The six policy priorities of the von der Leyen Commission

State of play in autumn 2023
This EPRS paper analyses progress made in carrying through the policy agenda set by Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, and her College of Commissioners when they took office in December 2019. It looks in particular at the state of play with respect to delivery of the agenda’s six key priorities, as we enter the final months running up to the 2024 European elections.

The von der Leyen Commission – either on taking office or more recently – has announced a total of 610 planned initiatives. In concrete terms, EPRS finds that more than two thirds (420) have now been submitted and, for those which are legislative proposals, the co-legislators have started work. Of the 420, more than half (221) have already been adopted by the co-legislators, or, for the non-legislative initiatives (such as strategies, action plans and other communications, amounting to nearly one fifth of the total), by the Commission itself. The vast majority of the remainder are either close to adoption (26) or proceeding normally through the legislative process (141). On the other hand, almost one sixth are moving slowly or are blocked (32). While the Commission’s first priority – the European Green Deal – ranks highest in terms of the number of initiatives planned (154), the second, fourth and fifth priorities – ‘A Europe fit for the digital age’, ‘A stronger Europe in the world’, and ‘Promoting our European way of life’ – have higher rates of initiatives actually adopted so far (more than half for the second and fifth, almost three quarters for the fourth, largely due, for the latter, to its less legislative nature).

Further details of the state of play on the EU legislative proposals tabled by the Commission, including all those mentioned in this paper, can be found on the European Parliament’s ‘Legislative Train Schedule’ website, developed by EPRS.

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Introduction

The September 2023 state of the Union address will be the last one of this Parliamentary term. The European institutions are entering the final phase of the current five-year political and institutional cycle. With the European elections scheduled for 6-9 June 2024, this European Parliament will hold its final plenary session in April. These coming months will therefore be crucial for the Commission to deliver on its commitments and for the Parliament, together with the Council of the European Union, to adopt legislation.

A fair assessment of the Commission’s delivery on its commitments has to start with the recognition that this mandate has been marked by two challenges – literally – unknown to this generation in Europe. The first such challenge was the coronavirus pandemic. COVID-19 emerged as the Commission was just beginning its mandate; the pandemic was declared within its first 100 days. The second was Russia’s war on Ukraine. The effects of this ‘tectonic shift in European history’, to use the words of the Versailles Declaration, are manifold and far from over.

One of the main findings of this twice yearly analysis is that, over recent years, despite the challenges, the European institutions have delivered steadily: the European Commission has reacted with proposals and initiatives to address events as they unfold while at the same time continuing to deliver on its wider programme and commitments. The European Parliament too has continued to debate, negotiate and adopt legislation and budget, as has the other co-legislator, the Council.

That the rate of progress has remained, for a further half year, largely unchanged is to the credit of the European institutions: the Commission in tabling the initiatives, and the European Parliament and Council for their work on the legislative proposals, through to adoption. At a time when building compromise and reaching majorities is a challenge, as seen in the Member States of the European Union (EU) as well as in other democracies across the globe, and when democracy itself is challenged in too many places, this is an achievement worth noting, especially as the months tick down to the next European elections.

It is noteworthy that, on some parts of the political agenda, the challenges themselves have provided additional reasons to support initiatives and accelerate reform. This has been the case for instance for the European Green Deal. This summer, Europeans have once again experienced first hand, and even more so than in previous years, what global warming means in practice, from fires in Greece, Cyprus and Portugal to the flooding in Austria, Croatia and Czechia. July was the hottest month ever recorded on our planet, according to the European Union’s climate observatory, Copernicus. The wildfires raging in Greece are the biggest ever recorded in the European Union, according to the European Commission. This succession of extreme climate events over the summer has continued to show the crucial importance of delivering on the agreed targets, at both European and international levels. In the European Union, it is the role of the co-legislators to represent and bring on board all parts of society in reaching these objectives.

On the world stage too, international events have propelled this Commission’s priority of ‘a stronger Europe in the world’ to a new dimension, as illustrated by the photograph on the cover, which pictures the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, addressing the European Parliament plenary session on geopolitical issues – in this instance on the need for a coherent strategy for EU-China relations.

This analysis monitors all six of the Commission’s priorities. It combines a two-page presentation of each priority and a synthesis infographic (page 3) illustrating the degree of progress – both overall and under each of the six priorities.

Our analysis finds that, across the six priorities, more than one third of the initiatives announced have been finally adopted, and almost a further third are proceeding normally through the
The adoption process varies from one proposal to another. The past few months have seen adoption in record time of the proposal for a regulation setting up an act in support of ammunition production (ASAP). Tabled by the Commission on 3 May 2023, it was signed on 20 July and published on 25 July. Other procedures can take years, and some 5% of the total presented by the Commission are proceeding slowly or blocked. Nine months ahead of the European elections, with just seven to go until the last plenary session of this Parliament, it is fair to assume that, with three in ten initiatives announced still to be submitted, and only a third of the announcements brought to final adoption in the past four years, not all the initiatives announced by the Commission will be tabled in time to be discussed and agreed by the co-legislators, and to come into law, before the end of this term.

According to this EPRS analysis, of the over 600 initiatives announced (610), more than two thirds (69%, 420) have now been submitted and, in the case of the legislative proposals, the co-legislators have started work. It is worth noting that almost one in five of the Commission’s initiatives are non-legislative, for instance strategies, action plans and other communications. Of the 420 initiatives that have been submitted, just over half (53%) have already been adopted (221) – by the legislators in the case of the legislative proposals, or simply by the Commission in the case of the non-legislative initiatives – while the vast majority of the other half are either proceeding normally through the legislative process (141, or 71%) or are close to adoption (26, or 13%). Conversely, a certain number are proceeding very slowly or are currently blocked (32, or 16%).

With a focus on each of the six policy priorities, the European Green Deal ranks highest in terms of the number of initiatives planned (154). The executive has tabled almost two thirds of them (or 62%), half of the latter (51%) being adopted by the co-legislators. The third priority, ‘An economy that works for people’, comes next (128), with more initiatives tabled (72%) but less than half of the latter have been adopted (46%). The digital priority totals 105 initiatives planned, 55% of which have already been submitted (58), and 31 adopted (53% of the total). For ‘A stronger Europe in the world’, an area with relatively few legislative initiatives by definition, and in contrast to the majority of the Commission’s priorities, more than eight out of ten (82%) initiatives have already been tabled (see Section 4) and three in five adopted. A fair amount of work remains to be done for the other priorities: 40% of the proposals have still to be submitted for ‘A Europe fit for the digital age’, 19% for ‘Promoting our European way of life’ and 28% for ‘A new push for democracy’ (see Sections 2, 5 and 6). This latter priority comes lowest in terms of number of initiatives announced (60).

The next edition of this publication, scheduled for after the April plenary session, will be the last one of this cycle and will provide an overall assessment of the Commission’s delivery before the 2024 European elections.

For more information on how the von der Leyen Commission’s agenda is proceeding, a proposal-by-proposal assessment is available on the European Parliament’s Legislative Train Schedule website, developed by EPRS.
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The von der Leyen Commission's six priorities: Legislative and non-legislative delivery as of 31 August 2023

Data on this page come from the Legislative Train Schedule website of the European Parliament, and represent the situation as of 31 August 2023.
1. European Green Deal

The von der Leyen Commission adopted the European Green Deal in its first month in office, setting its priority to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent, become a world leader in the circular economy, eliminate pollution, protect biodiversity and mobilise finance for the green transition. The Commission is on track towards delivering the key elements of the European Green Deal by the end of its mandate, despite delays on some files. While the climate- and energy-related initiatives have enjoyed broad political support, the environment-related proposals on pesticides, nature restoration and industrial emissions have proved far more contentious, not least because of the perceived impact on EU farmers. Citing concerns about food security and European industry, leaders of some EU Member States have called for a 'regulatory pause' on new EU environmental regulation, noting the need to focus on implementing the already adopted Green Deal initiatives. Meanwhile the European Court of Auditors recently warned that Member States’ efforts may be insufficient to reach the 2030 climate and energy targets and for a timely transition towards a circular economy.

The first major crisis for this Commission, the coronavirus pandemic, has not hindered progress on the Green Deal. On the contrary, the EU has used the crisis recovery instruments to advance climate action, by requiring Member States to spend 37% of EU funding under the Recovery and Resilience Facility on climate investment and reforms. The second major crisis, Russia’s war on Ukraine, has turned energy efficiency and renewables into critical tools to tackle rising energy prices and energy security challenges. The Commission’s RePowerEU initiative of March 2022 sought to diversify gas supplies and accelerate the transition to clean energy. It was complemented by the EU 'Save Energy' communication, a new Regulation on Gas Storage, and the EU 'Save gas for a safe winter' plan. In 2023, the Commission is taking initiatives to boost the global competitiveness of EU industry in the transition to climate neutrality through its Green Deal industrial plan. This comes in response to the United States’ inflation reduction act and its support for clean energy and green technologies.

Making Europe the first climate-neutral continent

The adoption of the European Climate Law in June 2021 marked a major milestone in implementing the European Green Deal. It established an independent scientific advisory board and set a legally binding EU target of climate neutrality by 2050, and a binding intermediate target to reduce net greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 55% by 2030 compared with 1990 levels. The process for setting a 2040 climate target, as required by the climate law, was launched in March 2023.

To implement this increased ambition, the Commission presented the 'fit for 55' package in July 2021. By September 2023, most of the legislative files in the package have been agreed by the co-legislators. The package contained legislative proposals to revise the entire EU 2030 climate and energy framework, including the legislation on effort-sharing, land use and forestry, renewable energy, energy efficiency, emissions standards for new cars and vans, clean maritime and aviation fuels, and the Energy Taxation Directive. The Commission also proposed to strengthen the emissions trading system (ETS) and establish a new ETS for road transport and buildings, complemented by a new social climate fund to address its social impacts. A new carbon border adjustment mechanism puts a price on GHG emissions associated with certain imported goods. The Commission tabled a revised regulation on fluorinated greenhouse gases in April 2022, a regulation on carbon removal certification in November 2022, and revised CO₂ standards for new trucks and buses in February 2023, and presented the 'greening freight transport' package in July 2023.

The Commission addressed energy-related emissions through the strategies on energy system integration, hydrogen and methane and offshore renewable energy sources in 2020, and a solar energy strategy in 2022. In December 2021, the Commission proposed legislation on energy-related methane emissions, the energy performance of buildings and a revised regulation and directive for the EU gas and hydrogen markets, and proposed a reform of the EU electricity market design in
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March 2023. To foster the EU market for clean hydrogen, the Commission intends to launch an EU hydrogen bank by the end of 2023 and plans an €800 million pilot auction in autumn 2023.

The European Commission launched the European climate pact, a non-legislative initiative in December 2020, and tabled a new strategy on adaptation to climate change in February 2021, seeking to mainstream climate adaptation and strengthen the international dimension.

Becoming a world leader in the circular economy

In May 2021, the Commission updated its March 2020 long-term strategy for Europe's industrial future that was aligned with the European Green Deal. The strategy was complemented by a chemicals strategy for sustainability, adopted in October 2020, the Batteries Regulation adopted on 12 July 2023, and a proposal on construction products in March 2022. The February 2023 Green Deal industrial plan aims to strengthen the competitiveness of the EU's 'net zero' industries through a favourable regulatory environment, access to finance, development of skills and open trade for resilient supply chains. A proposal for a net-zero industry act was presented in March 2023.

The March 2020 circular economy action plan promotes the sustainable use of resources, especially in resource-intensive sectors with a high environmental impact, such as electronics, textiles and construction. The Commission tabled legislative proposals on waste shipment in November 2021, on empowering consumers for the green transition and ecodesign requirements for sustainable products in March 2022, and on packaging and packaging waste in November 2022. Proposals on the right to repair and on substantiating green claims were tabled in March 2023.

Eliminating pollution and protecting biodiversity

The Commission adopted a zero-pollution action plan in May 2021 and tabled proposals to revise the Industrial Emissions Directive and the Ozone Regulation in April 2022. A proposal on air pollutant emissions standards for road vehicles was presented in November 2022. The key objective of the 2020 biodiversity strategy for 2030 is mainstreaming biodiversity across all policy areas. The Commission adopted a new EU forest strategy in 2021 and tabled a new deforestation regulation adopted by the co-legislators in May 2023. In 2022, the Commission tabled legislative proposals on nature restoration, pesticides, air quality, water pollution and waste water. In July 2023, the Commission proposed a soil monitoring law, a revision of the Mercury Regulation and a revision of the Waste Framework Directive to address food and textiles waste. Remaining initiatives for 2023 concern chemicals (REACH), microplastics, sustainable food systems and greening corporate fleets.

Further key initiatives of the European Green Deal have included the 'farm-to-fork' strategy for sustainable food, tabled in May 2020, a renovation wave for the building sector, a sustainable and smart mobility strategy in December 2020, and an action plan for organic food production in March 2021. In March 2022, the co-legislators adopted the eighth environment action programme.

Financing the European Green Deal

According to Ursula von der Leyen's political guidelines, record amounts of public funds were to be invested in advanced research and innovation, complemented by a strategy for green financing. EU funding for the European Green Deal is provided through the EU multiannual financial framework (MFF) and the Next Generation EU (NGEU) instrument, with 30% of expenditure dedicated to climate objectives. In addition, the European Investment Bank (EIB) has aligned its investment activities with climate objectives. In January 2020, the Commission presented the sustainable Europe investment plan to increase funding for the transition by mobilising €1 trillion and to create an enabling framework for sustainable investment. In April 2021, the Commission presented its proposal for a corporate sustainability reporting directive. It adopted a renewed sustainable finance strategy and proposed a voluntary EU green bond standard in July 2021.
The LIFE programme, adopted in April 2021, is the only EU fund entirely dedicated to environmental and climate objectives, with a budget of €5.4 billion in current prices for the 2021-2027 period. The Just Transition Fund, adopted in June 2021, has a budget of €17.5 billion to support the people and regions most affected by the transition towards climate neutrality.
2. A Europe fit for the digital age

As the legislative cycle enters its final months, the European Commission has presented the majority of its initiatives to steer Europe towards digital transformation. Important pieces of legislation have been adopted and entered into force, notably the Digital Services Act (DSA), the Digital Markets Act (DMA), and the Directive on a high common level of cybersecurity (NIS2). For 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, notably on the artificial intelligence act proposal, revision of the eIDAS Regulation, and working conditions of platform workers. New proposals are still expected by the end of 2023, such as the new radio spectrum policy programme, the EU regulatory framework for hyperloop, as well as proposals that had earlier been announced for 2022, for example on multimodal digital mobility services.

Shaping the digital future of Europe

With the cyber-resilience act proposal well on its way in the legislative process, the cybersecurity package, published on 18 April, rounds off the cybersecurity proposals of this legislature. The EU cyber-solidarity act aims to reinforce capacities in the EU to detect, prepare for and respond to the growing cybersecurity threats and attacks across the EU. The proposal would introduce the European cyber-shield, a cyber-emergency mechanism, and a cybersecurity incident review mechanism to assess and review significant or large-scale incidents. A cybersecurity skills academy would aim to bridge the digital cybersecurity skills gap in the EU, achieve the ambitious target of the digital decade programme of increasing the number of information and communication technologies (ICT) professionals by 20 million by 2030. The proposal would notably include a single point of entry for cybersecurity programmes, training provisions, and for cybersecurity certification. To enable the latter, the Commission proposed a targeted amendment to the Cybersecurity Act, which would permit cybersecurity certification schemes for managed security services.

As a response to the European Parliament resolution with recommendations to the Commission on organising sports events in the digital environment, the Commission adopted a non-legislative recommendation on piracy of live content on 4 May. It would step up the fight against online piracy of sports and other live events, which could be hindered by unauthorised streaming.

On 11 July 2023, the Commission adopted a non-legislative initiative on Web 4.0 and virtual worlds, calling for them to be based on human-centric digital transformation, anchored in fundamental rights and EU values, and create opportunities for business and promote innovation. The actions of the strategy, focused on the next technological transition, are built around objectives of the digital decade programme, also addressing the global governance of virtual worlds and Web 4.0.

Supporting industry and small and medium-sized enterprises

On 18 April 2023, the Commission put forward two proposals for Council recommendations to support Member States to enhance EU citizens’ digital skills: key enabling factors for successful digital education and training, and improving the provision of digital skills in education and training.

On 27 April, the Commission adopted a package of legislative proposals in the field of intellectual property rights, aimed at promoting innovation, investment and competitiveness, and complementing the unitary patent system which came into operation on 1 June 2023. The package includes proposals for regulations on supplementary protection certificates for plant protection and medicinal products, a proposal for a regulation on compulsory licensing of patents for crisis management, and a proposal for a regulation on standard essential patents.

On 3 May, the Commission put forward a proposal for a regulation setting up an act in support of ammunition production (‘ASAP’). With a budget of €500 million, it would reinforce the
responsiveness and ability of the EU defence industry to ensure the timely availability and supply of
ground-to-ground and artillery ammunition as well as missiles. The interinstitutional negotiations
were particularly rapid: Parliament and Council found an agreement on 7 July and the
ASAP Regulation entered into force on 25 July.

On 17 May, the Commission published a code of good practices to facilitate the development and
assessment of important projects of common European interest (IPCEIs). On 8 June, the Commission
approved under EU State aid rules the sixth IPCEI, concerning microelectronics and focusing on
innovative and resource-efficient technologies and components. It was prepared by 14 Member
States. Its total investments are expected to reach €21 billion, of which €8.1 billion from State aid.

On 6 June, the Commission published the transition pathway for the textiles ecosystem, putting
forward actions to make the industry greener, more digital, sustainable, resilient and competitive.

Improving the functioning of the single market

On 27 February 2023, the Commission put forward a proposal on the digital labelling of EU fertilising
products. It would ensure the good functioning of the single market and protect human health and
the environment by improving the readability of labels and facilitating their management by
companies. On 22 March, the Commission adopted a proposal for a directive on substantiation and
communication of explicit environmental claims (green claims directive) to tackle the proliferation
of misleading commercial practices concerning the environmental sustainability of products on the
internal market and to boost the competitiveness of companies making real efforts to reduce their
environmental impact. On 29 March, the Commission tabled a proposal for a regulation on the
approval and market surveillance of non-road mobile machinery (NRMM, such as combine
harvesters and machines for construction work) circulating on public roads. It intends to address the
considerable differences, across the EU, in technical requirements and approval procedures
concerning their circulation on roads, to improve the functioning of the single market and ensure a
high level of road safety across the EU. On 19 April, the Commission launched the public buyers
community platform, a digital platform aimed at improving public procurement processes.
On 28 April, the Commission tabled a proposal for a regulation on detergents and surfactants to ensure
the better functioning of the single market by addressing new market developments (such as
microbial cleaning products), and the current lack of efficient information requirements.

Under the ongoing review of EU competition tools, on 20 April the Commission adopted the
2023 merger simplification package, consisting of a revised implementing regulation, notice on
simplified procedure, and communication on the transmission of documents. On 1 June, it adopted
revised horizontal block exemption regulations on research and development and specialisation
agreements (HBERs), and revised horizontal guidelines, giving companies guidance to help them
assess the compatibility of their horizontal cooperation agreements with EU competition rules.
On 4 April, the Commission published updated State aid guiding templates to assist Member States in
designing the measures included in their national recovery and resilience plans, in line with EU State
aid rules. A public consultation on the draft revised market definition notice used by the Commission
in antitrust and merger cases ended on 13 January 2023. The Commission stated that it was planning
to have the new market definition notice in place in the third quarter of 2023, but it has still to be
finalised.

One of the priorities of the strategy to enhance European economic security adopted on 20 June by
the Commission and the High Representative/Vice-President of the Commission (HR/VP) is to
promote the EU’s competitiveness and growth, strengthen the single market, support a strong and
resilient economy, and boost the EU’s research, technological and industrial base.
The legislative proposal to further address the health and environmental risks related to exposure to asbestos in buildings was announced for the second quarter of 2023.
3. An economy that works for people

In her 2019 political guidelines, Ursula von der Leyen promised that the transition towards a green social market economy would be fair for all, and committed to fostering an ‘economy that works for people’. Despite the economic shocks caused by the pandemic and Russia’s war on Ukraine, more than seven out of ten of the initiatives planned have been tabled as well as several additional ones.

Deepening economic and monetary union

The European Commission put forward a package for a reform of the EU economic governance framework, a key pillar of the architecture of economic and monetary union. Three legislative proposals, presented on 26 April 2023, gear up towards greater national ownership, better EU enforcement, and more gradual adjustment supported by reforms and investments, while keeping the current reference values (3% deficit ratio, 60% debt ratio on gross domestic product, GDP). On 20 June 2023, the Commission proposed a mid-term review of the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework (MFF). This includes a dedicated Facility to support 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 tabled a single currency package with two legislative proposals to support the use of cash and to introduce a framework for a digital euro.

Completing the banking union and the capital markets union

The banking union made progress towards completion. In June 2023, the co-legislators reached a provisional agreement on two proposals amending the EU-level banking rulebook to strengthen the risk-based capital prudential framework, further harmonise supervisory powers and tools, and improve access to data. In April 2023, the Commission adopted 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.

The capital markets union (CMU) remained a key EU priority; further impetus was given to deepen it. The Commission designed an action plan in 2020, followed by a number of proposals in 2021. Among others, new proposals to amend the Markets in Financial Instruments Directive (MiFID) and Regulation (MiFIR) as well as the investment funds rulebook (UCITS and AIFMD), on which provisional deals were reached in June and July 2023, respectively.

The Commission also made a proposal to amend insurance prudential regulation (Solvency II) to further finance the real economy – currently with the co-legislators. 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 October 2022, the Commission adopted a legislative proposal on instant credit transfers in euros (also known as instant payments), designed to allow citizens and businesses to transfer money at any time of any day within 10 seconds. 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 (PSD2, which would become PSD3) and a proposal to establish a payment services regulation (PSR).

Helping recovery and resilience to external shocks

To address the major economic shocks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the von der Leyen Commission has taken economic measures to boost recovery and make the economy more resilient, while staying aligned with the 2019 political guidelines (such as the green transformation of the economy). The Commission proposed Next Generation EU (NGEU),
financing it through supranational debt; it is expected to borrow up to around €800 billion from the capital markets by the end of 2026, of which up to €250 billion (or 30 % of NGEU) by issuing green bonds. According to the most recent Commission report on the implementation of borrowing, to date, €183 billion has been disbursed: €153 billion under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (about €106 billion in grants, and €47 billion in loans, to Member States); €30 billion from the EU budget. This is financing investments in six areas (or pillars): green transformation; digital transformation; smart, sustainable and inclusive growth; social and territorial cohesion; health, and economic, social and institutional resilience; and policies for the next generation.

To repay the funds raised to finance the grant component of NGEU, the Commission adopted initially two proposals: the first would introduce new own resources, through the extended EU energy trading system, a carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM) and the reallocated profits of very large multinational companies (based on Pillar 1 of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/G20 agreement); the second would amend the 2018 Financial Regulation, to align the financial rules to the provisions of the 2021-2027 MFF and NGEU. In June 2023, the Commission put forward an adjusted package for the next generation of own resources, amending its previous proposal. The proposal aims to ensure more diversified and resilient types of revenue: it would increase the emissions trading system (ETS)-based own resource, add new sectors, and include a new temporary statistical own resource based on company profits.

Implementing the social pillar and promoting equality

Following the political guidelines, the Commission adopted an action plan for the implementation of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights in March 2021. It sets three headline targets for the EU on employment, skills and social protection, and commits the Commission to a number of concrete actions. Standing out among the legislative items are the adopted directives on binding pay transparency and on adequate minimum wages. Based on a Commission proposal, the Council adopted a recommendation on adequate minimum income ensuring active inclusion, which the Parliament wishes to strengthen into a directive. Further recommendations concerned the European Child Guarantee to protect children at risk of poverty and social exclusion, and the strengthened Youth Guarantee supporting jobs for young people, while the most recent ones targeted support for employment following the COVID-19 crisis and the strengthening of social dialogue. The Commission has also outlined an EU direction in strategies concerning the rights of persons with disabilities, rights of the child, the Roma people, gender equality and LGBTIQ equality, health and safety at work and care.

To promote a socially responsible economy, the Commission adopted in February 2022, a proposal for a directive on corporate sustainability due diligence and in September 2022, a proposal for a directive on the protection of workers from risks relating to exposure to asbestos at work. Following a Commission proposal tabled in November 2022, the Council adopted a decision on guidelines for the employment policies of Member States. In June 2023, the Commission adopted a proposal for a Council recommendation on developing social economy framework conditions.

Promoting fair taxation

In December 2022, the Council adopted a directive on ensuring a global minimum rate of corporate taxation for multinational groups, based on the OECD international agreement on a 15 % tax rate. As part of its EU strategy on business taxation, in May 2022, the Commission proposed a debt-equity bias reduction allowance (DEBRA). On 8 December 2022, the Commission presented the value added tax (VAT) in the digital age package, consisting of three elements: improving and expanding single VAT registration for businesses through a VAT one-stop shop, updating VAT rules for the platform economy, and introducing real-time digital VAT reporting. In May 2023, the Commission adopted proposals for a comprehensive reform of the EU customs union. A package of three legislative proposals aims to facilitate business operations through a new EU customs data hub, to allow smarter customs checks, and a more modern approach to e-commerce.
4. A stronger Europe in the world

One year and a half into the war in Ukraine, the EU and its partners continue to demonstrate their unity, resilience and capacity to develop what von der Leyen defined as a ‘geopolitical Commission’, that stabilises its neighbourhood, accelerates enlargement and champions multilateralism and a rules-based global order, through a more active role and stronger voice for the EU in the world. In her 2022 State of the Union address, the Commission President stressed that the response to the Ukraine crisis will determine not only the EU’s geopolitical status in the coming years, but also the nature of the international relations and tools deployed in safeguarding peace, European values and principles. Consequently, the EU’s main foreign policy priorities now are to respond to the military aggression against Ukraine, accelerate enlargement, and support global trade, peace and security.

Responding to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine

In line with President von der Leyen’s initial pledge that European leadership ‘will always be guided by our values and our respect for international law’, the EU has adopted 11 cycles of heavy sanctions against Russia’s financial system, industry, and people and entities who have facilitated the war in Ukraine and the harmful activities of the Russian government. The latest package of sanctions, adopted on 23 June 2023, includes a new anti-circumvention tool that will allow the EU to restrict the sale, supply, transfer or export of specified goods and technology to third countries whose jurisdictions are considered to be at continued and particularly high risk of circumvention.

In February 2022, the EU agreed to allocate a first package of assistance measures worth €500 million from the European Peace Facility (EPF) – an off-budget mechanism designed, inter alia, to support EU partners’ military forces – to Ukraine. Together with seven previous tranches of support, the assistance measure of €1 billion adopted on 13 April 2023 brings the total EU contribution for Ukraine under the EPF to €4.6 billion. The EPF has a total budget of more than €12 billion for the 2021-2027 period. In addition to the EPF, the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP) was adopted on 20 July 2023.

In November 2022, the European Union military assistance mission Ukraine (EUMAM) was launched for two years. Furthermore, the EU has allocated €685 million from the EU budget to deal with the humanitarian consequences of this war, both in the country and for refugees. This decision has complemented the activation of the temporary protection mechanism that provides refugees with a secure status and access to education, medical care and work in EU Member States (see section 5 below), as well as temporary trade liberalisation under the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement.

On 17 January 2023, the European Commission disbursed €3 billion to Ukraine, 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 ‘Plus’ package has already been disbursed; the sixth tranche of €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. The Facility should cater both for short-term state and recovery needs and medium-term reconstruction and modernisation of Ukraine, with a €50 billion expected budget. As of July 2023, together with the resources made available to help Member States, the overall support to Ukraine and Ukrainians amounts to €76 billion.

Accelerating EU enlargement

One geopolitical priority of the Commission is to accelerate EU enlargement. On 28 February 2022, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced Ukraine’s official request for ‘immediate accession via a new special procedure’. Following Ukraine, both Georgia and Moldova also requested to join the EU. Considering 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 3 February 2023, at the 24th EU-Ukraine summit, leaders reconfirmed
The six policy priorities of the von der Leyen Commission

The will ‘to rebuild a modern, prosperous Ukraine firmly anchored on our common European path’. Out of seven priorities identified by the European Council based on the Commission proposal, Neighbourhood and Enlargement Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi declared that Ukraine has already completed two: reform of judicial governance bodies and key media legislation. He added that Ukraine has achieved good progress on the Constitutional Court reform and some progress in anti-corruption reforms, anti-money-laundering efforts, ‘de-oligarchisation’, and national minorities.

As for the Western Balkan accession countries, President von der Leyen had welcomed the Council’s decision to open accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia in 2020. On 19 July 2022, the two countries opened accession negotiations. In December 2022, EU leaders decided to grant candidate country status to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Subsequently, the most critical task in the region is to complete the comprehensive agreement within the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue.

After the re-election of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in May 2023, the European Council conclusions of 29-30 June invited the High Representative and the Commission to submit a report to the European Council on the state of play of EU–Türkiye ties. Türkiye remains a ‘key partner’ for the EU and is eligible for EU financial support through the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA-III 2021-2027) and also for the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+).

Supporting global peace, security and trade

President von der Leyen’s political guidelines stated that ‘peace, security and development are all mutually dependent. We need an integrated and comprehensive approach to our security’. Several new initiatives were adopted in the first half of 2023. After the adoption of a new EU maritime security strategy and European space strategy for security and defence in March, the Commission welcomed the political agreement reached in June between the co-legislators on the regulation on establishing the instrument for the reinforcement of the European defence industry through common procurement (EDIRPA) with a budget of €300 million. EDIRPA will incentivise Member States to procure commonly the most critical and urgent defence products in light of Russia’s unjustified invasion of Ukraine.

In her political guidelines, President von der Leyen also expressed her readiness ‘to pave the way for an ambitious and strategic partnership with the United Kingdom, which will remain our ally, our partner and our friend’. Relations with the UK have thawed after the endorsement of the Windsor Framework agreement in March 2023 as well as through cooperation on Ukraine. The co-legislators also adopted the regulation governing EU implementation and enforcement of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement and the Withdrawal Agreement between the EU and the UK.

Furthermore, President von der Leyen wished to strengthen Europe’s role as a global leader and standard-setter through a strong, open and fair trade agenda. On 6 February 2023, the Commission President and Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the EU-India Trade and Technology Council. In March 2023, the EU relaunched trade negotiations with Thailand. With New Zealand, on 9 July 2023 the EU signed the comprehensive and ambitious trade deal concluded in June 2022. The Distortive Foreign Subsidies Regulation entered into force on 12 January 2023, and in June 2023 the EU successfully concluded interinstitutional negotiations on the Anti-coercion instrument. In June 2023, the Commission adopted the new agenda for relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean. Eight years since their last gathering, EU leaders and leaders from the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) met in Brussels for the third EU-CELAC summit on 17-18 July 2023. On 5 July, the Commission presented the modernised EU-Chile agreement to the Council for authorisation of its signature. On 20 July, the Council gave its green light to move towards the signature of the Post-Cotonou Agreement.

Finally, to deliver on the commitment set out in the 2022 State of the Union address, the Commission proposed a package of measures to combat corruption on 3 May 2023. With regard to the external dimension, the Commission proposed to establish a dedicated common foreign and security policy (CFSP) sanctions regime to target serious acts of corruption worldwide.
5. Promoting the European way of life

The 'Promoting our European way of life' priority covers a wide range of issues, encompassing not only migration, asylum and internal security policies, but also education, social integration and health. The humanitarian crisis at the EU’s eastern borders has propelled the reform of EU migration and asylum policy to the top of the EU agenda, leading to notable progress on the adoption of key legislative proposals. Significant progress has also been achieved in EU internal security policy, which calls for a greater focus on addressing cyber- and hybrid threats, building resilience, modernising law enforcement and bringing cooperation and information-sharing to a new level. New developments in health policy include a new pharmaceutical package and a comprehensive approach to mental health. Education policy sees further proposals aimed at current needs and challenges, such as digital skills and literacy.

A new pact on migration and asylum

Russia’s war on Ukraine has forced millions of people to flee, creating a major humanitarian crisis. In March 2023, the Commission adopted a communication on the Temporary Protection Directive, one year after the EU activated this 2001 directive for the first time. The communication took stock of the EU’s action in the year since the activation of the directive, stating that around 4 million people were granted protection in the EU, including one-fifth of Ukraine’s children. The Commission’s support of Member States in providing emergency assistance to people fleeing the war continued, including through the ‘Cohesion’s Action for Refugees in Europe’ (CARE).

Against this background, progress has accelerated on some major initiatives under the new pact on migration and asylum, proposed by the Commission in September 2020. The Council adopted its position on asylum and migration management, as well as border screening and asylum procedure in June 2023. The Parliament had already adopted its position in April 2023. Work continues on the proposal for a regulation to address situations of instrumentalisation of migrants. In March 2023, the Commission also presented a recommendation on the mutual recognition of return decisions and expediting returns. Interinstitutional negotiations are currently ongoing on the screening and Eurodac recast proposals. The voluntary relocation mechanism, signed in June 2022 between 18 EU Member States and 3 associated countries to plan for relocations or financial contributions, has been criticised for weak implementation. The revised Schengen evaluation mechanism entered into force in October 2022 and the Parliament has yet to adopt its report on the proposal to revise the Schengen Borders Code.

In April 2023, the 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. Other initiatives in the package include establishing an EU talent pool, stepping up operational cooperation and facilitating access to the EU labour market for those displaced by the war in Ukraine.

Towards a security union 2.0

The 2020-2025 EU Security Union Strategy frames the EU action on internal security for that period. Taking evolving cross-border and global threats into account, the strategy focuses on the interconnections between the physical and digital environments, as well as internal and external security. The Directive on the Resilience of Critical Entities, one of the Commission’s initiatives to increase the EU’s resilience to a wide array of threats including cyber- and hybrid threats, entered into force in January 2023, as well as 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. Parliament and Council are currently working on completing their respective positions on the proposal for permanent rules to combat child sexual abuse online, proposed in May 2022.
The proposed regulation would set mandatory measures to detect and report child sexual abuse online and create a new independent EU centre on Child Sexual Abuse.

When it comes to building an EU security ecosystem, both Europol and the EU Drugs Agency were endowed with strengthened mandates in June 2022 and June 2023 respectively. As to improving cross-border information-sharing and cooperation between law enforcement authorities, important progress has been made on the EU police cooperation code package: the Directive on information exchange between law enforcement authorities entered into force in June 2023. The Parliament confirmed the committee position on the second proposal, the proposal for a regulation on automated data exchange for police cooperation (Prüm II), in plenary in June 2023, allowing interinstitutional negotiations to start. The third element of the package, a recommendation on operational police cooperation, was adopted by the Council in June 2022. In June 2023, the Council adopted its position on the two legislative proposals revising the rules on the collection and transfer of advance passenger information (API), aimed at enhancing security and improving external border controls. The Commission announced a proposal on reciprocal access to security-related information for front-line officers, between the EU and key third countries, which is now planned for the fourth quarter of 2023. In June 2023, the Parliament and the Council adopted the directive and the regulation to facilitate access by law enforcement to electronic evidence.

Work continues on the 2021 package of proposals to strengthen the EU’s anti-money-laundering and countering the financing of terrorism rules. The Parliament confirmed the decision to enter into interinstitutional negotiations on the revision of the Directive on Asset Recovery and Confiscation in June 2023. Work continues on the December 2022 proposal to revise the 2011 Anti-trafficking Directive, with the aim of completing it before the end of the current term.

Towards a European health union

The coronavirus pandemic boosted the Commission's ambition to build a European health union. The 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. The Council recommendation on cancer screening was updated in December 2022 and the European care strategy was adopted in September 2022. Work successfully continued on the proposal for a regulation on the European health data space, as well as on the proposal for a regulation on standards of quality and safety for substances of human origin intended for human application. In April 2023, the Commission put forward a 'pharmaceutical package' to revise the EU's pharmaceutical legislation. It includes proposals for a new directive and a new regulation, which would replace the existing pharmaceutical legislation, including the legislation on medicines for children and for rare diseases. The package is completed by a communication and a proposal for a Council recommendation to step up the fight against antimicrobial resistance, which was adopted by the Council in June 2023. Also in June 2023, the Commission published a communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health.

A European education area for quality and inclusive education

Several strategic European education area (EEA) initiatives have already been carried out, contributing towards the achievement of the EEA by 2025. For instance, the Council adopted a recommendation on blended learning approaches for primary and secondary education (November 2021), on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation (April 2022), on learning for the green transition and sustainable development (June 2022), on micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability (June 2022), and on pathways to school success (November 2022). The Commission tabled the European strategy for universities in January 2022. In April 2023, the Commission adopted two proposals for Council recommendations: on key enabling factors for successful digital education, and on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training.
6. A new push for European democracy

Of the three initiatives announced under this priority in the Commission’s 2023 work programme, only one (the anti-corruption package) was delivered by July 2023 while the other two initiatives are still in the making: protection of the EU democratic sphere from covert foreign influence and the European disability card. For the latter, a consultation earlier in the year led to the Commission issuing its proposal on 6 September 2023.

Anti-corruption package

On 3 May 2023, the Commission, in cooperation with the High Representative/Vice-President of the Commission (HR/VP), issued a joint communication presenting a new strategy against corruption. On the same date the Commission adopted a proposal for a directive laying down minimum standards for combating corruption based on three main pillars: i) preventing and building a culture of integrity through campaigns to raise awareness on corruption, obligation for Member States to regulate interactions between public and private sectors and the disclosure of conflict of interest for public officials; ii) streamlining definitions and sanctions (e.g. harmonisation of definitions of criminal offences prosecuted as corruption to cover bribery, misappropriation, trading in influence, abuse of functions, obstruction of justice and illicit enrichment related to corruption offences, harmonising aggravating and mitigating circumstances); iii) requiring Member States to provide effective investigative tools and a clear and transparent process to lift immunities and privileges.

Interinstitutional ethics body

On 8 June 2023, the European Commission issued the long-awaited proposal for an interinstitutional ethics body (IEB) to be created by way of an interinstitutional agreement. This proposal should remedy the current fragmented ethics regulatory framework governing the EU institutions without overlapping with the competences of existing bodies (e.g. EPPO and OLAF). Taking account of the differences in role and mission of the EU institutions, the IEB would aim at establishing a common culture of ethics and common standards.

Review of the Victims Rights Directive

After a consultation held in spring 2022, the Commission presented a proposal to amend the current rules of the Victims Rights Directive (Directive 2012/29/EU) taking account of the evaluation of the same directive performed in June 2022. The Commission proposes to improve the recognition of judgments and judicial decisions in criminal matters, improve crime reporting, adopt a victim-centred approach where victims are recognised as such and can rely on their rights through better consideration of their needs, particularly for vulnerable victims, better access to information and to specialist support, and facilitated access to compensation from the offender.

Protection of adults in a cross-border situation

Increased mobility is a phenomenon that affects not only young and productive adult Europeans, but also people in need of assistance due to either age-related illness or special health condition that has impaired their ability to look after their own affairs. For this reason, on 31 May 2023 the Commission tabled a proposal for a regulation, within the area of judicial cooperation in civil matters (Article 81 TFEU), aimed at preserving the rights of those persons by streamlining the rules that apply in terms of defining the competent court, the applicable law, validity of foreign powers of representation, practical improvements on digital communication, the introduction of a European certificate of representation to facilitate providing evidence of powers of representation, interconnection of registers to facilitate retrieving information and in general improvement of the cooperation between national authorities.
Transfer of criminal proceedings

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. The proposed regulation would facilitate judicial cooperation and prevent conflicts of jurisdiction by establishing a uniform procedure across the EU. It would be an alternative to the surrender of a person for criminal prosecution under the European arrest warrant when that is not possible or is disproportionate. The proposal for a regulation includes: specific grounds for jurisdiction, criteria under which such a transfer can be requested, certain rights for suspects and accused persons as well as for victims, a procedure for requesting a transfer, time limits for taking the decision on the request as well as an exhaustive list of grounds for refusing a transfer.

Other initiatives

As announced, to follow up on the Conference on the Future of Europe, the Commission convened citizens’ panels largely resembling those of the Conference (random selection, diversity in their composition, strong representation of young people). In 2023, they focused on food waste, virtual worlds and learning mobility. The Commission also issued the progress report on the implementation of the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025 in April 2023, and the strategic foresight report in June 2023.

Rule of law and EU values

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. On 30 March 2023, Parliament adopted its resolution on the previous rule of law report (procedure 2022/2898(RSP)), noting with satisfaction that it ‘represents a step towards a coherent mechanism to uphold the Union values’. Whilst welcoming the inclusion of country-specific recommendations, the Parliament criticised them for being too vague, and called upon the Commission to implement all of its previous demands concerning the reports, e.g. to include all EU values within their scope, as well as to ‘immediately enter into negotiations’ with Parliament and Council to adopt an interinstitutional agreement for an EU mechanism on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights.

In the context of the ongoing Article 7 TEU procedures against Poland and Hungary, the Commission has made the effective implementation of the two Member States' recovery and resilience plans (RRP), although both approved by the Council, conditional on the meeting of a number of ‘super milestones’ pertaining to rule of law reforms. In May 2023, the Hungarian parliament adopted a law aimed at fulfilling the rule of law milestones, inter alia by strengthening the national judiciary council, which is yet to be evaluated by the Commission. A law adopted by the Polish parliament in January 2023 aimed at reforming the disciplinary procedure against judges to comply with the relevant milestones was referred by the President to the constitutional court, where it is still pending. In the July 2023 rule of law report, the Commission mentioned that it will assess Poland’s compliance ‘upon the submission ... of the first payment request’. The European Court of Justice (ECJ) considers that Poland has only partly complied with its judgments on judicial organisation in that Member State, reducing, in April 2023, the daily penalty (requested by the Commission) from the initial €1 million to €500 000. On 5 June 2023, the ECJ rendered its judgment in a fourth case brought against Poland by the Commission over judicial organisation (C-204/21), finding that a number of reforms from 2019 breached the rule of law.
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This EPRS paper analyses progress made in carrying through the policy agenda set by Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, and her College of Commissioners when they took office in December 2019. It looks in particular at the state of play with respect to delivery of the agenda’s six key priorities, as we enter the final months running up to the 2024 European elections.

The von der Leyen Commission – either on taking office or more recently – has announced a total of 610 planned initiatives. In concrete terms, EPRS finds that more than two thirds (420) have now been submitted and, for those which are legislative proposals, the co-legislators have started work. Of the 420, more than half (221) have already been adopted by the co-legislators, or, for the non-legislative initiatives (such as strategies, action plans and other communications, amounting to nearly one fifth of the total), by the Commission itself. The vast majority of the remainder are either close to adoption (26) or proceeding normally through the legislative process (141). On the other hand, almost one sixth are moving slowly or are blocked (32). While the Commission’s first priority – the European Green Deal – ranks highest in terms of the number of initiatives planned (154), the second, fourth and fifth priorities – ‘A Europe fit for the digital age’, ‘A stronger Europe in the world’, and ‘Promoting our European way of life’ – have higher rates of initiatives actually adopted so far (more than half for the second and fifth, almost three quarters for the fourth, largely due, for the latter, to its less legislative nature).