



Strasbourg, **XXX**
COM(2023) 638

SENSITIVE*
UNTIL ADOPTION

**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

Commission work programme 2024

Delivering today and preparing for tomorrow

* Distribution only on a 'Need to know' basis - Do not read or carry openly in public places. Must be stored securely and encrypted in storage and transmission. Destroy copies by shredding or secure deletion. Full handling instructions <https://europa.eu/db43PX>

1. Delivering today and preparing for tomorrow

*'Together, we have shown that **when Europe is bold, it gets things done**. And our work is far from over, so let's stand together. **Let's deliver today and prepare for tomorrow**.'* European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, State of the Union speech, 13 September 2023.

Next June, Europeans will take part in **the continent's biggest democratic exercise**. Among the more than 400 million people eligible to vote for the new European Parliament will be many young people who are **exercising their democratic rights** for the first time – including, in five Member States, 16- and 17-year-olds.

The results will set Europe on its path for the subsequent five years and beyond, with the election coming at a **crucial juncture in Europe's history**.

We are faced with a number of **epoch-making challenges and opportunities**. From the climate and biodiversity crises to the digital revolution and artificial intelligence; from Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine to the ensuing energy price and cost of living crises; from migration to ensuring economic growth and competitiveness.

For the sake of those who will follow in our footsteps and lead the European Union into the future, we must work to address these challenges and ensure that we have **delivered on the commitments we made**.

At the start of the mandate, this Commission laid out an **ambitious agenda for a stronger and more resilient Union**. We committed to bold action to be the first climate-neutral continent while preserving Europe's natural environment, to lead the way towards a human-centred and innovative digital transition, to boost our economy while ensuring social fairness, inclusion and prosperity, to reinforce our responsible global leadership, to protect our citizens and our values, and to nurture and strengthen our democracy.

The world is a very different place compared to 2019, however. As a Union, we have had to **react and adapt in the face of unprecedented challenges**, remaining united in our responses and refusing to back away from delivering on our ambitions.

We have accelerated the twin transitions, put in place the landmark NextGenerationEU, strengthened the EU's role as a global leader and promoted the values that lie at the heart of our societies, such as democracy and the rule of law.

The clock is now ticking on our work to finalise the remaining key legislative proposals presented by this Commission to ensure that **citizens and businesses can reap the benefits of our policy actions**. To this end, in the coming months, the Commission will support the European Parliament and the Council in their efforts to reach agreement on pending legislative proposals.

To allow sufficient focus for this task, and with most of the necessary legislative framework promised under this mandate already in place, this work programme contains a **limited number of new initiatives** that deliver on existing commitments or respond to emerging challenges.

The **EU's economy has continued to grow** despite the challenges we have faced thanks to efforts to strengthen our energy security, a resilient labour market and the easing of supply constraints.

The **European Green Deal**, our world-leading effort to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss and Europe's growth agenda, remains a central part of the Commission's work. While the main focus is now on **implementation**, we will come forward still this year with proposals on the protection of animals during transport, preventing microplastic pollution, improving forest monitoring and a mobility package.

NextGenerationEU will remain key to ensuring secure, affordable and clean supplies of energy, the competitiveness of European industry, and the transition to a net-zero, circular and nature-positive economy. The Commission will support all Member States in **accelerating the implementation of their recovery and resilience plans**. Early next year we will present an interim evaluation on the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

At the same time, we need to finish **building an economic governance framework fit for the challenges ahead**. This means finalising the proposals on reforming governance rules and strengthening debt sustainability and on promoting sustainable and inclusive growth through reforms and investment.

Together with the Belgian Presidency, the Commission will convene a **Social Partner Summit in Val Duchesse** to discuss the challenges facing our labour market. We will also continue work to accelerate the deployment of renewable energy while keeping energy prices under control, to ensure supplies of key strategic commodities such as critical raw materials and clean hydrogen, and to reduce administrative burden, in particular in relation to reporting in line with our strategy to boost the EU's long-term competitiveness .

The challenges over the past years have underlined the strengths and capabilities of our Union. But they have pushed the EU budget to the point of exhaustion despite its in-built flexibilities and extensive reprogramming. To counter this, we tabled a proposal to **reinforce the long-term EU budget**, which provides for a targeted increase in EU spending to deepen our support for Ukraine, finance our action on the migration crisis, bolster the Union's capacity to respond to heightened economic and geopolitical instabilities, crises and natural disasters, and boost investments to foster long-term competitiveness.

To secure the funding for this reinforced budget, we put forward a **proposal for stable new own resources**, including to finance the substantial NextGenerationEU investments.

Together with the Parliament and Council, we now need to make progress on these initiatives.

With the brave resistance against the invading Russian forces continuing unabated, **the EU will not waver in its solidarity with Ukraine and the Ukrainian people**. So far, the Union and its Member States have provided, in a Team Europe approach, **EUR 81 billion in total support**, including humanitarian aid, military equipment and training, civil protection, help for children and to rehabilitate damaged schools, and economic support.

The **EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes** have helped export around **53 million tonnes of agricultural goods and over 41 million tonnes of non-agricultural products**. Through the Joint Coordination Platform, the Commission will spare no efforts to ensure the timely and stable delivery of Ukrainian agricultural products to global markets.

At the same time, the Commission condemns Russia's decision to terminate the **Black Sea grain initiative** and will continue to support all efforts to mitigate security and safety risks to shipping in the Black Sea.

The Council adopted the Commission's proposal to **extend the temporary protection** for people fleeing Russia's aggression against Ukraine until 3 March 2025. This will provide certainty and support for more than 4 million persons enjoying protection across the EU.

The **Multi-agency Donor Coordination Platform** to support Ukraine's repair, recovery and reconstruction process was launched in January 2023 following a decision of G7 leaders. The Commission hosts the secretariat of the platform that facilitates close coordination among international donors and financial organisations and ensures coherent, transparent, and accountable support.

Finally, to underscore the EU's commitment to stand by Ukraine as long as is necessary, we will create a **facility to provide support to Ukraine to the tune of EUR 50 billion** in the period 2024-2027. This funding will cater for Ukraine's immediate needs, as well as bolstering its recovery, and supporting its modernisation on its path towards EU membership.

Together with our international partners, we have taken steps to ensure war crimes committed in Ukraine by Russia are punished and that Russia compensates for the damage it has done. The **International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine** has started its operations in The Hague and will be key to investigating these horrific acts and facilitating the building of cases for future trials. We will leave no stone unturned to hold those responsible to account. And we are continuing work on the possible use of proceeds from seized Russian assets for Ukraine's reconstruction.

The Union must **prepare for its successful enlargement** in order to foster long-term peace and stability in Europe. We will work closely with candidate countries as they prepare for this momentous step. But we also need to be ready for the institutional, financial and political challenges of future enlargement.

The Commission will put forward a **Communication on pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews** to see how each policy would be affected by a larger Union and how the European institutions would work.

In all our actions we remain committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and its sustainable development goals will remain at the heart of our policies¹ and better regulation agenda².

2. Better Regulation, implementation and enforcement of EU law

2.1. Better regulation, burden reduction and rationalisation of reporting requirements

Reducing administrative burdens is crucial to **maintaining the competitiveness of European businesses**. That's why the Commission's long-term competitiveness

¹ [EU Voluntary Review](#) on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

² The sustainable development goals and the 'do no significant harm' principle have been mainstreamed into the Better Regulation toolbox and the Commission's policy development to ensure that all legislative proposals contribute to the 2030 sustainable development agenda.

Communication³ set a target of **reducing burdens associated with reporting requirements by 25%**, without undermining policy objectives. This will rationalise and streamline such requirements, which have a disproportionate impact on businesses, including SMEs and micro-companies, and administrations, and ensure they fulfil their intended purpose.

To achieve this goal, the Commission has adopted legislation including to reform the Union Customs Code, which will create a single EU interface and facilitate data re-use. Together, these measures will bring about around **EUR 2 billion in cost savings**. In addition, the proposal for the revision of the Regulation on European statistics, which is aimed at reducing the number of surveys and increasing the use of automated and simplified processes, will bring cost savings – including for SMEs – of an estimated **EUR 450 million**. With this work programme, the Commission is putting forward **additional rationalisation proposals**⁴ to reduce administrative burden without lowering social, safety, consumer protection, environmental or economic standards. They will **streamline reporting requirements that are of limited use**, for example by consolidating overlapping obligations, reducing the number of businesses concerned and increasing digitalisation.

To allow stakeholders time to adapt to new requirements, we will postpone the deadline for adoption of the **European sustainability reporting standards**. The Commission will **adjust the thresholds of the accounting Directive** so more than a million companies will benefit from reduced reporting requirements, and review the **benchmark Regulation**, which ensures a high degree of consumer and investor protection, including to exempt smaller benchmark administrators from reporting and disclosure requirements, accounting for 90% of them. By amending the **Regulation on administrative cooperation through the internal market information system** (IMI Regulation), the Commission will set the grounds for creating a single online portal through which companies can submit posting declarations, in their own language, for all Member States who decide to make use of this portal.

Under the **second notice on taxonomy reporting**, which guides the interpretation of disclosures regarding taxonomy, we will clarify that no assessment is needed for activities that are not material to business or where they lack evidence or data to prove compliance. The removal of certain disclosure obligations related to alternative dispute resolution cases and replacing the online dispute resolution platform will bring overall benefits for businesses of around **EUR 630 million** per year.

Proposals will also cover marketing of fish products, plant health, transport, agriculture and spatial infrastructure monitoring. The Commission will work with the **co-legislators to preserve and, where possible, improve the leanness of reporting requirements**, as long as the objectives and the purpose of the legislation are not put at risk. For example, for the proposed **Directive on corporate sustainability due diligence**, the Commission will support the proportionate application of reporting requirements, in particular in areas such as the role of groups, with a view to ensuring efficiency and avoiding duplication.

³ COM(2023) 168.

⁴ For a detailed overview of initiatives taken since 16 March 2023 and taken forward with this work programme, see Annex II.

For the **industrial emissions portal Regulation**, the Commission is committed to accelerating digitalisation and further streamlining reporting requirements. In addition, digitalisation efforts for requirements linked to the posting of workers under social security coordination rules will help to reduce the associated costs for companies.

With the revision of the **coordination of social security framework**, the Commission will continue to support amendments introduced in the discussion with co-legislators to **exempt employers from the need to notify or request a certificate for business trips and short-term postings of workers**. Moreover, the **digital Europe programme** is available to fund initiatives by Member States to provide simple technical reporting means, such as a single-entry point for the reporting of cybersecurity incidents in the framework of the Directive on measures for a high common level of **cybersecurity** across the Union (NIS2 Directive).

The streamlining of reporting requirements is a **long-term effort that will require focus for the foreseeable future**. Establishing a **baseline** of reporting requirements, while complex given the breadth of EU legislation and its interaction with national and regional laws, will be crucial to measuring progress. Stakeholders can help in shaping a better understanding of how the reporting requirement landscape affects them. For this reason, we have launched a call for evidence⁵ to gather feedback on burdensome reporting requirements. Further consultations with companies, including with the SME envoys network, Member States' experts and other stakeholders, will be carried out to identify particularly problematic issues and areas to prioritise. The Commission will also appoint an **EU SME envoy** who will participate in Regulatory Scrutiny Board hearings on initiatives that have a high impact on SMEs. Additionally, the Commission will tackle the burdensome reporting requirements that its Directorates-General have identified with targeted **rationalisation plans** for 2024 and beyond. We will report on progress made towards the 25% goal in the annual burden surveys, starting with the 2023 edition, to be published next year.

The Commission will put the development of **artificial intelligence tools** and **large language models** at the core of this exercise. This will help to identify reporting requirements in EU legislation, based on standardised means, and support in analysing their effect in a certain sector. It will also work on the expansion of the use of **e-platforms** for collecting and sharing data, such as the Single Digital Gateway or the e-platform established under the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action Regulation. In addition, the Commission will carry out **evaluations and fitness checks** to assess how legislation can be simplified and made less burdensome, with an emphasis on identifying further opportunities for rationalising reporting requirements⁶. The evaluations of programmes and funds of the multiannual financial framework, due in 2024, offers another opportunity to assess how to reduce burdens linked to the EU's financial programmes.

The rationalisation of reporting requirements complements the Commission's tools for burden reduction. Under the Commission's **regulatory fitness and performance programme (REFIT)**, all evaluations and revisions look for opportunities to reduce burden,

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13990-Administrative-burden-rationalisation-of-reporting-requirements_en

⁶ See Annex II for a detailed overview of initiatives proposed for 2024 with this work programme.

and for all significant proposals, impact assessments are carried out to ensure that benefits outweigh costs. For example, establishing a Head Office Taxation system will simplify rules and cut tax compliance costs for SMEs expanding their operations across borders. The proposal on business in Europe: framework for income taxation (BEFIT) could reduce tax compliance costs for businesses operating in the EU by up to 65%.

In addition, since January 2022, with its **‘one in, one out’** approach, the Commission has presented proposals that are set to provide **EUR 7.3 billion more administrative savings than costs**. The **Fit for Future Platform** also advises the Commission on how to reduce burdens in EU law.

2.2. Implementation and enforcement of EU law

For people and businesses in the EU to enjoy the full benefits of our commonly agreed rules, EU law must be implemented and applied in a full, timely and correct manner across the Union. That is why the **enforcement of EU law is a priority for this Commission**. At this stage in the mandate, we will ensure that even greater attention is given to implementation and enforcement tasks, to make sure that the rules agreed deliver for people and businesses. Addressing implementation challenges when proposals are being developed and offering guidance to Member States are ways to prevent problems at an early stage. To deliver more efficient EU laws, we will thus work together **with Member States** to avoid placing unnecessary burdens on business and citizens when transposing EU directives into national law. When breaches do occur, the Commission will continue to engage with Member States to remedy the problems swiftly and to **act decisively on infringements** which obstruct the implementation of important EU policy objectives, or which risk undermining the EU’s values and fundamental freedoms.

To ensure that the enforcement tools at its disposal remain effective, the Commission conducted a **stocktaking exercise** with Member States in 2022. We are now implementing its findings and recommendations to improve the way the Commission and the Member States ensure enforcement of EU law. We will work closely with the Member States to facilitate the implementation of new legislation through increased support at national level, especially in areas where more efforts may be needed to ensure the timely and correct transposition of directives, and through a more systematic monitoring of the implementation of regulations. We will also continue reinforcing the transparency of the Commission's enforcement actions, with more information and data published in a more user-friendly way. This will help members of the public engage in this process and promote faster compliance by Member States, by highlighting positive achievements and giving credit to best practices, creating at the same time peer pressure concerning unresolved breaches of EU law.

3. Delivery on the six headline ambitions

As mentioned in the State of the Union address, the Commission has delivered on over 90% of the commitments made in the 2019 Political Guidelines of President von der Leyen. In 2024, a dedicated effort by the co-legislators is needed to find agreement on outstanding proposals to bring benefits for Europe’s citizens and businesses.

3.1. A European Green Deal

Born out of the urgency to take action to protect and preserve our planet, the European Green Deal is our growth agenda, proving to the world that modernisation and decarbonisation can go hand in hand. The EU has the world's most ambitious green transformation plan, with the goals of achieving **climate-neutrality, circular economy and a net-zero economy by 2050, as well as preventing environmental degradation, preserving biodiversity and creating a zero pollution environment**. In the face of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the Commission acted swiftly to ensure the security of energy supply while strengthening the Union's commitment to the European Green Deal and increasing our industrial base in clean tech sectors. Fundamental structural changes have been proposed for the electricity and gas markets, as well as new initiatives to spearhead the emergence of green hydrogen markets.

We will continue our efforts to ensure that the green transition is done in a just, smart and inclusive way, leaving nobody behind. To this end, the Commission will initiate a series of green social dialogues in order to fully and directly engage with citizens, as well as **clean transition dialogues with industry**. In parallel, the Commission is continuing its preparatory work for the implementation of the future Social Climate Fund, which will support vulnerable citizens and businesses in the transition. It will also launch a **strategic dialogue on the future of agriculture in the EU**, further engaging with farmers, stakeholders in the food chain and citizens, working together on the transition towards sustainable food systems.

Faced with new global threats, the Commission has laid out plans to **safeguard food security and reinforce the resilience of food systems** in the short and medium term. Through its farm to fork and strategy, it has been delivering on the vision of making the EU food system fair, healthy and environmentally friendly. The strategy also included action to achieve sustainable and resilient fisheries and aquaculture. In parallel, the Commission adopted further measures to build the **circular economy**, tabled flagship initiatives on **protecting biodiversity and restoring damaged ecosystems** and presented as key proposals under the **zero-pollution** action plan.

With the majority of initiatives set out in the 2019 Communication on the European Green Deal now delivered, and many already agreed into law, **it is imperative to swiftly reach agreement on the remaining proposals** in order to keep the Union firmly on track towards climate neutrality. This includes the proposals on carbon removals, methane emissions reduction in the energy sector, industrial emissions, the energy performance of buildings, CO₂ emission performance standards for new heavy-duty vehicles, type-approval of motor vehicles and engines, revision of rules on end-of-life vehicles, counting transport emissions, as well as electricity market design, renewable and natural gases and hydrogen. To foster **sustainable farming and food security**, the proposals on plants obtained by certain new genomic techniques and the sustainable use of plant protection products should also be agreed. To bring us closer to **a true circular economy** we need swift agreement on the ecodesign requirements for sustainable products, waste and packaging, shipment of waste, and the repair of goods. To **advance towards zero pollution and to protect and restore our nature**, we will need to bring into law the proposals on nature restoration, classification, labelling and packaging of chemicals, air quality, urban wastewater treatment, groundwater.

The Commission will launch the process to establish a **2040 climate target**, to keep the EU on course towards climate neutrality by 2050. It will present the **European wind power package** to accelerate the deployment of wind turbines, improve access to finance and level

the playing field for European industry. We will table an initiative on **industrial carbon management** setting out a strategy for environmentally sustainable carbon capture, utilisation and storage deployment in the EU, considering its importance for reaching carbon neutrality. We will adopt an initiative on **water resilience** to ensure access to water for citizens, nature and the economy, while also tackling catastrophic flooding, and **identify and assess how best to manage climate risks across EU policy areas**.

3.2. A Europe fit for the digital age

By making the 2020s the digital decade with clear digital targets, the EU and its Member States are on course to improve digital skills, digitalise administration and businesses, boost research and innovation and upgrade our digital infrastructure. At the same time, the EU is leading the way in managing the risks of our digital future. With the **digital markets act** and the **digital services act**, we have laid strong foundations for making our single market fair, competitive, consumer friendly and safe in the digital realm.

Although much has been achieved, efforts are still needed to agree pending key initiatives that will further the digital agenda and strengthen Europe's resilience. The **critical raw materials act** will allow Europe to build domestic supplies, including through boosting recycling capacities, diversify imports of these crucial materials, and incentivise our industry to better manage supply risks, while remaining competitive. The provisions will build on the strengths of the single market to boost more sustainable and circular practices and will also allow for joint purchasing of raw materials through a dedicated platform. Many of our partners around the world want to work together and develop local industries for processing and refining to strengthen global supply chains of raw materials. This is why the first meeting of the **new Critical Raw Materials Club** will be convened later this year. We will also adopt a **plan on advanced materials for industrial leadership** that, together with the Member States, aims to accelerate the development of safe, sustainable and circular advanced materials and their industrial uptake for the benefit of the green and digital transition.

The **net-zero industry act** will support Europe's industry in taking up the technologies needed in an economy with net-zero emissions, such as wind turbines, heat pumps, solar panels and renewable hydrogen, as well as CO₂ storage. Demand is growing, both in Europe and globally, and we are acting now to ensure European supplies can meet more of this demand.

The **intellectual property package** will, among other elements, allow companies, especially SMEs, to operate with clear new rules concerning standard essential patents and ensure they can benefit our economy and society. The **SME relief package** with its **revision of the late payments Directive** is designed to further support Europe's small and medium businesses, which are the backbone of our economy.

The pending proposals on **artificial intelligence (AI)** are key to the safe and beneficial application of a technology that has been evolving at tremendous speed in recent years. The window of opportunity is narrowing for us to guide this technology responsibly.

Alongside concerted efforts with our international partners to strengthen global AI governance, we will **open up our high-performance computers to AI start-ups** to facilitate European innovation. Europe's Copernicus, EGNOS and Galileo satellite programmes

already bring countless benefits to our economy and societies and play a pivotal role in understanding, preparing for and fighting climate change.

The space industry is gaining in importance for Earth observation and modern connected products and services, as well as for defence and security. The 2023 **space strategy for security and defence**⁷ aims to improve the resilience of the EU's space infrastructure and space capabilities in support of security and defence, and to promote partnerships for responsible behaviour in outer space. In 2024 we will propose a **European space law** that will set rules, for example for space traffic management, but also on how we will keep our critical space infrastructure safe. It will be complemented by a **strategy on the space data economy** to increase the use of space data across economic sectors.

3.3. An economy that works for people

The **EU economy has demonstrated remarkable resilience** in the face of an unprecedented array of crises. It has coped with the socio-economic impacts of both the global COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. By tabling reforms to secure the EU's long-term economic prosperity and competitiveness while ensuring the full implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, we have **strengthened the EU's unique social market economy**.

It is imperative that agreement is reached on pending proposals to strengthen our single market, the foundation of the EU's sustainable competitiveness. We need to **improve the Capital Markets Union** by agreeing the proposals on insolvency, insurance recovery and resolution and market infrastructures, and take further steps towards a Banking Union with a **targeted review of EU banking rules**. Moreover, we need to agree on the new es on withholding tax procedures, the proposal to prevent the misuse of shell entities for tax purposes and a series of measures to modernise the EU's Value-Added Tax (VAT) system and make it more resilient to fraud by embracing digitalisation.

Furthermore, we need to advance on the **proposal to improve business taxation (BEFIT)** and the comprehensive **reform of the EU Customs Union**. In the area of digital finance, we need to move forward on the **open finance** and **financial data access** and establish a **digital Euro**.

We also need to make progress on the **single market emergency instrument**, to help preserve the free movement of goods, services and persons and the availability of vital goods and services in case of future unforeseen disruptions.

Significant progress has been made in implementing the **European Pillar of Social Rights** and its 2030 targets. Rules to improve conditions for platform workers, a framework for minimum wages and the Pact for Skills have also been put forward. Youth access to the labour market has been facilitated with the reinforced Youth Guarantee and the upcoming initiative on quality traineeships. The European Child Guarantee helps to combat and prevent social exclusion by guaranteeing children effective access to a set of key services, including free education, free healthcare, healthy nutrition and adequate housing. The Commission will continue to support the co-legislators in finding an agreement on the coordination of social security systems.

⁷ JOIN(2023) 9.

In response to a legislative own-initiative report by the European Parliament, the Commission will present an initiative on **European works councils** in 2024. Furthermore, we will work with businesses and trade unions to make our labour market more future proof in the light of deep-rooted shifts in technology, society and demography.

An upcoming initiative will help realise the full benefits of **biotechnologies and biomanufacturing, key to the competitiveness** and modernisation of EU industry due to their high growth potential and labour productivity.

3.4. A stronger Europe in the world

On the global stage, we continue to see growing tensions and geopolitical upheaval. Not least, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has challenged the foundations of multilateralism and the rules-based international order.

The military support to Ukraine has opened up critical gaps in the defence stockpiles of Member States. In response, we have **supported Member States in strengthening the European defence industry** through an instrument for joint procurement (EDIRPA)⁸ and a Task Force for Joint Defence Procurement. In addition, we ramped up ammunition production capacity through the **act in support of ammunition production (ASAP)**⁹. The third **Joint Declaration on EU-NATO cooperation**¹⁰ expanded our cooperation to new areas critical for security – resilience, emerging and disruptive technologies, defence and space.

We will continue to strengthen and build more resilient connections with the world through our **Global Gateway**¹¹ by applying our **Team Europe approach**. We have adopted sectoral strategies and action plans including the strategy on international energy engagement¹², the Communication on international ocean governance¹³, the space strategy for security and defence¹⁴, the update of the EU maritime security strategy¹⁵, the Communication on a partnership with the Gulf¹⁶ and the new agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean¹⁷.

The Union will continue to work on building partnerships with countries and organisations across the globe. In particular, we need to continue our efforts to **strengthen our mutually beneficial partnership with Africa**, and we will further develop our strategic approach to take it forward with the African Union at the next EU-AU Summit.

The **European defence industrial strategy** will give further impulse to developing Member States' defence capabilities, underpinned by a modern and resilient European defence technological and industrial base. In 2024, we will also continue efforts to implement the **Strategic Compass**¹⁸ to strengthen our defence readiness.

⁸ COM(2022) 349.

⁹ Regulation (EU) 2023/1525 of 20 July 2023.

¹⁰ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_210549.htm

¹¹ JOIN(2021) 30.

¹² JOIN(2022) 23.

¹³ JOIN(2022) 28.

¹⁴ JOIN(2023) 9.

¹⁵ JOIN(2023) 8.

¹⁶ JOIN(2022) 13.

¹⁷ JOIN(2023)17.

¹⁸ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1_en

As a global leader and standard setter, we will also continue to **promote an open and fair trade agenda** geared towards sustainability. We will continue our work to enhance cooperation and trade relations with like-minded partners, and will drive global efforts to reform the World Trade Organisation. The reviewed trade strategy of the EU promotes an open, sustainable and assertive policy, which supports the green and digital transformations.

We have **successfully concluded trade agreements with Chile, New Zealand and Kenya and aim for agreements with Australia, Mexico and Mercosur soon**. EU-US relations have also been strengthened through the joint Trade and Technology Council. Inspired by this, an **EU-India Trade and Technology Council** has been launched this year. This work will proceed in parallel to the ongoing negotiations for comprehensive and ambitious agreements on trade, investment protection and geographical indications. The Commission will also **push forward the trade agreement negotiations with Indonesia**.

At the same time, we have strengthened our tools against unfair trade practices, and will act to ensure global competition remains fair. The Commission has therefore launched an **anti-subsidy investigation into electric vehicles coming from China**.

3.5. Promoting our European way of life

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission has created a European Health Union building on a reinforced legal framework for cross-border health security, the new **Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority** and the strengthened European **Centre for Disease Prevention and Control** and **European Medicines Agency**. The EU also adopted the new **EU global health strategy**¹⁹ to guide its efforts to strengthen healthcare worldwide.

The Commission has acted to strengthen the four pillars of the **EU Security Union Strategy**²⁰: addressing vulnerabilities, augmenting cybersecurity, fostering law enforcement cooperation and supporting resilience against hybrid threats. This include initiatives to remove terrorist content online, strengthen the Union's maritime security and protect the Union's space assets such as satellites and deter hostile activities in space.

It is imperative that lawmakers swiftly agree on the **New Pact on Migration and Asylum**²¹. Agreement is also needed on proposals that will **enhance the security of our citizens** and effectively fight crime together while upholding our shared fundamental values. This includes the proposals on cyber resilience, single permit and long-term residents, the Union Code on governing the movement of persons across borders, automated data exchange for police cooperation (Prüm II), the collection and transfer of advance passenger information, anti-trafficking in human beings, combating child sexual abuse, asset recovery and confiscation, and the definition of criminal offences and penalties.

In the coming days, the Commission will present an **action plan on anti-drug trafficking, including the European ports alliance**, to prepare the ground for more effective joint efforts in the fight against organised crime and illegal drug trafficking. The Commission will also update the legal framework to **fight the smuggling of migrants**, to ensure tougher enforcement and prosecution and closer cooperation with our partners.

¹⁹ COM(2022) 675.

²⁰ COM(2020) 605.

²¹ COM(2020)609.

In higher education, the Commission will propose a blueprint for the future **joint European degree**, which will contribute to achieving a European Education Area. It will be supported by recommendations on quality assurance in higher education and on attractive academic careers.

3.6. A new push for European democracy

During this mandate, the Commission has attached particular importance to **strengthening and revitalising our European democracy**. The **European democracy action plan** has guided our work with its goal to empower citizens and build more resilient democracies across the EU by promoting free and fair elections, strengthening media freedom and countering disinformation. The **Conference on the future of Europe** was an unprecedented exercise of participatory democracy and allowed us to listen to the views of citizens from across the EU on the future of our Union. With the **new generation of citizen panels** that we piloted for three key initiatives in 2023²², we have embedded citizens' participation even more concretely into our policy-making toolbox. Particular emphasis was placed on engaging with the younger generation who have a crucial role in shaping the future, with one third of the panellists aged between 16 and 25.

In line with the commitments of President von der Leyen's Political Guidelines, the Commission has followed up on almost all **legislative own-initiative reports of the European Parliament**.

A precondition for the democratic functioning of the EU and its Member States is an independent judiciary and respect for the **rule of law**. Both the annual Rule of Law cycle as well as the Conditionality Mechanism help to ensure this and to safeguard the EU's financial interests. Significant progress has been made in other crucial areas for our democratic societies, from key proposals on the **transparency and fairness of the electoral process** to the **strengthening and safeguarding of rights** of different groups in society, and from **protecting our democracies from malign influences** to guaranteeing the **freedom and independence of journalists** in the EU. We now also have a solid legal framework for **cross-border judicial cooperation**, including on court proceedings and digital communication.

An open and inclusive society needs to guarantee **equal rights and protections** to all groups in society. That is why the Commission adopted dedicated strategies on children's rights, gender equality, racism, LGBTIQ+, person with disabilities and victims' rights. The **women on boards Directive** was agreed after 10 years of negotiation. It will oblige companies to meet clear targets for director positions by mid-2026. This year, we signed the **equal pay Directive** into law, which is an important step towards gender equality and closing the pay gap. With the recent accession to the Council of Europe's 2016 **Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence**, the EU has sent a strong signal that it is determined to prevent, condemn and fight violence against women and girls in all its forms.

To have the right framework for the European Parliament elections, the Commission will aim to facilitate agreements on the **statute and funding of European political parties**, the **rights of mobile European citizens in European Parliament elections** and the **transparency of targeted political advertising**.

²² Food waste, virtual worlds and learning mobility.

A free and critical media landscape is the backbone of democratic society, and agreement is needed on the **Directive on strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP)** and the **media freedom act**.

We also need to find agreement on the proposals for the **victims' rights Directive**, the Directive on **combating violence against women and domestic violence** and the proposal on the **European disability card**. We invite the Council to swiftly adopt the proposed rules on **standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment**.

Next year, we will propose a **Council Recommendation on the development and strengthening of child protection systems** in the Member States, which will be an important step in following-up on the child's rights strategy and will ensure better use of existing EU tools (legislation, policy measures and funding).

4. Conclusion

Over the past four years, **the Union has shown its indivisibility and determination to tackle the challenges of our generation, for the generations of tomorrow**. We acted together in responding decisively in support of a Europe of freedom, prosperity and peace. We must continue this work and lay down solid foundations for **strengthening our Union and preparing for the future**.

This Commission will work until the last day of its mandate to address our common challenges. We will provide strong **support to the European Parliament and Council to facilitate agreements** on remaining key proposals, while tabling **the few new initiatives** still needed **to deliver on our promises and preparing the Union for tomorrow**.

A detailed overview of the Commission's planned work for 2024 is provided in the annexes to this work programme.