



Council of the European Union

PRESS
EN

BACKGROUND¹
Brussels, 2 February 2023

General Affairs Council **Brussels, 6 February 2023**

Chair: Jessika Roswall, Minister for EU Affairs of Sweden

The meeting will begin at 10.00.

The Council will prepare for the special European Council on 9-10 February 2023 by discussing draft conclusions.

Ministers will discuss the state of play of the EU-UK relations.

In public session, the Swedish Presidency will present its priorities for the duration of its term of office.

A press conference will take place at the end of the meeting (+/- 13.00).

* * *

[General Affairs Council, 6 February - meeting page](#)

[Press conferences and public events by video streaming](#)

[Video coverage in broadcast quality \(MPEG4\) and photo gallery](#)

* * *

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

Special European Council

The Council will prepare for the special European Council on 9-10 February 2023 by discussing draft conclusions.

At its meeting, the European Council will address Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The discussion will take place following the EU-Ukraine summit on 3 February and almost one year since the beginning of the war on 24 February 2022.

Leaders will also address the economic agenda. They are expected to focus on Europe's ability to maintain its global competitiveness and the immediate response to the current challenges faced by the European industry.

The European Council will also discuss issues related to migration.

EU-UK relations

Ministers will discuss the state of play of the EU-UK relations. They will focus on the implementation of the withdrawal agreement, in particular the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland. The Commission will shortly inform ministers about ongoing discussions between the EU and the UK to resolve the outstanding issues in the implementation of the Protocol.

The EU has consistently reiterated that it stands ready to constructively discuss a negotiated solution within the Protocol. To this end, it has provided further detail on its proposals, which would reduce sanitary and phytosanitary checks by more than 80%, cut customs paperwork in half, simplify certification and allow the movement of otherwise restricted goods.

The EU's aim is to help minimize disruption caused by the withdrawal of the United Kingdom and to help facilitate the everyday life of citizens in Northern Ireland.

The EU has also stressed that unilateral action by the UK, such as the proposed Northern Ireland Protocol Bill, made the work on possible solutions more difficult. If it were to go ahead, it would undermine long-term legal certainty and predictability for the people and businesses in Northern Ireland. The EU has reserved its right to act to protect the EU Single Market and uphold concluded agreements, should this situation materialise.

Scoping work between the EU and the UK is now underway to try and find common solutions to the real-life concerns of all communities in Northern Ireland and protect both Northern Ireland's place in the UK's internal market and the integrity of the EU's Single Market.

On 9 January 2023, an agreement was reached on the way forward regarding the specific question of the EU's access to UK IT systems.

[Joint Statement by Vice-President Šefčovič and UK Foreign Secretary Cleverly following their video conference call on 16 January 2023](#)

[Joint Statement by Vice-President Šefčovič and UK Foreign Secretary Cleverly following their meeting in London on 9 January 2023](#)

[Commission launches four new infringement procedures against the UK \(22 July 2022\)](#)

[Commission launches infringement proceedings against the UK and provides further details on possible solutions to facilitate the movement of goods \(15 June 2022\)](#)

[Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland: Commission proposes bespoke arrangements to benefit Northern Ireland \(13 October 2021\)](#)

Priorities of the Swedish Presidency

In public session, the Swedish Presidency will present its priorities in the first half of 2023.

The four priorities of the Swedish Presidency are security, competitiveness, green and energy transitions, democratic values and the rule of law.

As regards the General Affairs Council, the Presidency will continue the Council's rule of law dialogue and take forward the Article 7 procedures in a constructive spirit. It will follow up on the European Council's decision to grant candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova and to offer a European perspective to Georgia, and will continue the EU integration process of the Western Balkan countries.

The Presidency will also focus on protecting election integrity and fighting disinformation, and continue the work regarding the transparency and targeting of political advertising and European Political Parties and Foundations. It will support the Commission's efforts in the day-to-day implementation of the EU-UK agreements. It will work to strengthen the EU's crisis preparedness and crisis management capabilities and to prevent and deal with cyber threats.

The Presidency will also continue work on follow up to the Conference on the Future of Europe and support the Commission's work to present an initial voluntary review of the EU's implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

[Swedish Presidency programme](#)