

Background brief*18 September 2026*

General Affairs Council

22 September 2026, Brussels

PRESS**EN****Chair:** Thomas Byrne, Minister for European affairs and defence of Ireland**Commission representatives:** Piotr Serafin, European Commissioner for budget, anti-fraud and public administration

Michael McGrath, European Commissioner for democracy, justice, the rule of law and consumer protection

Marta Kos, European Commissioner for enlargement

Starting time: 10.00**Media opportunities:**

- Doorstep Thomas Byrne: 22 September 2026, 07.45
- Press conference General Affairs Council: 22 September 2026, +/- 18.00

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Main agenda topics:In public session, the Council will hold a policy debate on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (**MFF**) 2028-2034.The Council will start preparations for the **October 2026 European Council** by discussing an annotated draft agenda.As part of the Council's annual **rule of law dialogue**, ministers will hold a horizontal discussion on general developments related to the rule of law situation in the EU.Ministers will also exchange views on the general trend of the rule of law situation in selected **candidate countries**, namely Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Ministers from the four candidate countries will take part in the discussion.

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[General Affairs Council, 22 September 2026 - meeting page](#)[Press conferences, doorsteps and other public events in video streaming](#)[High quality photo and video material](#)

Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)

In public session, the Council will hold a policy debate on the MFF 2028-2034.

The MFF is the **EU's long-term budget**, covering a period of seven years. It provides for the financing of programmes and actions in all policy areas, from agriculture and regional policy, to support to Ukraine, strategic technologies and migration, in line with the EU's long-term priorities.

On 16 July and 3 September 2025, the Commission presented its proposals for the next seven-year period – 2028-2034. Since then, work has continued at both political and technical level with a view to **achieving an agreement between member states by the end of 2026**. This would allow for the adoption of the relevant legislative acts in 2027, ensuring that EU funding can reach beneficiaries without interruption from January 2028.

In support of an agreement by the end of this year, **European Council President António Costa discussed the next MFF with EU leaders** during his recent "Tour des Capitales", laying the groundwork for discussions at the next European Council meetings.

In parallel and following intensive bilateral outreach to member states, the Irish presidency aims to present **a revised 'negotiating box'** ahead of the October General Affairs Council meeting. This document, prepared under the responsibility of the presidency, aims to identify elements for political consideration, including draft figures for the various headings and programmes, and should facilitate their discussion both at technical level and by EU leaders.

The policy debate of this General Affairs Council will touch upon both the expenditure priorities and the revenue sources of the next EU budget.

[*The EU long-term budget \(background information\)*](#)

[*President Costa visits EU capitals to discuss priorities \(background information\)*](#)

October European Council

The Council will start preparations for the European Council meeting of October 2026 by discussing an annotated draft agenda. EU leaders are expected to discuss:

- the new MFF 2028-2034, including a revised negotiating box
- Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine
- latest developments in the Middle East
- enlargement and reforms
- European defence and security
- competitiveness, and
- migration

The preparatory work will continue at the next General Affairs Council on 13 October 2026.

[*European Council meeting \(15-16 October 2026\), annotated draft agenda*](#)

Legislative programming (in public session)

The Commission will present its **letter of intent** of 16 September 2026 following the State of the Union speech by the Commission president. In its letter, the Commission sets out the initiatives of major political importance for the coming year, in advance of the adoption of its **2027 work programme**.

This will be followed by an exchange of views among ministers. The presidency will summarise this exchange of views in a **letter to the president of the Commission** to provide the Commission with indications from ministers on the envisaged priorities. The 2027 work programme will be presented to the General Affairs Council (GAC) on 19 November 2026.

The three institutions will then work towards preparing the **joint declaration** on the EU legislative priorities for 2027, to be approved by GAC on 15 December 2026 and signed by the three presidents in the margins of the December European Council meeting.

[*Letter of intent with regard to the preparation of the Commission work programme for 2027, 16 September 2026*](#)

[*Annual rule of law dialogue*](#)

As part of the Council's annual rule of law dialogue, ministers will hold a **horizontal discussion** on general developments related to the rule of law situation in the EU.

The discussion will use the **Commission's 2026 rule of law report**, published on 17 July 2026. This seventh edition of the report maintains the exact structure of previous editions: a chapeau on general trends, structured along four pillars (justice systems; the anti-corruption framework; media pluralism; other institutional issues linked to checks and balances) and 27 country-specific chapters, reviewing the situation along the same four pillars in each member state. The 2026 report continues the practice of including a structured assessment of the rule of law's **impact on the single market**.

Finally, regarding the **recommendations** addressed by the Commission to member states, this edition of the report does not provide figures on their exact degree of implementation since the 2025 report. The Commission instead adopts a longer-term perspective, indicating that member states have been following up – to varying extents – on more than two-thirds of recommendations made in 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025.

The Council's annual rule of law dialogue aims to allow for an open exchange of comments and best practices based on the Commission's annual rule of law report, while ensuring objectivity, non-discrimination, and equal treatment of all member states. Since 2020, the dialogue is organised in two different types of political discussions: a **horizontal** discussion covering general rule of law developments in the EU, and country-specific discussions addressing key developments in each member state.

The Council is expected to hold a **country-specific discussion** at the General Affairs Council meeting in November, focusing on developments in Cyprus, Lithuania, Luxembourg, and Hungary.

[*Rule of law report strengthens EU democracy and fundamental rights, Commission press release, 17 July 2026*](#)

[*2026 Rule of law report \(European Commission\)*](#)

[*2026 Rule of law report - Recommendations*](#)

[*Council conclusions on the evaluation of the rule of law dialogue, 14 July 2026*](#)

[*Rule of law \(background information\)*](#)

[*Rule of law in candidate countries*](#)

Ministers will also exchange views on the general trend of the rule of law situation in selected **candidate countries**, namely Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Ministers from the countries concerned will take part in the discussion.

The methodology and the structure of the report are the same as for member states, except that **no recommendations** are addressed to the candidate countries. The report's country chapters are structured around four pillars: 1) the justice system, 2) the anti-corruption framework, 3) media pluralism, and 4) other institutional issues related to checks and balances. Following last year's practice, the 2026 report gives particular emphasis to the **single market** dimension. While candidate countries are not yet part of the EU's single market, their country chapters include relevant considerations to support their future participation - ensuring the timely and effective creation of a level playing field for businesses and investors.

The inclusion of the candidate countries in the rule of law report aims to put them on **equal footing** with member states and support their reform efforts and accession process.

[2026 Rule of law report \(European Commission\)](#)

[2026 Rule of law report – Country chapter Albania](#)

[2026 Rule of law report – Country chapter Montenegro](#)

[2026 Rule of law report – Country chapter North Macedonia](#)

[2026 Rule of law report – Country chapter Serbia](#)

[Rule of law \(background information\)](#)

Other points

In public session, the presidency will present the state of play on omnibus **simplification** packages.

The Spanish delegation will raise the issue of EU's **official languages** and changes to the regulation 1/1958 in the context of enlargement.