

# State of the Union address, European Parliament, 2023

## SUMMARY

The practice of European Commission presidents to deliver, each year in September, an EU State of the Union address, during a plenary session of the European Parliament, dates back to 2010. The address takes stock of the achievements of the past year and presents priorities for the year ahead. It is an important tool when it comes to the Commission's ex-ante accountability vis-à-vis Parliament and is also aimed at rendering the definition of priorities at EU level more transparent and at communicating them to the public. The event chimes with similar practices in national democracies. The United States, for instance, has a long-standing tradition of presidential State of the Union addresses. In contrast to the US constitution, the EU Treaties do not prescribe a State of the Union address; the EU version was established by the 2010 Framework Agreement on relations between Parliament and the Commission.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's fourth State of the Union address, scheduled for 13 September 2023, will be the last address in this legislative mandate, ahead of the 2024 European elections. The Commission President is expected to outline the main priorities and flagship initiatives for the year to come, building on the EU's successes and achievements of the past years. The address is to focus on 'A stronger and more resilient European Union' and is expected to address such issues as EU support for Ukraine, sanctions against Russia, the energy crisis, the green and digital transitions, as well protecting EU values, with particular focus on equality, inclusiveness and social fairness.

*This briefing further updates an [earlier one](#) from September 2016, originally written by Eva-Maria Poptcheva.*



## IN THIS BRIEFING

- State of the Union addresses around the world
- The EU State of the Union debate
- Previous State of the Union addresses to Parliament
- Ahead of the 2023 State of the Union debate



## State of the Union addresses around the world

Presidential State of the Union addresses are a feature in several federal states, in particular in the [United States](#), where the president gives a speech in the Capitol before a joint session of Congress, thus fulfilling the constitutional obligation to 'from time to time give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union' (Article II(3) of the [US Constitution](#)). President George Washington was the first to [address](#) the Congress in 1790, and the exact form of the speech has evolved over time. Whereas Washington established the precedent of delivering an annual State of the Union address, speaking before Congress, Thomas Jefferson preferred to deliver his [message](#) in writing. It was only in 1913 that the State of the Union [address](#) was delivered (by Woodrow Wilson) before a joint session of Congress; and Lyndon Johnson decided to move the [speech](#) from daytime to evening, to attract a larger audience.<sup>1</sup> With modern communication technology, the address has become a powerful rhetorical tool that is broadcast to a wide audience and is the object of intense media attention.

The State of the Union address, as part of the US political system of checks and balances, reports on current conditions in the US and sets the policy agenda for the upcoming legislative year.<sup>2</sup> This is all the more important in the US system of [separation of powers](#), characterised by the absence of a direct connection between the legislative and executive branches of the federal government, in which the president – as head of the executive – does not participate in the proceedings of Congress. In this context, commentators have argued that there are two ways in which the State of the Union address can affect legislation: either by influencing the actions of the legislators, who have a monopoly over legislative initiative, or by influencing the public first and thereby lawmakers.<sup>3</sup> The legislative success of proposals mentioned in the State of the Union address is seen as an indicator of the president's policy success in general.<sup>4</sup> Despite changes over time, scholars have identified three consistent rhetorical arguments that are put forward in all US presidential addresses: public meditations on values; assessments of information and issues; and policy recommendations.<sup>5</sup> Each year, the State of the Union address in the US is delivered in February; the most recent one was [delivered](#) by President Joe Biden on 7 February 2023. Following the president's address, there is an [opposition response](#), delivered by a member of Congress or governor from the opposition party.

However, State of the Union addresses can also be found in parliamentary systems (as opposed to systems based on the separation of powers), where the executive is dependent on the parliament and accountable to it. In fact, State of the Union addresses are rooted in 'speeches from the throne' that can be traced back to the 16th century. In the United Kingdom, for instance, the Monarch's Speech is given at the [State Opening](#) of Parliament and marks the start of a new parliamentary session. Although the monarch reads the speech, it is written by the government and outlines its policies and proposed legislation for the new parliamentary session. On top of the Monarch's Speech during the State Opening, British monarchs also deliver, less regularly, addresses to joint Houses of Parliament. During her reign, Queen Elizabeth II [delivered](#) six addresses to [both Houses](#) of Parliament, five of which were delivered in Westminster Hall. Following his accession, King Charles III delivered a brief [address](#) to the joint Houses of Parliament on 12 September 2022.

Similarly, in Canada, the '[Speech from the Throne](#)' marks the beginning of a parliamentary session and is normally delivered by the governor general<sup>6</sup> on the monarch's behalf. As with the US State of the Union address, the Throne Speech is an opportunity for the government to announce to a wide audience its view on the state of the country and to set the stage for forthcoming legislative proposals. In both the UK and Canada, the House of Commons votes on the speech following a debate. In the US, the opposition gives a formal response to the president's State of the Union address.

Addresses similar in form and substance can also be found in other parliamentary democracies. In [Spain](#) and Luxembourg,<sup>7</sup> the address is delivered by the prime minister, whereas in the [Netherlands](#), it is given by the monarch and is also known as the 'Speech from the Throne'. In Poland, the constitution explicitly authorises the president of the republic to deliver an address to one of the

chambers of parliament (*Sejm* or Senate) or to both chambers jointly (National Assembly), excluding, however, a debate on the address.<sup>8</sup> There is no rule limiting the president to giving only one address annually, and in practice such addresses are given whenever the president sees such a need.<sup>9</sup> They can touch on any internal or foreign policy issues that the president considers important.<sup>10</sup> These addresses are different from the routine speeches the president delivers to the parliament.<sup>11</sup> The most recent address of this kind was [delivered](#) on 11 March 2022.

## The EU State of the Union debate

### Origin

Unlike in the US, where they are a requirement of the Constitution, State of the Union addresses by the president of the European Commission are not prescribed by the EU Treaties. Rather, they were instigated by the 2010 [Framework Agreement](#) on relations between the European Parliament and the European Commission (adopted in the form of an interinstitutional agreement – 'the framework agreement') as part of the EU's [annual political and legislative programming](#). According to Article 5 of Annex 4 to the agreement, 'each year in the first part-session of September, a State of the Union debate will be held in which the President of the Commission shall deliver an address, taking stock of the current year and looking ahead to priorities for the following years'. The presence of a debate, rather than an opposition response, differentiates the EU and US models of a State of the Union.

Following the conclusion of the framework agreement, the Commission president at the time, José Manuel Barroso, delivered his [first State of the Union address](#) to the European Parliament on 7 September 2010, stating that 'from now on the State of the Union address will be the occasion when we will chart our work for the next 12 months'. The framework agreement also established regular consultations between Parliament and the Commission, as part of their 'special relationship', including regular meetings between the presidents of the two institutions, as well as between the president of the Commission, the vice-president for interinstitutional relations or the Commission College on the one side, and Parliament's Conference of Presidents and Conference of Committee Chairs on the other (Chapter III of the framework agreement). Whereas the first official State of the Union address to plenary by the president of the European Commission took place in 2010, Parliament had previously held State of the Union debates in the 1990s, during which Members of Parliament discussed major political priorities of the time such as enlargement, economic and monetary union, and food safety.

### Constitutional significance

#### Accountability and transparency

In form, the Commission president's State of the Union addresses to Parliament do resemble the State of the Union addresses of the US president to the US Congress, but with some important differences in substance deriving from the different systems of government. Like the State of the Union address by the US president, the Commission president's State of the Union address tends to be consensual, though not apolitical, in order to seek the broadest possible support for the Commission's work programme, which is presented one month after the State of the Union debate. However, unlike in the US, the State of the Union address by the president of the EU executive serves not only transparency and communication purposes but is also an exercise of political accountability to Parliament. This is due to the fact that, whereas in the US system of separation of powers, the president acquires legitimacy directly from the voters and is thus not politically accountable to Congress, the president of the European Commission is elected by the European Parliament, and the Commission as a body is responsible to Parliament ([Article 17\(7\) and \(8\) of the Treaty on European Union](#) – TEU).

The State of the Union address by the Commission president therefore constitutes an important instrument of ex-ante accountability, along with instruments of ex-post accountability such as

questions for oral or written answer ([Article 230\(2\) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#) – TFEU), committees of inquiry (Article 226 TFEU), budget discharge and, as a last resort, the motion of censure ([Article 234 TFEU](#)). The State of the Union address, however, is also aimed at rendering the definition of priorities at EU level more transparent, and at communicating those priorities to citizens. A debate in plenary is particularly suitable in this respect. It has been pointed out in the literature that the function of the annual work programme is, in fact, to 'further detail' the 'priorities and objectives' set out in the State of the Union address, and that the work programme 'identifies concrete actions of either a legislative or non-legislative nature that translate those priorities and objectives into operational terms'.<sup>12</sup>

The [Commission work programme](#) sets annual priorities and outlines legislative initiatives to be submitted in relevant policy areas by the Commission. The timetable for its adoption is not applied in parliamentary **election years**, which is why there was no State of the Union address by either Jean-Claude Juncker or Ursula von der Leyen in 2019.

The debates following the State of the Union address are also an opportunity for Parliament to shape, together with the Commission and Council, the EU's political and legislative agenda, giving Parliament the possibility to participate actively in political programming.<sup>13</sup> This adds to the quality of the executive's political accountability and ties in with attempts to remedy perceived flaws in the democratic legitimacy of the EU decision-making process. In this sense, the State of the Union address and the ensuing debate in Parliament seek to render the process of forming EU political priorities more transparent and indeed more political, making them subject to a parliamentary debate and interinstitutional negotiation – as prescribed in Article 17(1) TEU – as opposed to mere technocratic or political yet opaque bargaining. In response to this criticism, the framework agreement made important changes to the way the Commission adopts its work programme, ensuring that the process begins with discussions between the institutions on the EU's political priorities. This intense interinstitutional dialogue was further deepened by the [Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-making](#) adopted in April 2016 (see below).

Indeed, the State of the Union debates are now part of the broader context of increasing **politicisation** of the EU decision-making process through a stronger political link between Parliament and the Commission. The Lisbon Treaty strengthened the relationship between the Commission and Parliament, first of all through the [election of the Commission president](#) by Parliament, rather than 'appointment', as was previously the case, after nomination by the European Council and taking the results of the elections to the European Parliament into account (Article 17(7) TEU). The election of the president of the European Commission by Parliament, suggesting a political choice, is a major step in the further parliamentarisation of the EU democratic system. Furthermore, the [Spitzenkandidaten process](#) in the 2014 and 2019 European elections contributed to building a stronger political link between Parliament and the Commission. This marks yet another step in the direction of a parliamentary governance system, making the Commission more politically accountable and thus increasing democratic legitimacy.<sup>14</sup> The 2015 State of the Union [address](#) by the president of the European Commission therefore for the first time blended in with a broader process of political agenda-setting and an ex-ante accountability exercise, begun during the election year.

## European Commission reporting obligations

The Commission is tasked with several [duties to report](#) to Parliament and Council, in order to ensure both political accountability and transparency for citizens. According to [Article 14\(1\) TEU, second sentence](#), the European Parliament exercises functions of political control and consultation. Furthermore, the Commission has to report, for instance, on EU citizenship ([Article 25 TFEU](#)), on the results of multilateral fiscal and economic surveillance ([Article 121\(5\) TFEU](#)), and on the fight against fraud ([Article 325\(5\) TFEU](#)). The Commission also issues an annual activity report ([Article 249\(2\) TFEU](#)), the draft of which is discussed at the same time as its draft annual work programme, enhancing Parliament's involvement in political programming as opposed to mere ex-post control, as the annual activity report is adopted only in February of the subsequent year.

## State of the Union address and institutional challenges

The formal requirement for State of the Union addresses was set in 2010, at a time (just after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty) when the roles of the Commission and of Parliament in the EU institutional set-up were undergoing important changes. The extension of the ordinary legislative procedure to the vast majority of EU policy fields led to a more direct relationship between Parliament and Council, relegating the Commission, in the opinion of many, to the position of a mere 'honest broker' in the institutional triangle.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the Commission's executive power, although strengthened vis-à-vis the Council – which lost executive tasks except in the field of the EU's common foreign and security policy (Articles 24 and 26 TEU) – was diluted during the economic and financial crisis by major initiatives authored by the European Council.<sup>16</sup> The European Commission's monopoly on legislative initiative has thus also been weakened, with political initiatives during the financial crisis often coming from the [European Council](#), which has increasingly used its conclusions to 'invite' the Commission to propose specific measures.<sup>17</sup> The creation of the semi-permanent presidency of the European Council with the Lisbon Treaty also emerged as a further challenge to the role of the Commission and its president in the EU institutional framework. It is notable that the State of the Union address is not delivered, for instance, by the president of the European Council. The address has therefore re-affirmed to a certain extent the central role of the European Commission in political and legislative agenda-setting, as the main EU executive body.

### Presidentialisation versus collegiality in the European Commission

The State of the Union address is delivered by the Commission president because of the president's representative function. However, it is also a further sign of the increasing 'presidentialisation' of the European Commission that began with the Treaty of Nice, giving preference to coherence and efficiency over collegiality in Commission decision-making processes. The Commission president is no longer first among equals, but rather lays down the guidelines within which the Commission is to work ([Article 17\(6\) TEU](#)), assigns portfolios to each of the Commissioners and can reallocate responsibilities among them ([Article 248 TFEU](#)). Furthermore, Commissioners 'shall carry out the duties devolved upon them by the President under his authority' (Article 248 TFEU) in order to ensure the efficient and coherent functioning of the Commission. In this sense, the [presidentialisation of the Commission](#) is said to have contributed significantly to its effectiveness and political accountability, but is criticised by some commentators as being detrimental to the defence of the 'general interest' for which the collegiality principle is said to be a guarantee.<sup>18</sup> The president of the Commission's speech on the State of the Union before the European Parliament is, therefore, together with the political guidelines, both an additional instrument and a reflection of political leadership, while also strengthening the president's 'inner executive powers' in terms of enhanced presidential authority.<sup>19</sup>

### Role in annual legislative programming

The State of the Union debate is an important milestone in the annual political cycle of [legislative programming](#), and part of the timetable for the adoption of the annual Commission work programme (CWP), as set out in Annex 4 to the 2010 framework agreement. It envisages a structured dialogue between the Commission and the corresponding parliamentary committees during the first half of a given year on the implementation of the CWP for that year and on the preparation of the future CWP. On the basis of the outcome of that dialogue, the parliamentary committees report to the Conference of Committee Chairs. In parallel, the Conference of Committee Chairs holds a regular exchange of views with the vice-president of the Commission responsible for interinstitutional relations.

On the basis of this summary report by the Conference of Presidents on the implementation of the previous CWP, Parliament adopts a resolution ([Rule 38, European Parliament Rules of Procedure](#)) at the July part-session, outlining its position and including particular requests based on legislative initiative reports. At the September part-session each year, the president of the Commission then



delivers the State of the Union address to Parliament, taking stock of the current year and looking ahead to priorities for the next year – which should become part of the CWP for that period. The State of the Union debate is launched with an address by Parliament's president, with the Council president also outlining the Council priorities. The political groups in Parliament then present their positions. Following the State of the Union debate, Parliament continues its dialogue with the commissioners responsible for the various policy areas, to ensure that Parliament's priorities are duly considered before the CWP is adopted by the Commission. The Commission president then presents the CWP either to the Conference of Presidents or to Parliament in plenary in October.

The 2016 [Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-making](#) contains further commitments regarding the dialogue between the Commission, Parliament and Council, both before and after the adoption of the annual work programme. This dialogue includes the early exchanges of views described above and the 'letter of intent' from the president of the Commission and the vice-president responsible for interinstitutional relations on issues of major political importance for the following year and on intended withdrawals of Commission proposals. Furthermore, following the debate on the State of the Union and before the adoption of the CWP, Parliament and Council hold an exchange of views with the Commission on the basis of the letter of intent. The Commission has committed to take due account of the views expressed by the Parliament and the Council at each stage of the dialogue, including their requests for initiatives. On the basis of the CWP, Parliament, the Commission and the Council exchange views on initiatives for the coming year and agree on a joint declaration on annual interinstitutional programming, including items of major political importance that should receive priority treatment in the legislative process.

## Previous State of the Union addresses to Parliament

### José Manuel Barroso (2010-2013)

As was mentioned above, the [first State of the Union address](#) was delivered by Commission President José Manuel Barroso. In total, he delivered four State of the Union addresses between 2010 and 2013, during his second term as Commission president. In a period marked by the economic and financial crisis in the EU, his addresses focused to a great extent on economic issues. Barroso's most ambitious State of the Union address was that of [2012](#), when he argued for Treaty change to create a 'federation of states', not as a 'superstate', but to 'tackle our common problems, through the sharing of sovereignty in a way that each country and each citizen are better equipped to control their own destiny'.

### Jean-Claude Juncker (2015-2018)

The tradition of delivering State of the Union addresses, initiated by José Manuel Barroso, was continued by his successor, Jean-Claude Juncker. The latter delivered his [first address on the State of the Union](#) in 2015. The political context included the Greek debt crisis, the asylum and immigration crisis and the situation in Ukraine. Juncker called for common EU solutions and for more solidarity between Member States. Despite the more strategic, political tone of his address, Juncker referred to several concrete legislative proposals, including the Commission proposal for the relocation of a further 120 000 asylum-seekers from Member States on the external EU borders particularly hit by the refugee crisis, after the Commission had previously tabled a proposal for 40 000 relocations. He also called for a stronger Frontex, to be developed into a fully operational European border and coast guard. Both proposals were subsequently adopted. On the euro area and economic governance, he pleaded for investment in the single market to generate more jobs and economic growth and to complete economic and monetary union.

In his [second State of the Union address](#), delivered in 2016 and entitled 'Towards a better Europe: A Europe that protects, empowers, and defends', Juncker called for strong investment in EU youth, jobseekers, and start-ups, an ambitious investment plan for Africa, free WiFi for every European

village and city by 2020, fair pay for journalists, publishers and authors, wherever content is made and shared, as well as stronger defence of EU borders, with a new European border and coast guard.

Juncker's [third State of the Union address, of 2017](#), was accompanied by a [letter of intent](#) to the President of the European Parliament and the Prime Minister of Estonia (the Member State then holding the Council presidency), as well as a [roadmap for a more united, stronger and more democratic Union](#). In this address, Juncker called for a stronger European trade agenda, promising that the 'European Parliament will have the final say on all trade agreements' and that Members 'must be kept fully informed from day one of the negotiations'; a new industrial policy strategy that should 'help our industries stay or become the world leader in innovation, digitisation and decarbonisation'; EU leadership in combating climate change; better protection of EU citizens in the digital age, including against cyber-attacks that can threaten European democracies; a continued focus on migration policy and better protection of EU borders.

Juncker's [fourth and final State of the Union address](#) was delivered in 2018. It was also accompanied by a [letter of intent](#) to the President of the European Parliament and the Prime Minister of Austria (the Member State then holding the Council Presidency). The 2018 address was [published](#) with the official title 'The hour of European sovereignty'. Juncker stated that: 'Geopolitics teaches us that the time has come for European sovereignty, for Europe to take its destiny into its own hands. [...] This belief that "united we stand taller" is the very essence of what it means to be part of the European Union [...] Sharing sovereignty – when and where needed – makes each of our nation states stronger'. Specific points raised in the 2018 address included underpinning continued growth of the EU economy and recovery from the crisis, defending the Paris Agreement and the goals to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, making the EU a global player in international policy, with specific mention of the European Defence Fund and permanent structured cooperation in defence (PESCO), and completion of the security union and protecting the rule of law in the Member States.

## Ursula von der Leyen's first State of the Union address (2020)

Ursula von der Leyen is the third Commission president to deliver annual State of the Union addresses. Her [first State of the Union address](#), delivered on 16 September 2020, was deeply marked by the coronavirus pandemic. In this context, von der Leyen focused on her vision of the EU emerging stronger from the pandemic and leading the way towards a 'new vitality'. In a nutshell, von der Leyen's 2020 address focused on six main subject-matter areas:

- **Health policy:** building a stronger [European health union](#), making the EU resilient in the face of the coronavirus pandemic and other potential threats; at that time, she highlighted the importance of developing safe and widely accessible vaccines against the coronavirus;
- **Environmental policy:** proposing a new strategy for the future of the Schengen area; implementing the [European Green Deal](#), in particular by making Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, and in the meantime by cutting emissions by as much as 55 % by 2030, i.e. within a decade; channelling 37 % of [Next Generation EU](#) funds towards the green transition in Europe, including the development of [European hydrogen valleys](#);
- **Economic policy:** making the most of the [EU single market](#), in particular by effectively enforcing the four freedoms and lifting restrictions on the free movement occasioned by the pandemic; meanwhile shaping the 2020s as the [EU's digital decade](#), with a focus on the European data cloud, artificial intelligence, and infrastructure; setting up a [New European Bauhaus](#) – a co-creation space where architects, artists, students, engineers and designers could work together as part of Next Generation EU;
- **Social policy:** protecting the livelihoods and health of EU citizens, including through a framework for [EU-wide minimal wages](#);
- **Foreign policy:** responding more assertively to global events and deepening the EU's relations with its neighbours and global partners; revitalising and reforming the

[multilateral system of international relations](#); taking a new approach to migration – the [new pact on migration and asylum](#);

- **EU values:** continuing to protect [EU values](#), which – as the Commission President emphasised – 'are not for sale'.

## Ursula von der Leyen's second State of the Union address (2021)

Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's [second State of the Union address](#), delivered in September 2021, was entitled 'Strengthening the soul of our Union' and focused on the challenges posed to European society and economy by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the way to recover from the ensuing crisis. The main issues highlighted in von der Leyen's 2021 State of the Union address included:

- **combating the [coronavirus pandemic in the EU and beyond](#)**, with an emphasis on the EU's role in the vaccination programme, but also in the introduction and application of the [EU digital COVID certificate](#), which helped restore the free movement of persons in the EU;
- the **Next Generation EU spending programme**, which von der Leyen described as 'invest[ing] in both short-term recovery and long-term prosperity';
- the future [European chips act](#), which will help produce semi-conductors in the EU;
- the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, including the recently adopted [European care strategy](#);
- the [ALMA programme](#), which will enable young people to find **temporary employment** in other Member States;
- the **European Green Deal**, with particular focus on the proposed [social climate fund](#);
- **questions of foreign policy**, including the [Afghan support package](#), progress on implementing the [European defence union](#), the new [Indo-Pacific strategy](#), as well as a series of planned '[global gateway](#)' [partnerships](#) to establish fibre optic internet connections with other regions of the world;
- the [new pact on migration and asylum](#), calling on Member States and the European Parliament to agree on the Commission's proposals and speed up the process to adopt a pact that von der Leyen described as 'balanced and humane';
- **EU values, including the rule of law**, with particular reference to the [annual rule of law reports](#) as well as [judgments of the European Court of Justice on judicial independence](#), which, as the Commission President recalled, are binding on all Member States; von der Leyen further committed to ensuring that they are indeed respected across the EU;
- **media freedom**, with an emphasis on the [media freedom act](#) (expected to be adopted before the next European elections);
- the **fight against corruption**, especially as regards [protecting the EU budget](#).

## Ursula von der Leyen's third State of the Union address (2022)

On 14 September 2022, Ursula von der Leyen delivered her [third State of the Union address](#) to the European Parliament, entitled 'A Union that stands strong together', in which she focused on [EU support for Ukraine](#), overcoming Europe's dependency on Russian energy sources ([REPowerEU](#) programme), and following up on the Commission's flagship initiatives, as adjusted following the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, President von der Leyen emphasised the importance of the [Next Generation EU](#) spending programme, noting that the EU has succeeded in having a very fast recovery following the pandemic-linked depression. Concerning the European Green Deal, she highlighted the [European hydrogen bank](#) project, as well as the EU position on [biodiversity](#) to be pursued during the UN Conference on Biodiversity in Montréal. In the area of economic policies, von der Leyen focused on new ideas for [economic governance](#), including more flexibility for sovereign [debt reduction](#), opening space for [strategic investment](#), ensuring confidence of financial



markets, improving the EU's business environment, including the [SME relief package](#), and simplification of tax rules ([BEFIT](#)), the revision of the [Late Payments Directive](#), and finally plans to further support European IT industry, announcing the [critical raw materials act](#) to reduce dependency on China, which will complement the [European chips act](#). As regards foreign policy, the Commission President touched upon plans for further [EU enlargement](#), specifically mentioning the [Western Balkans](#), Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, as well as highlighting the launch of the [European Political Community](#). She also mentioned new trade agreements with [Chile](#), [Mexico](#), and [New Zealand](#). Lastly, as regards the protection of EU values, von der Leyen announced the '[defence of democracy](#)' package, reaffirmed her Commission's insistence on enforcing [judicial independence](#) in the Member States, including through the use of the [conditionality mechanism](#), as well as the enhancement of [EU anti-corruption policy](#).

Prior to the State of the Union address, in July 2022, the Commission had published a 64-page document entitled [State of the Union 2022: Achievements](#), which provided the background to the State of the Union address and debate. The address was accompanied by a [letter of intent](#), signed by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič, addressed to the president of the European Parliament and to the presidency of the Council. The letter of intent outlined the main initiatives within the six priorities of the von der Leyen Commission, with initiatives directly linked to the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#) marked with an asterisk. A total of 29 initiatives (13 of which linked to the Conference on the Future of Europe) were outlined in the letter of intent. The Commission is therefore committed to implementing as much as possible the final proposals of the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#) and [keeps track](#) of this process.

## Ahead of the 2023 State of the Union debate

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's fourth State of the Union address, [scheduled](#) for 13 September 2023, will be the **last address during the present political cycle**, ahead of the [next European elections](#), scheduled for 6-9 June 2024. Speaking before Parliament in its plenary session in Strasbourg,<sup>20</sup> the Commission President is expected to outline the main priorities and flagship initiatives for the year to come, building on the [achievements](#) of the past years, in particular those which took place since the previous State of the Union address. The address is to focus on the theme of '**A stronger and more resilient European Union**' and is expected to address such issues as EU support for Ukraine, sanctions against Russia, the energy crisis, the green and digital transitions, as well protecting EU values, with particular focus on equality, inclusiveness and social fairness.

### Context: Overview of main achievements on the Commission's six priorities

In addition, President von der Leyen is likely to recall the context in which her last State of the Union address is delivered, taking stock of the Commission's achievements as regards the six priorities of her presidency, which may include some of the following:

**1. European Green Deal.** Following the adoption of the [European Climate Law](#) in 2021, the process for setting a [2040 climate target](#) was launched in March 2023. During 2023, the Commission has been taking initiatives to boost the EU industry's global competitiveness in the transition to climate neutrality through its [Green Deal industrial plan](#). By September 2023, most of the legislative files in the '[fit for 55](#)' package have been agreed by the co-legislators. Most recently, the Commission tabled a proposed regulation on [carbon removal certification](#) in November 2022, and on revised [CO2 standards for new trucks and buses](#) in February 2023, as well as presenting the '[greening freight transport](#)' package in July 2023. The Commission intends to launch an [EU hydrogen bank](#) by the end of 2023, and plans a €800 million pilot auction for hydrogen producers in autumn 2023. The EU has been using the crisis recovery instruments to advance climate action, by requiring Member States to spend 37 % of EU funding under the [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#) (RRF) on climate investment and reforms.

**2. A Europe fit for the digital age.** By September 2023, the European Commission has presented the majority of its initiatives planned under this priority, with many legal acts already adopted, such as the [Digital Services Act](#), the [Digital Markets Act](#) and the [Cybersecurity Directive](#). On others, such as the [chips act](#), the [data act](#) and the proposal for a [cybersecurity regulation for EU institutions](#), the co-legislators have found political agreement. There has been progress in legislative deliberations on several other proposals, including on the [artificial intelligence act](#), on a [revision of the eIDAS Regulation](#) and on a [platform work directive](#). [New proposals](#) are still expected by the end of 2023, such as the new radio spectrum policy programme.

**3. An economy that works for people.** On 26 April 2023, the European Commission put forward a package for a [reform of the EU economic governance](#) framework, comprising three legislative proposals. On 20 June 2023, the Commission proposed a [mid-term review](#) of the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework (MFF), which includes a dedicated [facility](#) to provide financial support to Ukraine up to 2027, a reinforcement of the EU budget to address internal and external dimensions of migration, a [strategic technologies for Europe platform](#) (STEP) to promote the EU's long-term competitiveness, and a mechanism to address the higher Next Generation EU funding costs due to the surge in interest rates. On 28 June 2023, the Commission put forward a [single currency package](#) of two legislative proposals to support the use of cash and to introduce a framework for a [digital euro](#). In June 2023, the co-legislators reached [provisional agreement](#) on a reform of EU banking law. In April 2023, the Commission tabled a proposal to [reform EU bank crisis management](#), aiming to extend the scope of the existing regulation to smaller banks and ensure effective utilisation of private funds in resolution. Provisional deals were also reached on proposals concerning the [capital markets union](#), including legislation on [better access](#) to market data and robust EU market infrastructures, and on [investment funds](#). In May 2023, the Commission put forward a [retail investment strategy](#), consisting of a package of proposed new rules to protect and empower retail investors. In June 2023, it made a proposal on a framework for financial data access (also known as [open finance](#)), a proposal to amend and [modernise the current Payment Services Directive](#) and a proposal to establish a [payment services regulation](#) (PSR). On 24 May 2023, the Commission put forward a proposal for a Council decision on [guidelines](#) for the employment policies of Member States; and in June 2023, a proposal for a Council [recommendation](#) on developing social economy framework conditions. On 8 December 2022, the Commission presented the 'value added tax (VAT) in the digital age' [package](#), and in May 2023, put forward proposals for a comprehensive [reform of the EU customs union](#).

**4. A stronger Europe in the world.** Up to now, the EU has adopted a total of 11 packages of sanctions against Russia, with the [10th package](#) adopted in February 2023, and an [11th package](#) in July 2023. That package will allow the EU to restrict the sale, supply, transfer or export of specified sanctioned goods and technology to certain third countries whose jurisdictions are considered to be at continued and particularly high risk of circumvention of the existing sanctions. The EU has continually provided support to Ukraine. Since November 2022, an [EU military assistance mission](#) to Ukraine has been in place, planned for a two-year period. The EU has [allocated](#) €685 million from the EU budget to provide humanitarian support to Ukraine and Ukrainians, on top of the activation of the [temporary protection mechanism](#) that provides Ukrainian refugees with access to education, medical care and work in EU Member States, as well as [temporary trade liberalisation](#) under the EU/Ukraine Association Agreement. In addition, on 17 January 2023, the European Commission [disbursed](#) €3 billion to Ukraine as the first tranche of an €18 billion support package for 2023, the EU's largest-ever macro-financial assistance (MFA) package for a third country. Some €10.5 billion of this 'MFA+' package has already been paid out; the 6th tranche worth €1.5 billion was [disbursed](#) on 25 July 2023. In addition, in June 2023, the Commission [proposed](#) to create a new instrument, the Ukraine Facility, to provide predictable financial support for Ukraine over the 2024-2027 period. As of July 2023, together with the resources made available to help Member States, the overall support to Ukraine and Ukrainians [amounted](#) to €76 billion. Following the Commission's positive [opinions](#), on 23 June 2022, EU leaders [decided](#) to grant Ukraine and Moldova candidate country status, and

Georgia pre-candidate country status. On 15 December 2022, EU leaders decided to grant [candidate country status](#) to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**5. Promoting our European way of life.** The main achievements in this include the application of the 2001 [Temporary Protection Directive](#) for the first time (in March 2023, the Commission [adopted](#) a [communication](#) on the Temporary Protection Directive, taking stock of EU action in the year since the directive was activated, stating that around 4 million people were granted protection in the EU). Progress has accelerated on some major initiatives under the [new pact on migration and asylum](#), proposed by the Commission in September 2020. In April 2023, the European Parliament adopted its position on the two legislative proposals that are part of the package of measures on [legal migration](#) tabled in April 2022: the revision of the [Long-term Residents Directive](#) and the [Single Permit Directive](#). In the area of the [EU security union](#), the [Directive on the resilience of critical entities](#) entered into force in January 2023, as did the revised Directive on security of network and information systems ([NIS2](#)). The EU is focused on enhancing the EU's cybersecurity through a series of other [initiatives](#). In June 2023, Parliament agreed its positions on the [proposal for a regulation](#) on automated data exchange for police cooperation (Prüm II) and on the revision of the [Directive on Asset Recovery and Confiscation](#). Work continues on the 2021 [package of proposals](#) to strengthen the EU's [anti-money-laundering and countering the financing of terrorism](#) rules. In the area of the [European health union](#), the EU's [health security](#) framework was strengthened by the European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority ([HERA](#)), reinforced mandates for the European Medicines Agency ([EMA](#)) and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control ([ECDC](#)), and the [Regulation on serious cross-border threats to health](#).

**6. A new push for European democracy.** Of the three initiatives announced under this priority in the 2023 [Commission work programme](#), only one (the [anti-corruption package](#)) was delivered by July 2023. The other two initiatives – [protection of EU democratic sphere](#) from covert foreign influence and the [European disability card](#) – are still in the making, with the [latter](#) freshly presented by the Commission on 6 September. On 3 May 2023, the Commission, in cooperation with the High Representative/Vice-President of the Commission, issued a [joint communication](#), presenting a new strategy against corruption. On that same date, the Commission [adopted](#) a [proposal for a directive](#) laying down minimum standards for combating corruption. On 8 June 2023, the European Commission issued the long-awaited [proposal](#) for an interinstitutional ethics body (IEB), to be set up by way of an interinstitutional agreement. On 5 April 2023, the Commission tabled a [proposal](#) for a regulation on the transfer of proceedings in criminal matters to establish common rules when a criminal proceeding initiated in one Member State is transferred to another Member State. In July 2023, the Commission published its [fourth rule of law report](#) addressing the state of play of judicial independence, the fight against corruption, media pluralism, and checks and balances in each Member State. The Commission formulated [new recommendations](#) to each Member State, analysing the progress made with regard to the implementation of its [2022 recommendations](#), as well as formulating new tasks.

## MAIN REFERENCES

Bassot É., [Ten issues to watch in 2023](#), EPRS, European Parliament, January 2023.

Bassot É., [The six policy priorities of the von der Leyen Commission: State of play in spring 2023](#), EPRS, European Parliament, March 2023.

Del Monte M., [The US President's State of the Union Address](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 2015.

Maňko R., [Annual legislative planning in the EU](#), EPRS, European Parliament, February 2023

[Future Shocks 2023: Anticipating and weathering the next storms](#), EPRS with Directorates-General for Internal Policies (IPOL) and External Policies (EXPO), European Parliament, July 2023.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> M. Del Monte, [The US President's State of the Union Address](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 2015, p. 2.
- <sup>2</sup> C. Shogan, [The President's State of the Union Address: tradition, function, and policy implications](#), January 2015.
- <sup>3</sup> S. Kernell, *Going Public: New strategies for presidential leadership*, D.C: CQ Press, 1986, as cited in J. Cummins, '[State of the Union Address and the President's legislative success](#)', *Congress & the Presidency*, Vol. 37(2), 2010, p. 180.
- <sup>4</sup> J. Cummins, [State of the Union Address and the President's legislative success](#), p. 189.
- <sup>5</sup> M. Del Monte, [The US President's State of the Union Address](#), p. 2.
- <sup>6</sup> The [governor general](#) represents the monarch in Canada and has state representative functions.
- <sup>7</sup> Articles 96-97 of the [Rules of Procedure of the Chamber of Deputies](#) of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.
- <sup>8</sup> Article 140 of the [Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997](#).
- <sup>9</sup> See P. Kuczma, [Oredzia prezydenta](#) [The President's Addresses], *Zeszyty Naukowe DWSPiT. Studia z Nauk Społecznych*, 2015, No 8, pp. 189-206.
- <sup>10</sup> W. Skrzydło, *Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej: Komentarz*, 7th ed., LEX, 2013.
- <sup>11</sup> P. Czarny, 'Commentary to Article 140', in: P. Tuleja (ed.), *Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej: Komentarz*, 2nd ed., LEX, 2021.
- <sup>12</sup> P.J. Lowenthal, '[Article 17 TEU](#)', in: M. Kellerbauer, M. Klamert and J. Tomkin (eds.), *The EU Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights*, OUP, 2019, p. 162.
- <sup>13</sup> P.F. Nemitz, 'Commentary to Article 249 TFEU, para. 16', *EU-Kommentar*, J. Schwarze (edit.), Nomos, 2012.
- <sup>14</sup> A. Kocharov, '[This time it's different? Constitutional Complexities of the Spitzenkandidaten Arrangement](#)', *Berliner Online-Beiträge zum Europarecht*, No 95, 2014; R. Streinz, C. Ohler, C. Herrmann and T. Kruis, *Der Vertrag von Lissabon zur Reform der EU*, C.H. Beck, 2010, p. 69.
- <sup>15</sup> P. Ponzano, C. Hermanin and D. Corona, [The Power of Initiative of the European Commission: A Progressive Erosion?](#), *Notre Europe*, 2012, p. 43.
- <sup>16</sup> D. Allerkamp, Who sets the agenda? How the European Council and the team presidencies are undermining the Commission's prerogative, ECPR Standing Group on the European Union, June 2010; See also C. Fasone, '[European economic governance and parliamentary representation: What place for the European Parliament?](#)', *European Law Journal*, Vol. 20(2), 2014, pp. 164-185.
- <sup>17</sup> D. Dinan, [Relations between the European Council and the European Parliament](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 2018, pp. 37-40; J. R. Vanden Broucke, E.-M. Poptcheva and S. de Finance, [The European Council and its President](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 2015, p. 3; E. Lenski, in: H. von der Groeben, J. Schwarze and A. Hatje (eds.), *Europäisches Unionsrecht*, 7th ed., C.H. Beck, 2015, commentary to Article 15, para. 6.
- <sup>18</sup> H. Kassim et al., *The European Commission of the twenty-first century*, 2013, p. 176.
- <sup>19</sup> A. Wille, *The normalization of the European Commission: Politics and bureaucracy in the EU executive*, 2013, pp. 61-62.
- <sup>20</sup> The 2023 State of the Union address will be webstreamed by the EP Multimedia Centre, including interpretation in [International Sign Language](#).

## DISCLAIMER AND COPYRIGHT

This document is prepared for, and addressed to, the Members and staff of the European Parliament as background material to assist them in their parliamentary work. The content of the document is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of the Parliament.

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.

© European Union, 2023.

Photo credits: © European Union 2022 - Source : EP / Philippe Buissin

[eprs@ep.europa.eu](mailto:eprs@ep.europa.eu) (contact)

[www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu](http://www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu) (intranet)

[www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank) (internet)

<http://epthinktank.eu> (blog)