proposal for a common list of safe countries of origin
	High-level conference on the Western Balkans route	European Commission and Council presidency	High-level conference on the Western Balkans route
	EU money for refugees and Member States	EP, Commission and Council	budget adjustments in order to finance the migration measures
23/09/2015	Increased financing to external relations initiatives and United Nations programmes	Member States	Limited follow up to the financial commitments
	Increase funding for the EU Regional Trust Fund for Syria and the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa	European Commission	Proposed 2016 Budget amendments
		Member States	Not all Member States have contributed to the full extent
	Setting up 'hotspots' to ensure the identification, registration, fingerprinting and reception of migrants	Member States	Slow in setting up hotspots; slow in sending resources and personnel

European Council	Main Request/ Commitment	Followed up by	Action taken
	Apply and implement existing rules, in particular the Dublin regulation and the Schengen <i>acquis</i>	Member States/ European Commission	European Commission's 40 infringement decisions adopted on 23 September 2015 against 19 Member States for failure to fully transpose and correctly implement the Common European Asylum System.
	Reinforce the dialogue with Turkey	European Commission	Draft action plan with Turkey
15/10/2015	Work towards the gradual establishment of an integrated management system for external borders	European Commission	
	Make full use of the existing Frontex mandate, including as regards the deployment of Rapid Border Intervention Teams (RABIT)	Member States, Frontex	RABITs have started work in Greece
	Enhancing the Frontex mandate for a European Border and Coast Guard System	European Commission	Coast and Border Guard proposal

Annex V: State of play of commitments

European Council meeting	Main Request/ Commitment	Addressee	Actions taken
12/02/2015	Detect and disrupt terrorist-related travel, notably of foreign terrorist fighters.	Non specific	EC Proposal for a directive on combatting terrorism and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA on combatting terrorism
12/02/2015 17- 18/12/2015	Adopt a European Passenger Name Records directive.	EP and Council	2015 Council confirms agreement found with EP on EU Passenger Name Record (PNR) directive. 2016 European Parliament legislative resolution on the use of Passenger Name Record data for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crime.
12/02/2015	Reinforce and modernise external border control.	Member States	2016 Commission Proposal for a Regulation establishing an Entry/Exit System (EES) to register entry and exit data and refusal of entry data of third country nationals crossing the external borders of the Member States of the European Union.
12/02/2015	Issue operational guidelines for systematic and coordinated checks on individuals enjoying the right of free movement against databases relevant to the fight against terrorism based on common risk indicators.	Commission	Proposal COM(2015)0008 for a Regulation on a Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders (Schengen Borders Code)
17- 18/12/2015	Implement systematic and coordinated checks at external borders, including on individuals enjoying the right of free movement.	Member States	

European Council meeting	Main Request/ Commitment	Addressee	Actions taken
12/02/2015	Amend the Schengen Borders Code	Commission	
12/02/2015	Increase cooperation in the fight against illicit trafficking of firearms, including by a swift adaptation of the relevant legislation.	All competent authorities	European Commission Communication on EU action plan against illicit trafficking in and use of firearms and explosives . European Commission package of measures to make it more difficult to acquire firearms in the European Union .
12/02/2015	Deepen cooperation of security services.	Member States' (security services)	2016 Counter-Terrorism Group (CTG) is setting up a platform to improve information-sharing practices.
12/02/2015	Implement the rules to prevent money laundering and terrorist financing.	Member States	2015 Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the prevention of the use of the financial system for the purposes of money laundering or terrorist financing.
17-18/12/2015	Swiftly take further action to combat terrorist financing.	Commission and Council	2016 European Commission Action Plan to strengthen the fight against terrorist financing .
12/02/2015	Work towards the adoption of the Network and Information Security Directive.		Coreper endorsed an informal deal with the European Parliament. It should be concluded in spring 2016.
12/02/2015	Detect and remove internet content promoting terrorism or extremism.	Member States, and Europol	Europol launched the European Union Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU) to combat terrorist propaganda on the internet.
12/02/2015	Carry out communication strategies to promote	Non specific	

European Council meeting	Main Request/ Commitment	Addressee	Actions taken
	tolerance, non-discrimination, fundamental freedoms and solidarity throughout the EU.		
12/02/2015	Carry out initiatives regarding education, vocational training, job opportunities, social integration and rehabilitation in the judicial context to address factors contributing to radicalisation, including in prisons.	Non specific	
12/02/2015 17-18/12/2015	Engage more with third countries on security issues and counter-terrorism, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa and in the Sahel, but also in the Western Balkans.	Non specific	
12/02/2015	Sustained and coordinated international engagement with the UN and Global Counterterrorism Forum as well as with relevant regional initiatives.	Non specific	
12/02/2015	A dialogue among cultures and civilisations to promote fundamental freedoms together.	Not specified	
12/02/2015	Present a proposal for a comprehensive European Agenda on Security.	Commission	Commission communication on the European Agenda on Security .
17-18/12/2015	Examine the Commission's proposal on combatting terrorism.	Council	2016 Council agreed its negotiating position.
17-18/12/2015	Examine the Commission's proposal on strengthening	Council	2016 The Presidency The aimed to have a

European Council meeting	Main Request/ Commitment	Addressee	Actions taken
17-18/12/2015	the control of firearms. Monitor the situation closely and report to the Council.	Commission, the High Representative and the EU Counter-terrorism Coordinator	position in the Council by June 2016. 2016 Report of the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator on the State of play on implementation European Council of 12 February 2015.
17-18/12/2015	The European Council will regularly review the situation.	European Council	

Designed to be the first in a series of annual publications, this In-Depth Analysis by the European Council Oversight Unit of the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) examines in detail the activity of the European Council in 2015 in all of the six policy areas which have most attracted the attention of the Heads of State or Government: namely migration, economic governance, foreign and security policy, terrorism, and work towards a new settlement for the United Kingdom in the European Union.

Although European Council's principal mission is meant to be strategic, in 2015 the institution mainly engaged in crisis management, due principally to the outbreak of the migration crisis. This led to an increase in the number of meetings: eight meetings of the Heads of State or Government were held, two of which were of an informal nature. Except for one informal meeting, the European Council President, Donald Tusk, reported to the European Parliament on the outcome of the meetings of the Heads of State or Government as required by the Treaties.

This is a publication of the European Council Oversight Unit
EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service
European Parliament

The content of this document is the sole responsibility of the author and any opinions expressed therein do not necessarily represent the official position of the European Parliament. It is addressed to the Members and staff of the EP for their parliamentary work.



PE 581.406

ISBN 978-92-823-9437-3

doi:10.2861/19522

QA-04-16-501-EN-N

www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank (Internet) – www.epthinktank.eu (blog) – www.eprs.sso.ep.parl.union.eu (Intranet)