



GENERAL AFFAIRS Council

Tuesday 15 and Wednesday 16 November in Brussels

The Council will start work on **Tuesday 15 November** at 14.30.

Ministers will discuss the **mid-term review of the EU's multi-annual budgetary framework for 2014-2020**.

They will prepare for the **European Council on 15-16 December 2016** by discussing an annotated draft agenda. Ministers will also take note of the implementation of the **October European Council** conclusions.

They will discuss and evaluate the **rule of law dialogue**, established in December 2014 to promote and safeguard the rule of law.

Ministers will exchange views on the **Commission work programme for 2017** and discuss an input for the joint declaration on inter-institutional programming.

Finally, ministers will hear a presentation by the Slovak and incoming Maltese presidencies of the 2017 **European Semester** roadmap.

The second day of the Council meeting on **Wednesday 16 November** will be dedicated to EU **cohesion policy**.

Starting at 10.00 the presidency will update ministers on the state of play **of modifications to the Common provisions regulation for the European structural and investment funds**, including the on-going work on the proposals related to simplification of cohesion policy submitted by the Commission as part of the mid-term review of the EU's multi-annual budgetary framework for 2014-2020.

Ministers will discuss and adopt conclusions on the **results and new elements of cohesion policy and the European structural and investment funds**.

Presidency press conferences will be held both days at the end of the meeting (+/- 18.30 on Tuesday and on +/- 14.30 on Wednesday).

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*Press conferences and public events by video streaming: <http://video.consilium.europa.eu/en/webcasts>
Video coverage in broadcast quality (MPEG4) and photo gallery on:
<https://tvnewsroom.consilium.europa.eu/permalink/87640>*

¹ This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the press office.

MFF mid-term review

The presidency will inform ministers on the state of play on the mid-term review of the EU's multi-annual financial framework (MFF) for 2014-2020.

The overarching aim of the MFF mid-term review is to strengthen the EU's ability to address new priorities. To that end the Commission proposed to

- increase the resources for measures to tackle the migration crisis, reinforce security, boost growth and create jobs
- add flexibility by creating new special instruments outside the MFF and increase the allocations of existing ones

The presidency's objective is to reach an agreement on this file before the end of the year.

The MFF regulation sets out annual maximum amounts which the EU is allowed to spend on different policy areas over the period from 2014 to 2020. It translates political priorities into figures, ensures budgetary discipline for the EU and seeks to facilitate the adoption of the annual EU budget.

Preparation for the December European Council

The Council will examine an [annotated draft agenda](#) for the European Council meeting to be held on 15 and 16 December 2016.

The European Council will focus on:

- **migration**; it will 1) assess progress on the partnership framework on migration, set orientations for further work and decide on the possible extension of the approach to other countries; 2) look at the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement; 3) revert to the issue of the reform of the common European asylum system, including on how to apply the principles of responsibility and solidarity in the future
- **security**; it will address the implementation of the security agenda and the strengthening of EU cooperation on external security and defence
- **economic and social development, youth**: it will take stock of progress on the European fund for strategic investments, single market strategies, youth-related initiatives and the fight against youth unemployment
- **external relations**: Russia; Netherlands/EU-Ukraine association agreement

The annotated draft agenda will serve as the basis for draft conclusions, to be prepared in the run-up to the meeting.

Follow-up to the June European Council

The presidency will inform ministers about the implementation of the October European Council conclusions. It will brief ministers on progress and on the state of play of the main files referred to in the conclusions.

Evaluation of the rule of law dialogue

The Council will evaluate the experience acquired so far with the annual rule of law dialogue. Ministers will be invited to discuss the [presidency evaluation](#) of the dialogue. The presidency intends to issue conclusions following the discussions in the Council.

Until now, the Council has conducted two annual rule of law dialogues. The first dialogue took place under the Luxembourg presidency in November 2015. It allowed member states to share examples of best practices and challenges met at national level with regard to the respect of rule of law. The second dialogue was held under the Netherlands presidency in May 2016. Member states presented best practices in the field of integration of migrants.

The rule of law mechanism has been set up in December 2014. Its purpose is to promote and safeguard the rule of law in the framework of the Treaties.

Commission work programme for 2017

In public session, ministers will hear a presentation and exchange views on the [Commission work programme for 2017](#) adopted on 27 October.

After the public session, the presidency will inform ministers on the intended handling of the preparation of a joint declaration.

The better law-making agreement adopted by the Council on 15 March 2016 provides that each year the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission adopt a joint declaration identifying the common top priorities for the upcoming year. This is to allow the three institutions to work more closely together to tackle the big challenges which lie ahead.

2017 European Semester roadmap

The Council will take note of a presentation by the Slovak and forthcoming Maltese presidencies of the [roadmap for the 2017 European Semester](#). The roadmap sets out how work will be taken forward in the coming months and in the first semester of 2017. The objective of the roadmap is to ensure that all relevant Council formations work in a coordinated manner and to enable the General Affairs Council to oversee the process.

The European Semester is a cycle of economic and fiscal policy coordination within the EU. Its task is to help the member states to coordinate their economic, employment and fiscal policies better and to make sure they reflect the EU-level goal.

COHESION

Common provisions regulation

The presidency will update ministers on the state of play regarding modifications to the common provisions regulation.

The common provisions regulation defines the common principles, rules and standards for the implementation of the five European structural and investment (ESI) funds. These are the European regional development fund (ERDF), the European social fund (ESF), the cohesion fund, the European agricultural fund for rural development (EAFRD) and the European maritime and fisheries fund (EMFF). The modifications proposed by the Commission include:

- the possibility of making increased payments to any member state which benefits from financial assistance after 30 June 2016 as well as allowing Cyprus to apply the maximum co-financing rate of 85% until programme closure ([10738/16](#))

- simplification measures for the ESI funds contained in the proposed omnibus regulation ([12187/16](#))

The omnibus regulation seeks to simplify the financial rules applicable to the EU budget and to a number of sectorial legislative acts, including in the field of cohesion policy. The omnibus regulation has been proposed by the Commission as a part of the MFF mid-term review.

Results and new elements of cohesion policy

Ministers will discuss results of cohesion policy programmes implemented in the years 2007-2013, and new elements of cohesion policy and the ESI funds for the period 2014-2020. They are also expected to adopt [conclusions](#) on this topic.

The ex-post evaluation presented by the Commission highlights achievements of cohesion policy in the period 2007-2013, as well as the unique evidence-based policy learning process. First concrete experiences with certain new elements of the current period 2014-2020 were made during the elaboration of the partnership agreements and programmes, highlighting a strong commitment to the practical application of the recent cohesion policy reform and its further improvement.

The discussion will be steered by questions regarding the balance between the various objectives of the policy, the measures needed to effectively achieve these objectives and the communication of the policy.
