

Outlook for the special European Council meeting on 17-18 April 2024

The special European Council meeting on 17-18 April will be an important step towards agreeing on the EU's political priorities for the 2024-2029 period. The three main priorities are likely to centre on 'a strong and secure Europe', 'a prosperous and competitive Europe' and 'a free and democratic Europe'. EU leaders are also expected to adopt lengthy conclusions related to competitiveness, notably addressing the single market and the capital markets union. They will also address the war in Ukraine, and hold a strategic debate on EU-Türkiye relations. They may also discuss developments in the Middle East following Iran's attack on Israel.

1. General

This will be the first meeting for two new members of the European Council: the new prime minister of Portugal, **Luís Montenegro**, as well as **Simon Harris**, the new Taoiseach (i.e. prime minister) of Ireland.

2. Special European Council meeting, 17-18 April

Strategic Agenda 2024-2029

EU leaders will dedicate a substantial part of their discussions to the [next long term priorities of the European Union](#), to be set out in the strategic Agenda 2024-2029. The process has intensified recently and the main priorities have now been identified.

Process. In June 2023, European Council President Charles Michel [invited](#) EU leaders to start the reflection process on the priorities for the next institutional cycle, which will feature in the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029. The first step in the reflection process was a [discussion](#) at the informal European Council meeting in Granada, Spain on [5-6 October 2023](#). The second step was a [series of meetings](#), each with a small number of EU leaders representing a mix of geographical regions in the EU, political party affiliations and diversity of opinion. Four meetings took place in late 2023: on [13 November](#) in Berlin, [14 November](#) in Copenhagen, [16 November](#) in Zagreb, and [29 November](#) in Paris. A second [series of small group](#) meetings has taken place more recently, on [2 April](#) in Vilnius, [3 April](#) in Bucharest, [11 April](#) in Warsaw, and [12 April](#) in Vienna. Whilst many EU leaders have participated in only one of these meetings, some have participated in two, notably Robert Abela, Nikos Christodoulides, Nikolay Denkov, Mette Frederiksen, Luc Frieden, Kaja Kallas, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, Karl Nehammer, Petteri Orpo, Mark Rutte and Donald Tusk. Charles Michel, together with the Secretary-General of the Council, Thérèse Blanchet, has attended all of these meetings. On the other hand, the Commission President, also a member of the European Council, has not been involved thus far.

Priorities. EU leaders will discuss the current outline for the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, which in the [view](#) of Charles Michel is converging around the common goal of transforming 'Europe into a strong, resilient and more prosperous union'. The current working draft is based on three main broad priorities:

- I. 'A strong and secure Europe', including the topics of the EU's international role, security and defence, migration, and enlargement.
- II. 'A prosperous and competitive Europe', addressing many topics including competitiveness, innovation, digital, energy, climate change, food security and social policy
- III. 'A free and democratic Europe', concentrating on the rule of law, and promoting democracy and fundamental values.

These main priorities, notably the ones mentioned under 'A strong and secure Europe', also reflect the main concerns of EU citizens – the war in Ukraine, immigration and the international situation – as expressed in the [autumn 2023 Eurobarometer](#) survey.



The [draft](#) Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 shows both similarities with and differences from the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024. Whilst the issue of migration is salient in both, an enhanced focus on security and defence as well as on enlargement is apparent in the 2024-2029 draft. As for the rule of law, it clearly has a prominent position in the 2024-2029 agenda compared to the current one, which hardly mentions it.

In the context of long-term EU priority-setting, Michel [stressed](#) that the EU needs to ensure that its financial decisions reflect its ambitions. Indeed, the draft Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 specifies that 'the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) should take these priorities into account'.

Competitiveness

In the face of growing geopolitical and trade challenges, many Member States have underlined the need for greater focus on [European competitiveness](#) in the coming years. EU leaders are thus likely to hold a lengthy discussion on the future directions. The [High-level report on the future of the Single Market](#), requested by the European Council in [June 2023](#) and drawn up by former Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta, will feed into the debate. Amongst the means proposed to support EU companies and incentivise investment, Letta mentions [US style tax credits](#). He also advocates a joint industrial policy at EU level.

As a concrete measure stemming from the debate, EU leaders are expected to call for a horizontal Single Market Strategy by June 2025, an idea also raised by 15 Member States in [a non-paper in January 2024](#). Building on previous initiatives designed to strength the Single Market, the strategy would put special focus on SMEs. There also seems to be political momentum for introducing a '[European competitiveness deal](#)' to encourage growth, productivity and innovation in Europe. In addition, EU leaders may insist on the need to reduce strategic dependencies and increase investments in infrastructure/connectivity. In that context, access to capital, notably for SMEs, as well as concrete measures aimed at advancing the capital markets union (CMU) will be central points for discussion. Possible measures on the latter range from harmonising national insolvency frameworks and corporate tax law to designing new products to mobilise investment. Considering the role of digital transformation for European competitiveness, EU leaders are also expected to request a joint communication on ways of strengthening the EU's leadership in global digital affairs.

EU-Türkiye relations

In recent years, the European Council's discussions on Türkiye have been overshadowed by other external relations issues, e.g. the war in Ukraine. Previously, Türkiye was regularly on the European Council agenda in connection with, i) the migration crisis; ii) Syria; and iii) [illegal](#) activities in the eastern Mediterranean, as well as with the key issue of the Cyprus settlement. Reunification of the island of Cyprus was the [prominent subject](#) in the Cypriot President's [speech](#) to the European Parliament in June 2023. EU leaders will most likely reiterate their commitment to resolving the problem within the United Nations framework, in line with United Nations Security Council resolutions, and consistent with the EU's principles and *acquis*.

In June 2023, the European Council [requested](#) the High Representative and the Commission to submit a report on the state of play of EU-Türkiye relations. Based on this [report](#), presented in November 2023, EU leaders will hold a strategic debate on EU-Türkiye relations. [Reportedly](#), Germany wants work to be 'taken forward' on political, economic and trade relations with Türkiye, whilst Greece wants a balance between engaging with Türkiye and addressing Cyprus's concerns.

Ukraine

Following a wave of missile attacks on cities and infrastructure, EU leaders may discuss developments in Ukraine, and notably the need to supply Ukraine with, inter alia, anti-aircraft defence systems. The European Parliament expressed its support for President Zelenskyy's [reiterated requests](#), by [postponing](#) the discharge for the Council's 2022 budget, to [pressure Member States](#) to provide additional air defence systems. Moreover, considering the importance of sanctions against Russia in the EU's response to the invasion of Ukraine, EU leaders may discuss a recent [decision](#) by the Court of Justice of the EU annulling the inclusion of two Russian oligarchs on a list of individuals under sanctions, and its likely consequences. Member States can still appeal the Court's decision; whether or not to do so, could be part of EU leaders' discussion.