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# The six policy priorities of the von der Leyen Commission

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State of play as the Commission approaches mid-term

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## IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

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**EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service**

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This EPRS paper analyses progress in attaining the policy agenda set out 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 in respect of delivery on the six key priorities asserted at that time.

Concretely, EPRS finds that, following the March 2022 EP plenary sessions and European Council meeting, of the over 500 initiatives foreshadowed by the von der Leyen Commission on taking office or since (504), more than half have already been submitted (288). Of these, almost half have already been adopted (135), while the great majority of the remainder are either proceeding normally through the legislative process (113) or are close to adoption (11). Conversely, a certain number are proceeding very slowly or are currently blocked (29). While the Commission's first priority, the European Green Deal, ranks highest in terms of the number of initiatives planned (125), its third priority, 'An economy that works for people', has seen the highest number of legislative proposals actually adopted so far (32).

Further details of the state of play on the various EU legislative proposals tabled by the Commission, including all those mentioned in this paper, can be found in the European Parliament's 'Legislative Train Schedule' website, which has also been developed by EPRS and is available at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/>

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## Introduction: The geopolitical Commission's moment

This edition of EPRS's six-monthly assessment of the delivery of the six policy priorities of the current European Commission, led by Ursula von der Leyen, comes as the Commission approaches the middle of its five-year term. On the eve of taking office in November 2019, then-President elect Ursula von der Leyen stated that 'Europe urgently needs' a 'geopolitical Commission'. Russia's war on Ukraine, unfolding as this publication was being written, confirms the relevance of this challenge beyond what most experts had envisaged at the time. The pressing need for the Union to develop its 'strategic autonomy', brought into focus by the various barriers thrown up during the initial coronavirus lockdowns, has become even starker, and not just in the field of security and defence policy – with war on the EU's borders – but also in fields such as energy and food, where dependence on external suppliers risks compromising the Union's stability.

Published on the eve of the 2021 State of the Union address, the previous issue of this publication was drafted as the United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) troops were withdrawing from, and the Taliban taking over, Kabul. This issue comes as war has returned to Europe and millions of refugees are fleeing Ukraine to the European Union. This is a stark reminder to European citizens, as well as their leaders and representatives, that peace and democracy, which are at the heart of the European project, cannot be taken for granted.

Among its many effects, this most dramatic crisis has strengthened unity among the 27 Member States. It has pushed security and defence higher on the European Union agenda, a subject that was already a priority for the French Presidency of the Council of the EU. This is evidenced first in the Versailles Declaration following the 10-11 March 2022 informal meeting of the Heads of State or Government, which analysed Russia's war on Ukraine as 'a tectonic shift in European history'. It is also seen in the decision to take more responsibility for the EU's security and bolster its defence capabilities, and later in the endorsement of a reinforced, updated Strategic Compass by the European Council on 24-25 March (see Section 4).

It is no longer the pandemic, but the war on Ukraine and its numerous consequences, that define the European agenda. As the cover photograph of this publication illustrates: on 1 March 2022, the European Parliament, chaired by its new President, Roberta Metsola, held an extraordinary plenary session on the situation in Ukraine at which the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, was welcomed with a standing ovation.

The predominance of Putin's war on Ukraine in the media and our conversations – reaching unprecedented levels of coverage and spread due to the extent of social media use in Ukraine, Europe and worldwide – should not divert our attention from other major ongoing challenges: the policy priorities of the European Commission. On climate change, this Commission's first priority and an area where President von der Leyen wants Europe to lead globally, the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, released on 28 February 2022 raises the alarm on 'increasing climate risks' (see Section 1). Helping the EU recover from the coronavirus crisis (see Section 3), turning the EU into a digital continent (see Section 2), promoting the European way of life (see Section 5), and the new push for European democracy, notably with the Conference on the Future of Europe (see Section 6), are all high on this Commission's agenda.

This paper monitors all six of these priorities. It combines a two-page presentation of each priority and an infographic illustrating in a single page (page 3), the degree of progress– both overall and under each of the six priorities.

Our assessment is that, of the over 500 initiatives foreshadowed (504), more than half (57 %) have already been submitted (288). It is worth noting that almost one in five of the Commission's initiatives are non-legislative in character, such as strategies, action plans and other communications. Among these 288, almost half (47 %) have already been adopted (135), while the great majority of the remainder are either proceeding normally through the legislative process (113,

or 74 %) or close to adoption (11, or 7 %). Conversely, a certain number are proceeding very slowly or are currently blocked (29, or 19 %).

These numbers reflect the state of play as the Commission reaches the mid-point of this five-year EU political cycle, during which the executive continues to come forward with new proposals, whilst simultaneously the twin branches of the legislature (the European Parliament and the Council of the EU) are fully engaged in considering and (very often) amending them. The ranking and proportionate progress have remained stable compared with the previous assessment, which is all the more remarkable as the Commission has returned to a more 'business-as-usual' mode after more than one year in pandemic mode.

With a focus on each of the six policy priorities, our assessment shows how the European Commission is performing at the different stages of announcing and tabling proposals, followed by the three institutions' progress in negotiating and finally adopting legislation. The European Green Deal ranks highest in the number of initiatives planned (125) but the executive has tabled less than half of them (or 45 %), leading to only one-fifth being adopted by the co-legislators so far (20 %). The third priority, 'An economy that works for people', comes next (101), but this time with more initiatives tabled (68 %) and the highest number of initiatives adopted (32 %). The urgent need to recover from the economic consequences of the pandemic explains this result and why the third priority has overtaken the lead expected for the second 'twin transition' – digital – in terms of initiatives planned, tabled and adopted. This latter totals 84 initiatives planned, half of which are already submitted (44), and 14 already adopted (17 %). For 'A stronger Europe in the world', an area with relatively few legislative initiatives, by definition and by contrast with the majority of the Commission's priorities, over three in four (78 %) initiatives have already been tabled (see Section 4), but a fair amount of work remains to be done for the other priorities (38 % of the proposals remain to be submitted for 'A Europe fit for the digital age', 39 % for 'Promoting our European way of life' and 49 % for 'A new push for democracy' (see Sections 2, 5 and 6). This latter priority comes lowest in terms of number of initiatives announced (55), as neither the Conference on the Future of Europe, which is expected to come to a close this spring, nor (however important), upholding EU values, especially fundamental rights and the rule of law, require such proposals to proceed.

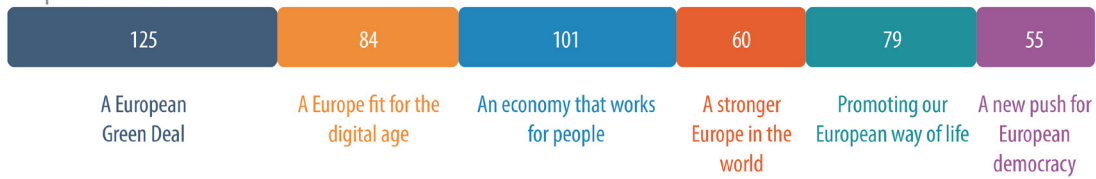
The next edition of this biannual paper will monitor the situation in September 2022, on the eve of the 2022 State of the Union address. The coming months will be crucial for this Commission to deliver on its commitments and on the 'main elements guiding the preparation of the Commission work programme' for 2023. The Commission is expected to set out its plans in writing to the Parliament, under the 2010 Interinstitutional Agreement between the European Parliament and the European Commission.

In the face of the latest events and their 'tectonic' magnitude, this publication and the next will continue to monitor this Commission's ambition to become a 'geopolitical Commission'.

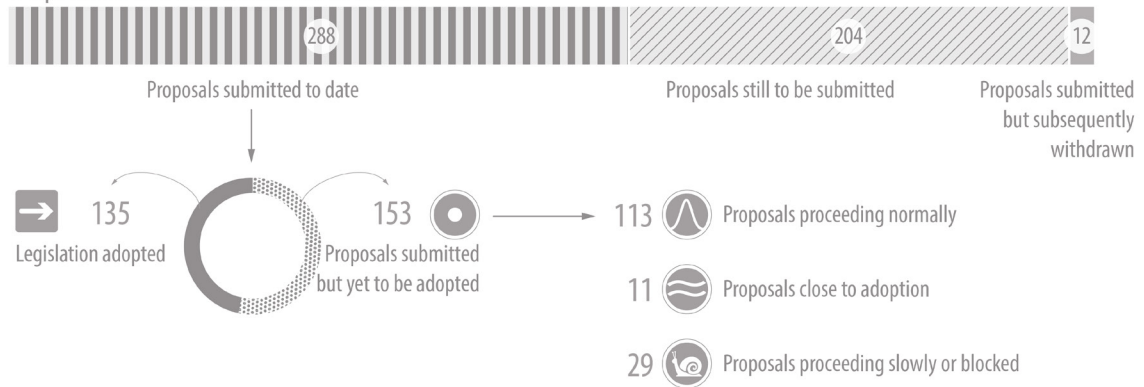
For more information on how the von der Leyen Commission's agenda is proceeding, a proposal-by-proposal assessment is available on the European Parliament's 'Legislative Train Schedule' website, also developed by EPRS, at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/>

The von der Leyen Commission's six priorities: Legislative delivery to 31 March 2022

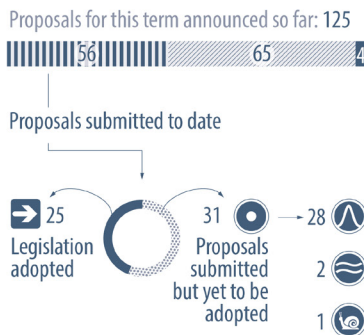
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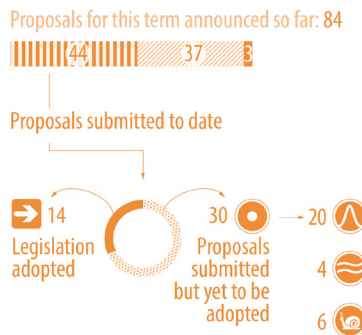
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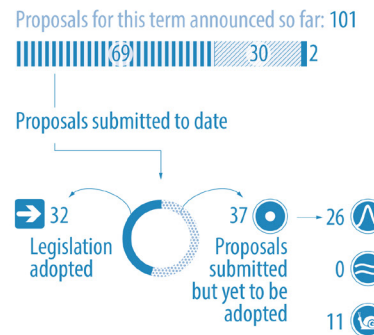
**A European Green Deal**



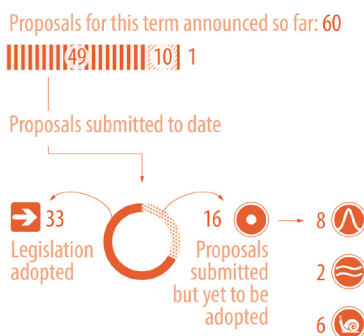
**A Europe fit for the digital age**



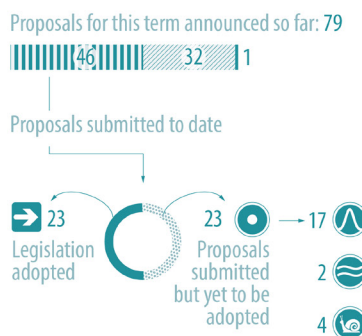
**An economy that works for people**



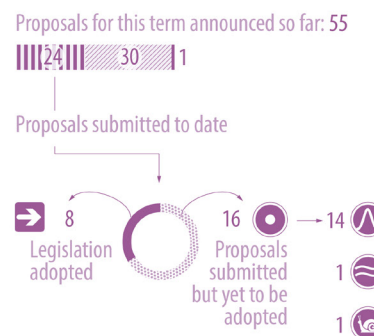
**A stronger Europe in the world**



**Promoting our European way of life**



**A new push for European democracy**



03 2022

Data on this page come from the [Legislative Train Schedule](#) website of the European Parliament, and represent the situation as of 31 March 2022.





# 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 by 2050, become a world leader in the circular economy, eliminate pollution, protect biodiversity and mobilise finance for the green transition. The coronavirus crisis has not hindered progress on the Green Deal. On the contrary, the EU is using the instruments for crisis recovery to advance climate action, by requiring Member States to spend 37 % of EU funding in the €672.5 billion [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#) on climate investment and reforms (see Section 3). As the Commission is reaching its mid-term, it has delivered most of the planned initiatives on EU climate action. The [2022 Commission work programme](#) contains initiatives on the circular economy, plastics, climate and environmental protection.

Russia's war on Ukraine has brought EU energy security into the spotlight. The Commission's [RePowerEU](#) initiative, announced on 8 March 2022, seeks to diversify gas supplies and accelerate the transition to clean energy to end the EU's over-dependence on gas imports from Russia.

## 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 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. These targets were based on an impact-assessed [climate target plan](#). The EU submitted this 55 % target for 2030 as its updated international commitment to the Paris Agreement in December 2020. In line with the [Parliament's position](#), the European Climate Law establishes an independent scientific advisory board and introduces a carbon budget that will guide the setting of the emission reduction target for 2040.

To implement this increased ambition, on 14 July 2021 the Commission presented the '[fit for 55](#)' package. 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](#), and the [Energy Taxation Directive](#). The Commission also proposed to strengthen the [emissions trading system](#) (ETS), extend it to the maritime sector, and reduce over time the free allowances allocated to [airlines](#). A proposed new emissions trading system for road transport and buildings would start in 2025, complemented by a new social climate fund with a financial envelope of €72.2 billion to address its social impacts. New legislation was proposed on clean [maritime](#) and [aviation](#) fuels. To ensure fair pricing of GHG emissions associated with certain imported goods, the Commission proposed a new [carbon border adjustment mechanism](#).

The Commission addressed emissions in the energy system through the strategies on [hydrogen](#) and [energy system integration](#) adopted in July 2020, the strategies on [methane](#) and on [offshore renewable energy sources](#) in November 2020, and legislative proposals on [energy-related methane emissions](#), the [energy performance of buildings](#) and a revised regulatory framework for the [EU gas and hydrogen market](#) in December 2021.

The [European climate pact](#), a non-legislative initiative launched in December 2020, brings together regional and local authorities, civil society, industry and schools to agree on commitments to change behaviour, supported by a secretariat under the lead of the Commission.

The European Commission tabled a new [strategy on adaptation to climate change](#) in February 2021, seeking to mainstream climate adaptation and strengthen the international dimension. The strategy focuses primarily on the interaction with other Green Deal strategies – circular economy, biodiversity, the renovation wave, and the farm-to-fork strategy – to increase the EU's preparedness for the impacts of climate change.



## Becoming a world leader in the circular economy

In March 2020, the Commission adopted a long-term strategy for Europe's [industrial future](#) that is aligned with the European Green Deal. It was [updated](#) in May 2021, to take account of the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, the evolving global competitive context, and the acceleration of the twin green and digital transitions. This was complemented by a [chemicals strategy for sustainability](#), adopted in October 2020, and a proposal for a new [batteries regulation](#) in December 2020.

The [circular economy action plan](#) adopted in March 2020 promotes the sustainable use of resources, especially in resource-intensive sectors with high environmental impact, such as electronics, textiles and construction. Key components of the plan are the roll-out of a sustainable product policy framework across key value chains, and initiatives to prevent waste and promote circularity. A legislative proposal on empowering consumers for the green transition and a sustainable products initiative are [expected in 2022](#). In January 2021, the Commission [launched](#) the transdisciplinary [New European Bauhaus](#) initiative as a bridge between science, technology, art and culture.

## Eliminating pollution and protecting biodiversity

The Commission adopted a [zero-pollution action plan](#) for air, water and soil in May 2021, and [plans](#) to present legislative proposals to revise the Industrial Emissions Directive and the air pollutant emissions standards for combustion-engine vehicles in 2022. A [biodiversity strategy for 2030](#), adopted in May 2020, supports the key objective of mainstreaming biodiversity across all policy areas. Binding targets to restore degraded ecosystems are expected in 2022. The Commission adopted a new [EU forest strategy](#) on 16 July 2021, and a [legislative proposal](#) aimed at minimising the risk of deforestation and forest degradation associated with products placed on the EU market in November 2021.

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 President 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, as set out in the [EIB climate bank roadmap](#). In January 2020, the Commission adopted a communication on the [sustainable Europe investment plan](#) (often referred to as the European Green Deal investment plan). It was designed to increase funding for the transition by mobilising €1 trillion for sustainable investment over the next decade through the EU budget and associated instruments such as [InvestEU](#), and to create an enabling [framework for sustainable investment](#). In April 2021, the Commission presented its proposal for a [corporate sustainability reporting directive](#), revising and strengthening the existing rules, introduced by the [Non-Financial Reporting Directive](#), on companies' disclosure of social and environmental performance and impacts. The European Commission adopted a [renewed sustainable finance strategy](#) in July 2021.

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. It is part of a just transition mechanism that cuts across different funds and financing instruments and should mobilise at least €100 billion in public and private investment. 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 2021-2027.

## 2. A Europe fit for the digital age

In the past six months, the Commission has adopted a series of legislative and non-legislative texts announced in its [work programmes](#) since 2020. So far, it has delivered most of the promised initiatives aimed at steering Europe towards digital transformation, with further initiatives expected [in 2022](#).

### Shaping the digital future of Europe

The Commission put forward a [proposal](#) on 15 September 2021 on the 'path to the digital decade', which requires a decision by the Parliament and Council. The initiative would set the framework leading the EU towards digital sovereignty, as well as to a 'human-centred, sustainable, and more prosperous' digital future. The proposal would set digital targets for 2030, defined along four 'cardinal points' – digital skills, digital infrastructure, digitalisation of businesses and of public services – and a governance framework to achieve them. Key performance indicators would measure progress for each target.

On 23 September 2021, the Commission adopted a [proposal](#) for a directive amending the [Radio Equipment Directive](#). The intention is to introduce a common charger for mobile phones and other small portable devices. It is expected to reduce electronic waste, improve consumer convenience and avoid market fragmentation for charging devices. The Commission adopted a [delegated act](#) to the same directive on 29 October 2021, aimed at better protecting wireless devices available on the European market. The purpose of the act is to protect consumers by increasing network resilience, enhancing protection of personal data (for children in particular), and requiring wireless devices and products to incorporate features to reduce the risk of monetary fraud.

The Commission made a [proposal](#) for a directive aiming at improving the working conditions and social rights of people performing digital platform work on 9 December 2021. Some 43 million people are expected to enjoy protection under this directive by 2025. The proposal would ensure correct determination of their employment status, promote transparency, fairness and accountability in algorithmic management, and enhance transparency in platform work. Furthermore, as an overarching reference framework for digital transformation, the Commission tabled a [declaration](#) on digital rights and principles for a human-centred digital transformation on 26 January 2022, based on the principle that EU rights and freedoms, as well as European values, should be respected online in the same way as they are off-line. The Commission intends to work with the Parliament and the Council to facilitate the signature of the declaration [in 2022](#).

As radio spectrum policy is a key enabler in achieving Europe's digital targets, the Commission adopted several [implementing decisions](#) on 7 February 2022. These should enable the radio spectrum to enhance connectivity through any kind of connected device in the EU in the future, from medical devices and self-driving cars to 'smart homes'.

To implement the [data strategy](#) and complement the [proposal](#) for a regulation on data governance, the Commission adopted a [proposal](#) for a regulation on harmonised rules on fair access to and use of data (the data act) on 23 February 2022, to regulate the use of non-personal data generated in the EU. The proposal would give users more power over data created by connected devices, as it would require companies to share business-to-consumer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) data generated from the use of their products or related services. It would enhance data portability for users, and ease switching between different data-processing services. It would also allow data to be made available to public sector bodies and EU institutions in exceptional cases, and set safeguards against unlawful transfers of data, including protection from foreign government surveillance.

### Supporting industry and small and medium-sized enterprises

Semiconductors (or chips) are the [engines of the digital transition](#). On 8 February 2022, the Commission adopted a [European chips act package](#) aimed at increasing the resilience of the EU's

semiconductor ecosystem and its global market share. The package includes a [communication](#) on a chips act for Europe, explaining the strategy and the rationale behind the package. It also includes a [proposal](#) for a regulation of the Parliament and Council setting up a framework of measures to strengthen Europe's semiconductor ecosystem (the 'chips act'). The proposal is based on three pillars: the first builds on a 'chips for Europe initiative', supporting technological capacity-building and innovation in the sector, implemented primarily through a chips joint undertaking (the revised Key Digital Technologies Joint Undertaking, amended through a [proposal](#) for a Council regulation). The second pillar sets up a framework to boost projects aimed at improving the EU's security of supply, by attracting investments and enhancing production capacities. The third pillar establishes a coordination mechanism between the Member States and the Commission to monitor the supply of chips and implement emergency measures in case of supply crises (e.g. the Commission may oblige some undertakings to accept an order of crisis-relevant products). In addition, a Commission [recommendation](#) on a common toolbox to address semiconductor shortages and an EU mechanism for monitoring the semiconductor ecosystem includes possible crisis-response measures, which Member States could implement before the new regulation enters into force.

On 15 February 2022, the Commission adopted three texts: first, a [proposal](#) for a regulation setting up an EU global secure and autonomous space-based communication system (the third EU satellite system announced in the [action plan](#) on synergies between civil, defence and space industries), allowing Europe to remain connected in all circumstances. Second, with the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, a joint [communication](#) on an EU approach for space traffic management to promote a safe, sustainable and secure use of space. Third, a [roadmap](#) on security and defence technologies, putting forward ways to bolster research, technology development and innovation and to reduce the EU's strategic dependencies in critical technologies and value chains for security and defence.

## Improving the functioning of the single market

In the framework of the ongoing [review](#) of EU competition tools, on 18 November 2021 the Commission adopted a communication on a [competition policy fit for new challenges](#), detailing the initiatives planned under the review and their timeline. The review is aimed at enhancing the resilience of the single market and enabling EU industries to lead in the green and digital transitions. In particular, the criteria used by the Commission to analyse the internal market compatibility of State aid promoting the execution of important projects of common European interest (IPCEIs) were [reviewed](#) on 30 December 2021. The changes aim at better aligning the criteria with the new EU strategies, such as the digital decade, increasing the transparency of setting-up IPCEIs and facilitating the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises in IPCEIs.

Furthermore, highlighting that a standardisation system reflecting EU policy priorities is key to enabling EU industries' digital transition and the good functioning and resilience of the single market, the Commission proposed a [standardisation strategy](#) on 2 February 2022. The strategy aims at ensuring European leadership in global standards.

On 23 February 2022, the Commission published its second annual [report](#) setting out the state of the single market. It presents the actions taken to strengthen the resilience of the single market. The report discusses the volume of investment needed to ensure the green and digital transitions (€650 billion annually up to 2030) and to increase the single market's resilience. On the same day, the Commission published its second [report](#) on Europe's strategic dependencies and capacities. The report presents recent progress made in addressing strategic dependencies and assesses Europe's dependencies in the rare earths and magnesium, chemicals, solar photovoltaic panels and technologies, cybersecurity, and IT software (edge and cloud) sectors.

As a response to the disruption of the single market caused by the pandemic, the Commission announced a proposal for a regulation on a single market emergency instrument for the first quarter of 2022, to ensure the free movement of goods, services and people in times of crises, with improved transparency and coordination. It had yet to be presented at the time of drafting this paper.

### 3. An economy that works for people

In her [political guidelines](#), Ursula von der Leyen promised the transition towards a green social market economy would be fair for all. She committed to fostering an 'economy that works for people', enhancing the distinctive features of the social market economy called for in [Article 3\(3\) TEU](#). The European Commission announced new initiatives implementing this priority in its [2022 work programme](#) and took additional measures to address the negative economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

After 18 months focused on replying to the economic fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic for the EU, the past 6 months have seen a return to 'business-as-usual', with important reviews of the files forming banking union (BU) and the capital markets union (CMU), as well as follow-up measures on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and the social pillar.

#### Supporting small and medium-sized enterprises' investment and financing

On 10 January 2022, the Commission and the European Union Intellectual Property Office ([EUIPO](#)) launched a new [EU SME Fund](#), endowed with a budget of €47 million, which will offer vouchers for SMEs based in the EU, to help them protect their intellectual property (IP) rights. In June 2021, the Commission had published a [list of indicators](#) – some of which concern SMEs – to help monitor capital market developments and measure progress towards the CMU objectives.

#### Deepening economic and monetary union

To achieve a more growth-friendly fiscal stance in the euro area, the Commission initially announced its intention to further deepen economic and monetary union ([EMU](#)). Following up on this commitment, in February 2020, the Commission presented a [communication](#) to review the current framework for economic and fiscal surveillance, especially the six-pack and two-pack reforms. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the EU economy led to the decision to temporarily suspend the stability and growth pact ([SGP](#)) by activating the '[general escape clause](#)' and to the consultation being [relaunched](#) and extended until 31 December 2021. To-date, the clause is still active and the Commission has not yet published the results of the consultation.

The crisis caused by the pandemic has also revived supranational debt instruments as a solution for avoiding a symmetrical exogenous shock producing asymmetric effects between Member States. In this setting, the European Commission is expected to [borrow](#) up to around €800 billion from the capital markets by the end of 2026, to finance Next Generation EU ([NGEU](#)). Between June and December 2021, the European Commission [raised](#) €71 billion for NGEU, €12 billion of which through the first ever [NGEU green bond](#) issuance.

The completion of banking union ([BU](#)) has remained a key priority, as restated at the [25 June 2021](#) Euro Summit, when leaders reiterated their full commitment to the completion of the BU and invited the Eurogroup, in its inclusive format, to 'agree without delay on a stepwise and time-bound work plan'. On 27 October 2021, the Commission published two proposals, the [first](#) amending the Capital Requirements Directive and the [second](#) amending the Capital Requirements Regulation. Their aim is to strengthen the risk-based capital framework, further harmonise supervisory powers and tools and improve access to institutions' prudential data.

The Commission gave further impetus to another very important project, the capital markets union (CMU). In November 2021, the Commission adopted three proposals, the [first](#) to review the Markets in Financial Instruments Directive (MiFID), the [second](#) to review the Regulation (MiFIR), which regulates investment services and activities. The [third](#) proposal reviews the Undertakings for Collective Investment in Transferable Securities (UCITS) Directive and the Alternative Investment Funds Managers Directive (AIFMD), which regulate investment funds. In the insurance sector, the

Commission adopted proposals [establishing](#) a framework for the recovery and resolution of insurance and reinsurance undertakings and [amending](#) the central piece of legislation in insurance, i.e. the Solvency II Directive in September 2021. Lastly, to improve the efficiency of the EU's settlement markets and ensure financial stability, in March 2022 the European Commission [proposed](#) changes to the Central Securities Depositories Regulation.

Finally, on sustainable finance, the EU economic and financial system is a key driver of the green transition, as exemplified by the [new strategy](#) for financing the transition to a sustainable economy, including the establishment of an [EU green bond standard](#), which the Commission had adopted on 6 July 2021.

## Implementing the social pillar and promoting equality

Following the commitment made in the political guidelines, and reiterated in the January 2020 [communication on a strong social Europe for just transitions](#), the Commission adopted an [action plan](#) for the implementation of the principles of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) in March 2021. The action plan sets three headline targets for the EU, to be reached by 2030, on employment, skills, and social protection, in line with the United Nations sustainable development goals ([SDGs](#)). The Heads of State or Government, meeting at the Euro Summit of 25 June 2021, welcomed the EU headline targets of the European Pillar of Social Rights action plan, in line with the Porto Declaration. As concrete actions under the Social Pillar, the Commission took various steps in 2021, such as the publication of its [strategy](#) for the rights of persons with disabilities (2021-2030), and the adoption of a [recommendation](#) for effective active support to employment following the Covid-19 crisis. In February 2022, it adopted a [communication](#) on promoting decent work for all, which reaffirms the EU commitment to eradicating child labour and forced labour worldwide, as well as to promoting decent work in third-country domestic markets and in global supply chains.

Pending the establishment of a European unemployment reinsurance scheme – originally announced for end-2020 in the 2020 Commission work programme – an instrument for temporary support to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency ([SURE](#)) was created to tackle the negative impact of the pandemic on the labour market. Following the adoption of a [new occupational safety and health strategy](#) on 28 June 2021, the Commission adopted a comprehensive [social economy action plan](#) in December 2021.

Several related legislative initiatives are under examination, or already adopted. In March 2021, the Commission tabled a [proposal](#) for a Council recommendation on establishing a European child guarantee, as a key element of the comprehensive EU strategy on the rights of the child. The Council [adopted](#) the recommendation on 14 June. In December 2021, the Commission tabled a [proposal](#) for a directive on improving working conditions in platform work, which is expected to more clearly determine the employment status of people working through digital labour platforms and lead to new rights for both workers and self-employed people regarding algorithmic management (see Section 2). In 2021, the co-legislators endorsed their respective mandates ([European Parliament](#), [Council](#)) to finalise the adoption of the [proposal](#) for a directive on [adequate minimum wages](#) in the EU. In February 2022, the Commission tabled a [proposal](#) for a directive on corporate sustainability due diligence, which will also contribute to identifying, preventing and mitigating potential adverse impacts on labour rights along global supply chains.

## Promoting fair taxation

On 18 May 2021, the Commission adopted a [communication](#) on business taxation for the 21st century, to promote a robust, efficient and fair business tax system in the EU. To follow up, in the second half of 2021 the Commission adopted proposals on [energy taxation](#), on preventing the [misuse of shell entities](#) for tax purposes and on a global [minimum level of taxation for multinational groups](#) in the EU, which will implement the [global tax reform](#) agreement reached by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in October 2021.



## 4. A stronger Europe in the world

In November 2019, then-President elect of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, stated her intention to head a [geopolitical Commission](#) that stabilises its neighbourhood; re-evaluates EU enlargement; champions rules-based global leadership, particularly in Africa; and counters China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region. These priorities were underlined in her [State of the Union](#) speech on 15 September 2021. Russia's war on Ukraine – '[a moment of truth for Europe](#)', as President von der Leyen emphasised, speaking before the European Parliament in plenary on 1 March 2022 – is the biggest military operation in Europe since World War II, threatening [peace](#) and prosperity in Europe. The response to this crisis and other international challenges will determine the extent to which this Commission has achieved its objective of being a 'geopolitical Commission'.

### Responding to Russia's war on Ukraine and its consequences

The 2019 [political guidelines](#) state that 'European leadership also means working hand in hand with our neighbours and our partners. In deepening our relationships, we will always be guided by our values and our respect for international law'. Responding to the Ukrainian crisis, the EU has imposed heavy [sanctions](#) against Russia's financial system, high-tech industries and the people and entities who facilitate the war in Ukraine. On 26 February 2022, key Russian banks were [disconnected](#) from the [SWIFT network](#). On 28 February 2022, together with the United States and Japan, the EU [banned](#) transactions with the Central Bank of the Russian Federation, effectively barring access to any assets Russia's central bank holds in the EU, USA or Japan. Experts [estimate](#) that around half of Russia's US\$630 billion reserves remains inaccessible, however Russia's central bank can still access its gold reserves and the 13 % of its reserves held in Chinese yuan. The [fourth package of sanctions](#), adopted by the Council includes an agreement between the EU and the World Trade Organization (WTO) to deny Russian products and services most favoured nation treatment. Furthermore, the EU has [agreed](#) to allocate €1 billion from the [European Peace Facility](#) to strengthen Ukrainian military and defence capacities. For the first time ever, EU Member States are using this off-budget mechanism to purchase and deliver military equipment to a country under attack. On 2 March 2022, the European Commission [proposed](#) to activate the Temporary Protection Directive to offer assistance to people fleeing the war in Ukraine (see Section 5).

### Countering hybrid threats

The legal framework set up by the EU to face hybrid threats remains fragmentary and is based principally on the 2016 [Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats](#). The above-mentioned 2019 political guidelines underlined the necessity to counter hybrid threats: 'Security challenges are becoming diverse and unpredictable. Serious and acute hybrid threats have become a reality. The European Union needs to step up its response and resilience'. Due to Russia's use of disinformation in hybrid warfare against Ukraine, the EU [banned](#) Russian state-owned media, Russia Today and Sputnik, all of their subsidiaries, and removed their ability to hold broadcast licences in EU Member States. The [European Digital Media Observatory](#), which serves as a hub for fact-checkers, is monitoring [false news](#) related to Ukraine on a daily basis. Building resilience to hybrid threats is a key element of the Commission's contribution to [European defence](#) adopted on 15 February 2022, which has been further developed in the [Strategic Compass](#), a common assessment of threats facing the EU and a common approach to dealing with them, which was [adopted](#) by the Council on 21 March 2022. Economic and energy resilience is another aspect of European security and [strategic autonomy](#) addressed in the context of the war in Ukraine: it has intensified the need for an urgent energy transition towards renewable sources, as well as the [interconnection](#) of electric grids and other energy infrastructure. The EU is also addressing the region's heavy dependence on the importation of Russian energy and hydrocarbons.

## Re-evaluating EU enlargement

The von der Leyen [Commission's](#) geopolitical [priority](#) is to stabilise its neighbourhood and re-evaluate EU enlargement. The Ukraine crisis has confirmed the attractiveness of the European normative and security model. The EU has reaffirmed its determination to continue to stand in support of its eastern partners' sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. On 28 February 2022, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced Ukraine's official [request](#) for 'immediate [EU] accession via a new special procedure'. President von der Leyen [expressed](#) her support for Ukrainian membership. Following the Ukrainian example, [Georgia](#) and [Moldova](#) signed requests to join the EU. On 10 March 2022, the European Council [acknowledged](#) Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova's European aspirations and European choice, and underlined that the Council has already invited the Commission to prepare opinions on these applications in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Treaties.

A European perspective for the Western Balkans and the commitment to the accession process was reaffirmed in President von der Leyen's 2021 State of the Union speech, during her visit to the region in September 2021, as well as at the [EU-Western Balkans Summit](#) on 6 October 2021. The [Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans](#) will [mobilise](#) up to €30 billion of funding, representing one-third of the region's gross domestic product (GDP). To stabilise the region, it is critical to complete the comprehensive agreement within the [Belgrade-Pristina dialogue](#). President von der Leyen [welcomed](#) 'a very positive development' in this direction, following the meeting with Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić in September 2021.

## Global leadership and engaging with Africa

The Covid-19 pandemic and geopolitical crises have accentuated the need for responsible global leadership, referred to by President von der Leyen in [2019](#). To this end, on 18 February 2022, the EU and the African Union (AU) convened the sixth European Union-African Union Summit and adopted a declaration on [A joint vision for 2030](#), developing the principles of the March 2020 [comprehensive strategy for Africa](#). The EU also pledged €150 billion for 2021-2027, which will mainly be delivered through the [Team Europe](#) and [Global Gateway](#) schemes. The EU also committed to supporting the delivery and production of Covid-19 vaccines in Africa.

To facilitate trade, on 22 September 2021, the European Commission adopted a [proposal](#) for a regulation on a generalised scheme of preferences. It also adopted a new [sustainable corporate governance proposal](#) on 23 February 2022, as part of its broader efforts to make trade more sustainable. In December 2021, to promote security and contribute to peacebuilding, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) [adopted](#) the EU strategic approach to supporting the [disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration](#) of former combatants, which 'addresses the risks posed by armed groups and supports the transition from armed confrontation to political engagement and inclusive governance'.

## A strategic approach to the Indo-Pacific region

As President von der Leyen stated in her 2021 State of the Union speech, the EU and partner countries will 'work together to deepen trade links, strengthen global supply chains and develop new investment projects on green and digital technologies'. Given the growing strategic importance of the [Indo-Pacific region](#), the European Commission presented the [EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific](#) the next day. It was endorsed by the European Council in October 2021. New initiatives, such as the [Global Gateway](#), adopted on 1 December 2021, complement this approach by providing an EU plan for major investment in infrastructure development around the world. The Global Gateway will channel EU spending on global infrastructure development, in accordance with key democratic principles and standards, including a green and climate-neutral strategy.



## 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. Policy action in these areas has been highly influenced by the multiple crises that Europe has faced, from the coronavirus pandemic to the Russian war on Ukraine. While the former has strongly accelerated progress on health policy, it remains to be seen if the current humanitarian crisis at the EU's eastern borders can provide the impetus to overcome the deadlock in reforming EU migration and asylum policy. These crises have also had an impact on EU internal security policy, calling 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.

### A new pact on migration and asylum

Since autumn 2021, the EU has faced unprecedented pressure at its eastern borders, triggering the European Commission to take urgent measures. Russia's war on Ukraine has forced millions of people to flee, creating a major humanitarian crisis. To [assist](#) Ukrainians seeking refuge in EU countries, the EU has activated, for the very first time, the 2001 [Temporary Protection Directive](#), providing harmonised rights for refugees across the EU (residence permit, access to employment, education, housing and healthcare). To help Member States provide emergency support to people fleeing the war, the Commission [proposed](#) to launch a 'cohesion's action for refugees in Europe' ([CARE](#)) and to unlock access to unspent financial resources under the 2014-2020 [Home Affairs](#) funds.

A few months earlier, the EU had been forced to react to the Belarusian regime's instrumentalisation of migratory flows, which it considered a '[hybrid attack](#)'. In December 2021, the Commission proposed a [Council decision](#) on provisional [emergency measures](#) for Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. It also proposed a [regulation](#) addressing [instrumentalisation](#) situations in migration and asylum, creating an emergency procedure at external borders as well as support and solidarity measures. At the same time, the Commission adopted a proposal to amend the [Schengen Borders Code](#) to adapt the rules to evolving challenges, including providing tools to better manage external borders should a public health crisis or instrumentalisation of migrants occur. The proposal complements [initiatives](#) to strengthen the Schengen Area's resilience adopted in June 2021.

However, [progress](#) on other major initiatives under the [new pact on migration and asylum](#), adopted in September 2020, has been rather slow. Work is ongoing on the first [package](#) of legislative proposals, including new regulations on [asylum and migration management](#), [screening](#) and [crisis and force majeure](#), and amended proposals revising the [Asylum Procedures Directive](#) and the [Eurodac Regulation](#). Most asylum and return reforms pending from the previous term are still blocked in the Council, with the notable exception of the [Regulation](#) on the [European Union Agency for Asylum](#), adopted in December 2021. Proposals on legal migration announced in the 2021 [Commission work programme](#), such as a 'talent and skills' package, including revision of the [Long-term Residents Directive](#) and of the [Single Permit Directive](#), have been postponed to April 2022. The reform of the [Blue Card](#) scheme, initiated in 2016, was finalised with the adoption of the directive in October 2021. The Commission also put forward a number of non-legislative initiatives envisaged in the pact, such as EU action plans on [integration and inclusion](#) and against [migrant smuggling](#).

### Towards a security union 2.0

The EU's action on internal security during 2020-2025 is framed by the [EU security union strategy](#). Taking evolving cross-border and global threats into account, the strategy focuses not only on the interconnection between physical and digital environments, but also between internal and external security. In this context, the Commission put forward initiatives to increase the EU's resilience to cyber and hybrid threats, such as the proposal for a directive to enhance the [resilience of critical entities](#) (currently in trilogue negotiation) and the recommendation to set up a [joint cyber unit](#). As

to building an EU security ecosystem, an important development is the February 2022 [agreement](#) reached by the co-legislators on [strengthening Europol's mandate](#). It will allow Europol to cooperate more effectively with private parties, analyse big data sets and conduct research and innovation activities. To improve information-sharing and cooperation between law enforcement authorities, in December 2021 the Commission adopted a legislative package on the [EU Police Cooperation Code](#), with proposals for: a [directive](#) on information exchange between law enforcement authorities to enhance cross-border flows of information, a [regulation](#) on automated data exchange (Prüm II) extending the Prüm framework to facial images and police records, and a [Council recommendation](#) on operational police cooperation addressing obstacles to police officers' activities when operating in other Member States – as regards cross-border 'hot pursuits', surveillance, joint patrols, etc.

The Commission also adopted a number of initiatives to address specific forms of crime, such as strategies and action plans against [trafficking in human beings](#), [firearms trafficking](#), [drugs](#), [organised crime](#) and [child sexual abuse online](#). In view of the increased digitalisation of crime and the surge in child sexual abuse during the pandemic, the co-legislators adopted a [temporary derogation](#) to the e-Privacy Directive to allow tech companies to continue tracking child sexual abuse material online. The Commission planned to propose more comprehensive [legislation](#) in spring 2022 (postponed from 2021). It had yet to be presented at the time of drafting this paper.

## Towards a European health union

The coronavirus pandemic boosted the Commission's ambition to build a [European health union](#). From the start of the public health crisis, the Commission undertook to coordinate Member States' responses while also launching long-term initiatives to make the EU more resilient in the future. These coordination efforts translated into the adoption of an [EU vaccines strategy](#), later complemented by an [EU strategy on Covid-19 therapeutics](#), as well as of the [EU digital Covid certificate](#) facilitating the [free movement of people in the EU](#) during the pandemic. In February 2022, the Commission proposed to [extend](#) the certificate by one year, until 30 June 2023.

In a longer-term perspective, work advanced on strengthening the EU's [health security](#) framework. In January 2022, the co-legislators approved the extension of the mandate of the [European Medicines Agency \(EMA\)](#) and reached agreement on a new mandate for the [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control \(ECDC\)](#), while negotiations continue on the [proposal for a regulation on serious cross-border threats to health](#). In September 2021, the Commission [established](#) a new Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority ([HERA](#)), allocated a total €30 billion budget with a view to strengthening EU health security coordination before and during crises. Other initiatives, set out in the Commission's 2022 work programme ([CWP 2022](#)), include developing a European [health data space](#), updating the [2003 Council recommendation](#) on [cancer screening](#), adopting a [European care strategy](#), as well as revising [pharmaceutical legislation](#) and the [EU legislation on medicines for children and rare diseases](#), as a follow-up to the [pharmaceutical strategy for Europe](#).

## A European education area fit for the digital age

Over the past six months, the Commission has tabled several initiatives to fulfil its objective to make a European education area a reality by 2025. As part of the [European skills agenda](#), and according to the [European education area](#) communication adopted in 2020, the Commission issued two key proposals in December 2021 to [improve](#) lifelong learning and employability: a Council recommendation on [individual learning accounts](#) and a European approach to [micro-credentials](#). Action in this area is underpinned by several EU financial instruments available in 2021-2027, such as the European Social Fund Plus, Erasmus+ and InvestEU's Social Investment and Skills window, as well as the [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#). The [Digital Europe programme](#) will contribute to advanced digital skills development, while the updated 2021-2027 [digital education action plan](#) aims at improving everyone's digital skills.

## 6. A new push for European democracy

Whilst the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#) has remained high on the agenda over the past six months, developments surfaced regarding the rule of law, protection of the EU's democratic fabric and of human rights, persons with disabilities and media freedom. This accelerated advances on the push for European democracy following delays due to the pandemic.

### Strengthening the EU's democratic fabric

On 25 November 2021, the Commission adopted a series of proposals under the first two European democracy action plan (EDAP) pillars: (1) protecting the [integrity of elections](#) and promoting democratic participation and (2) strengthening [media freedom](#) and media pluralism. A first set of initiatives aims at improving current electoral arrangements. A first [proposal](#) modifies [Directive 93/109/EC](#) on the right to vote and stand as candidate in elections to the European Parliament for citizens of the Union residing in a Member State of which they are not nationals. It would simplify the process of registering to vote, ensuring equal access to remote and electronic possibilities, and guaranteeing that no double candidacies can occur. Another Commission [proposal](#) issued the same day would modify the arrangements for the exercise of the right to vote and stand as a candidate in municipal elections by EU citizens residing in a Member State of which they are not nationals. This [proposal](#) aims at simplifying registration, guaranteeing higher standards of electoral information to mobile citizens by requiring Member States to appoint authorities informing mobile citizens of their rights, and that mobile citizens are informed by those authorities on the status of their registration and on how and where they can vote.

A second set of initiatives concerns political parties and political advertising. As announced in the [2021 Commission work programme](#), the Commission adopted a [proposal](#) in November 2021 that would amend the current regime; increase transparency, particularly in relation to political advertisements and donations; cut administrative burdens and increase the financial viability of European political parties and foundations; and facilitate European political parties' interactions with political parties from other [Council of Europe](#) countries. The same day, the Commission tabled a [proposal](#) aimed at [harmonising](#) transparency obligations for providers of [political advertising](#), by requiring them to clearly label political adverts as such and publish information including who paid for it and how much. The [proposal](#) would also establish strict rules for the use of political targeting and amplification techniques.

Concerning the third pillar, on media freedom and media pluralism, although the Commission [committed to taking action](#) to protect journalists and civil society from strategic lawsuits brought against public participation (SLAPPs) by the end of 2021, this proposal was delayed and is currently [expected](#) in April 2022. The Commission however already issued a recommendation in [September 2021](#), setting out actions the Member States should take to ensure safer working conditions for journalists. Moreover, in its [2022 work programme](#), the Commission committed to putting forward a proposal for a European media freedom act that would seek to increase media transparency, independence and accountability.

### The Conference on the Future of Europe: Close to conclusion

At the time of publication, the Conference on the Future of Europe has rolled out a substantial part of its activity. The four citizens' panels, made up of 800 citizens, randomly selected to debate a broad range of policy areas, have held their three [deliberative sessions](#). The citizens' panels made 178 recommendations (48 for [Panel 1](#); 39 for [Panel 2](#), 51 for [Panel 3](#) and 40 for [Panel 4](#)). These were presented to the Conference plenary in the course of the December 2021 and March 2022 sessions, followed by a debate. In parallel, the [nine working groups](#) have met since October 2021 in a series of deliberative sessions with the aim of presenting their conclusions at the Conference's plenary on 25-26 March and 8-9 April 2022 and thereafter to vote on the Conference's recommendation at a

Conference plenary at the end of April 2022. A first set of conclusions of the Conference should be announced by the three co-chairs on Europe Day (9 May) 2022. Meanwhile, the Conference has also heard the conclusions of [national citizens' panels](#) from some Member States (Belgium, Germany, France, Lithuania, and the Netherlands).

Of what is available to date, the recommendations of one of the [four components](#) of the Conference (citizens' panels, Conference plenary, multilingual digital platform and decentralised events), the citizens' panels, show citizens' strong engagement in proposing ways to improve the EU. An analysis of recommendations from [Panel 2](#) and [Panel 3](#) shows that, for many of the issues highlighted by citizens, Parliament has made proposals or taken a position close to citizens' recommendations.

## Strengthening a Europe that protects

In December 2021, the Commission published a [communication](#) on 'a more inclusive and protective Europe: extending the list of EU crimes to hate speech and hate crime', inviting the Council to adopt a decision identifying hate speech and hate crime as another area of crime meeting the criteria set out in [Article 83\(1\) TFEU](#). The [annex](#) to this communication contains a proposal for such a Council decision. If adopted, the Commission would make a proposal, based on Article 83 TFEU, for a directive on minimum rules concerning the definition of criminal offences and sanctions in this area of crime. This would also allow stronger protection of people with disabilities.

Legislation on gender-based violence, although included in the 2021 work programme, has not yet been proposed. However, Helena Dalli, the European Commissioner for Equality, [clarified](#) that the proposal would set standards for prevention, protection and access to justice for victims, and criminalisation of specific forms of violence against women, with a victim-centred approach and to the extent of EU competence. In December 2021, the Commission issued a [legislative proposal](#) on the protection of the environment through criminal law, defining new environmental crimes, setting a minimum level for sanctions and strengthening the effectiveness of law enforcement cooperation.

## Upholding the rule of law and other EU values

Following the [second](#) annual [rule of law report](#), published in July 2021, a third edition is [being prepared](#). To uphold the rule of law, the Commission has brought a series of actions against Poland over breaches of judicial independence (cases [C-619/18](#), [C-192/18](#), [C-791/19](#), [C-204/21](#)). In the latter case, at the Commission's request, the European Court of Justice (ECJ), [ordered](#) Poland to pay a €1 million daily fine for failing to comply with its earlier [interim order](#) requesting the suspension of the disciplinary regime for judges. The [General Conditionality Regulation](#) was adopted in December 2020 and entered into force on 1 January 2021. It [allows for](#) the suspension or withdrawal of EU funding for those Member States that breach the principles of the rule of law in a way that hampers the proper implementation of the EU budget and affects EU financial interests. The Commission had [committed](#) not to apply the regulation whilst awaiting the ECJ ruling on its legality, an approach which met with criticism in Parliament (resolutions of [25 March 2021](#), [10 June 2021](#), [8 July 2021](#), [10 March 2022](#)), and an action for failure to act was even brought to court in October 2021 ([Case C-657/21](#)). On 17 November 2021, the Commission wrote letters to Poland and Hungary demanding detailed information on the rule of law in those countries, but not yet [triggering](#) the conditionality mechanism as such. In its [judgment of 16 February 2022](#), the ECJ dismissed actions for annulment brought by Hungary and Poland and upheld the legality of the regulation. The Commission finally published its [communication](#) containing 'guidelines' on the application of the regulation on 2 March 2022.

Following its 2020 [communication](#) on the digitalisation of justice, the Commission has pursued initiatives for the digitalisation of cross-border judicial cooperation, notably by adopting a proposal for a [regulation](#) in December 2021.

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This EPRS paper analyses progress in attaining the policy agenda set out 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 in respect of delivery on the six key priorities asserted at that time.

Concretely, EPRS finds that, following the March 2022 EP plenary sessions and European Council meeting, of the over 500 initiatives foreshadowed by the von der Leyen Commission on taking office or since (504), more than half have already been submitted (288). Of these, almost half have already been adopted (135), while the great majority of the remainder are either proceeding normally through the legislative process (113) or are close to adoption (11). Conversely, a certain number are proceeding very slowly or are currently blocked (29).

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