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COVER NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Legislative programming: Commission work programme for 2025 and multiannual programming - Letter from the Presidency to the Commission

As a follow-up to the exchange of views on legislative programming held at the Council (General Affairs) meeting of 17 December 2024 and written comments received after the meeting, delegations will find attached the letter from the Presidency to the Commission summarising the debate.



19 December 2024

Council (General Affairs) 17 December 2024
Follow-up letter on legislative programming

**Dear President von der Leyen,
Dear Commissioner Šefčovič,**

In 2016, the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission agreed to reinforce the Union's annual and multiannual legislative programming through the interinstitutional agreement on better law-making.

In June 2024 the European Council agreed on the strategic agenda 2024-2029 that will guide the work of the EU institutions over the next five years. It identifies a number of priorities to be put into action in the new cycle to deliver on the goals of the European Union that is free and democratic, strong and secure, prosperous and competitive. To achieve this and to address the aspirations of our citizens, we are called upon to combine our strengths and resources to face the coming years with unity and resolve. The Council intends to ensure that the three institutions, each acting within their own powers and prerogatives, work effectively together to deliver on the ambitions of the strategic agenda.

Ministers exchanged views on legislative programming at the Council (General Affairs) meeting on 17 December. I thank the Commission for its contribution to this debate and for the information provided on the next steps.

I would like to provide you with a summary of the views expressed, grouped in five priority areas. Whilst the individual positions expressed by delegations varied, Ministers broadly agreed on the principles and objectives requiring primary attention in the five years ahead, as well as on the key priorities and initiatives for the year to come. The following paragraphs outline the general views emerging from our exchange.

General considerations

Ministers underscored that the principles of unity, inclusiveness and transparency should guide the Union's action in this new cycle and they broadly welcomed the balanced and comprehensive approach taken in the political guidelines of the President of the Commission.

Long-term competitiveness and growth

Delegations repeatedly referred to the need to close the EU's productivity and growth gap with other advanced economies, restoring competitiveness and re-establishing a sense of economic security for our citizens and businesses, with some underlining the need to make a success of the

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triple green, digital, and social transition. According to the opinion of some, the industrial strategy will continue to be a priority; with a holistic approach to support green transformation. Some Member States expressed their views on expanding and intensifying our strategic partnerships worldwide, as the EU stands for openness and free trade. Some think, it is important to ensure the coherence of policy areas in our global activities. The Budapest Declaration on the New European Competitiveness Deal and the recommendations contained in the Draghi report were frequently mentioned in this respect.

Ministers also called for an ambitious regulatory simplification agenda, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises, for ensuring a business-friendly environment fostering innovation and growth, and for securing an affordable and stable energy supply while upholding the Union's energy security. In this regard, many referred to the importance of the announced Clean Industrial Deal. Furthermore, according to some delegations, structural reforms are also important to increase productivity.

Member States also emphasised the role of the single market in underpinning the EU's economic strength, advocating for its further integration and deepening, with particular attention to ensuring fair competition, to enhancing energy, transport and communication links, and to overcoming barriers that still exist, such as in the area of services and capital markets. The Letta report was considered a blueprint for action in this area. The establishment of an investment and savings union is also considered a priority by some Member States.

Security, defence and resilience, including support to Ukraine

Delegations identified strengthening Europe's defence readiness as a strategic priority. More specifically, they stressed the importance of addressing critical capability gaps, increasing investment in defence production and innovation, and swiftly taking work forward on the joint procurement of military equipment. In this regard, the White Paper will be an important milestone according to some Member States, while efforts to strengthen common defence capability in complementarity to NATO remain central for others.

Following up on the Niinistö report, Ministers also referred to the need to build up EU's and Member States' resilience to crises through a coherent and coordinated approach to preparedness, taking into account the specificities of different types of crises and respecting Member States' responsibilities and competences, and enhancing the Union's ability to counter hybrid threats, but also the need to consider man-made and natural threats together. Some Member States highlighted that another priority in this context is strengthening democracy and protecting the rule of law. The Council conclusions on democratic resilience provide an important basis with regard to countering all forms of foreign interference, including disinformation and FIMI.

Continued and comprehensive support to Ukraine, including financial, military and humanitarian assistance, was also highlighted as a priority for the majority of the Member States; this also means maintaining and increasing pressure on Russia to stop its war of aggression against Ukraine.

Ministers also emphasised the fight against organised crime, and in particular the need to increase cooperation with online platforms on access to digital evidence.

Cohesion, sustainability, climate change and agriculture

Delegations stressed that work on improving competitiveness should not come at the expense of the EU's social and environmental goals. Instead, these efforts should complement actions on decarbonisation, on sustainable development and on the social pillar, ensuring social cohesion and fairness for all regions and communities. Ministers considered the EU climate target for 2040 as a particularly important milestone in the path to a climate-neutral Union.

On agriculture, Member States referred to generational renewal and to balancing environmental sustainability with the competitiveness of the agricultural sector as key challenges to be addressed, together with fair income of farmers and rules-based and fair competition globally and in the internal market.

Migration

Delegations called for an acceleration in the reform of the EU's migration policy, including the external dimension and the implementation of adopted EU legislation. The revision of the Return Directive, better protection of the EU's external borders and new ways to combat irregular migration were mentioned as priorities with some advocating for the promotion of safe and legal pathways in line with national competences.

Enlargement and neighbourhood

Ministers emphasised the importance of enlargement as a way to bolster the EU's stability, competitiveness and geopolitical relevance. They also stressed that the accession process should remain merit-based as defined in the new methodology. The EU should also undertake its own reforms as stated in the Granada Declaration.

Initiatives and synergies aimed at ensuring the stability, security and prosperity of the Mediterranean, such as the new Pact for the Mediterranean and the wider EU-Middle East strategy, were also mentioned. Our strategic partnership with Africa should also remain a key priority.


To conclude, many interventions emphasised the importance of achieving concrete results for our citizens and businesses, as well as of institutional balance, simplification and better regulation.

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Accordingly, the long-term EU budget should reflect the Union's both longstanding and new priorities. We are confident that the Commission's future initiatives, guided by the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, will benefit our citizens and promote the interests of the EU and of its Member States.

The views summarised in this letter represent the initial reaction from the members of the Council at this stage of the legislative programming process. The Council would greatly appreciate it if the Commission could take account of these views when preparing its work programme for 2025, as well as in the subsequent documents in the context of the annual and multiannual legislative programming. The Council looks forward to continuing the dialogue with the Commission and the European Parliament in this context.

Yours sincerely,



Mr János BÓKA
Minister for European Union Affairs