

Background brief*9 July 2026*

General Affairs Council

14 July 2026, Brussels

PRESS**EN****Chair:** Thomas Byrne, Minister of State for European Affairs and Defence of Ireland**Commission representatives:** Valdis Dombrovskis, European Commissioner for economy and productivity, implementation and simplification

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

Piotr Serafin, European Commissioner for budget, anti-fraud and public administration

Starting time: 10.00**Media opportunities:**

- Doorstep with Minister Thomas Byrne: 14 July 2026, 09.40
- Press conference General Affairs Council: 14 July 2026, +/- 14.15

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Main agenda topics:

In public session, the presidency will present its **priorities** and **work programme** for the second half of 2026 with a focus on those specifically falling within the remit of the General Affairs Council.

The Council will also hear a presentation and hold an exchange of view on the state of play and future orientation of work on the EU's **simplification** agenda.

Finally, the Council will be invited to approve conclusions on the evaluation of the **rule of law** dialogue.

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[General Affairs Council, 14 July 2026 - meeting page](#)[Press conferences, doorsteps and other public events in video streaming](#)[High quality photo and video material](#)

Presidency priorities (public session)

The presidency will present its **priorities** and **work programme** for the second half of 2026 with a focus on those specifically falling within the remit of the General Affairs Council.

Through the General Affairs Council, the Irish presidency will promote its horizontal priorities of **competitiveness**, **values** and **security**, while ensuring a coherent approach across the work of all Council configurations. Delivering on the 'One Europe, One Market' roadmap and advancing simplification are central to this work.

The presidency will also advance work on the next EU's long-term budget (**MFF**) **2028-2034**, with a view to enabling EU leaders to take the necessary decisions by the end of 2026. Other priorities include **enlargement**, the **rule of law**, relations with the **UK**, the **EEA and EFTA** countries, and **cohesion** policy.

On 18 June 2026, ministers endorsed the Council's **18-month programme** covering the period from 1 July 2026 to 31 December 2027.

[*Priorities of the Irish presidency of the Council of the EU*](#)

[*Eighteen-month programme of the Council \(1 July 2026 - 31 December 2027\)*](#)

Simplification

The Council will hear a presentation by the presidency and hold an exchange of views on the state of play and future orientation of its work on the EU's **simplification** agenda.

The Irish presidency intends to follow up on the task given by the Leaders through the '**One Europe, One Market**' Roadmap, striving to close the Omnibus packages VII to X (on digital policy, environment, automotive, and food and feed safety, respectively) by the end of the year, assuming the European Parliament is ready to negotiate swiftly, and beginning the work on the two new packages on taxation and energy products, respectively.

In this context and based on a **steering note** prepared by the presidency, ministers will have the opportunity to discuss the strategic aspects of how to boost the EU's long-term competitiveness through further simplification. The Council will be invited to consider how to collectively sustain the momentum with the simplification agenda to meaningfully reduce the administrative burden and support **EU competitiveness**, without undermining EU policy goals. Ministers will be also called upon to reflect on what **policy areas** should be prioritised for further simplification at the EU level in pursuit of these objectives, and how could the Council best keep the focus on simplification that can deliver quick results.

[*General Affairs Council, 16 June 2026 \(main results\)*](#)

[*Omnibus simplification legislative packages, progress report, 12 June 2026*](#)

[*Simplification of EU rules \(background information\)*](#)

Rule of law dialogue

The Council will be invited to approve a set of **conclusions** on the evaluation of the rule of law dialogue. The draft text of conclusions is identical to the presidency conclusions of 12 December 2023 that laid down the reinforced structure of the rule-of-law dialogue in the Council. As by now the conclusions are supported by all 27 member states, the Council intends to highlight its continuous commitment to the dialogue.

The conclusions consolidate the existing approach to the Council's annual rule of law dialogue as a **valuable preventive tool** in the EU's rule of law toolbox. They also strengthen the Council's dialogue by setting out a faster cycle, covering more member states per year, and by encouraging more frequent exchanges within the Council, and with external stakeholders, as appropriate.

The approval of these conclusions does not prejudice in any way the next evaluation of the dialogue, which shall be undertaken by the end of 2027.

The dialogue was initiated by the Council conclusions agreed on 16 December 2014. Since then, all member states have participated, in a spirit of sincere cooperation, in this dialogue. Since 2020, the dialogue has been divided into **horizontal** discussions, covering general rule of law developments in the EU, and **country-specific** discussions, focusing in detail on the situation in each member state. Both discussions make use of the Commission's annual rule of law reports. The dialogue was previously evaluated in 2016, 2019 and 2023.

At the General Affairs Council of 12 December 2023 and in the absence of consensus on the text, the Council presidency had decided to issue **presidency conclusions**. It concluded that the text was supported or not objected to by 25 delegations. On 20 December 2023, in a meeting of EU member states' permanent representatives (Coreper), Poland also stated its support for the presidency conclusions. At the General Affairs Council of 26 May 2026, Hungary stated that it could also support the text of the presidency conclusions.

[2025 Rule of law report \(European Commission\)](#)

[Presidency conclusions on the evaluation of the Council's annual rule of law dialogue, Council press release, 12 December 2023](#)

[Presidency conclusions - Evaluation of the annual rule of law dialogue, 19 November 2019](#)

[Conclusions of the Council of the EU and the member states meeting within the Council on ensuring respect for the rule of law, 16 December 2014](#)

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

Other points

In a public session, under 'any other business', the presidency will inform the Council about the handling of the Council's work on the next EU's long-term budget (Multi-Annual Financial Framework / **MFF**) 2028-2034.

Over an informal lunch, ministers will hold an exchange of views with EU Rapporteur on the Future of the Single Market, Prof. Enrico Letta on the '**One Europe, One Market**' roadmap.

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

[A solid start – first progress report on the 'One Europe, One Market' Roadmap, Joint press release, 18 June 2026](#)