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Europe's strategic agenda 2024–2029: Reconciling security, competitiveness, and social justice

Auteur

Léna Spinazzé
Deputy Director

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The first post-election European Council will meet today and tomorrow in Brussels. It should ratify its nominations for the [top jobs in European institutions](#) and its proposals for the European Union's strategic agenda, i.e., its guidelines for European action for 2024–2029. The agenda's June 12 working version highlights three priorities: protecting liberty and democracy, strengthening the EU's security and defense capacity, and Europe's competitiveness on the international scene in terms of the green and digital transition. These priorities respond to the shocks from Russia's war in Ukraine, the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the escalation of the commercial rivalry between China and the United States (highlighted by the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022). While these priorities should not be called into question, certain orientations could be in a context where the [new power balance in the European Parliament](#) is [not yet completely settled](#) and where the anticipated legislative elections of June 30 and July 7 in France could have

an impact on the future power balance in the Council. As we await the outcome, this blog post puts forward an analysis of the European strategic agenda in terms of its capacity to pursue and increase its action aimed at making Europe the first continent to respond to ecological challenges (climate, biodiversity, pollution) on behalf of and in concert with its citizens.

The strategic agenda is a short document (8 pages), providing guidelines for European action over the next five years. European strategy will then slowly take shape, starting with the project presented by the new nominee to the Presidency of the European Commission, a priori Ursula von der Leyen (EPP) for a second term, as she did in her [speech to the Parliament](#) in July 2019. This laid the foundation for what became the Green Deal, her previous term's flagship program, which aimed to make Europe the first continent to achieve carbon neutrality.

A good basis for continuing and enhancing the Green Deal

The strategic agenda's priorities and design are compatible with [continuing and enhancing the Green Deal](#), in so far as:

- The green transition is no longer perceived, as it has sometimes been, as overly costly, but rather as a global race in which the EU must resolutely participate to conquer the markets and technologies of a future economy;^{[1](#)}
- The target of European competitiveness is described as being in the service of European citizens: “*We must strengthen our competitiveness [...] and respond to citizens’ economic concerns;*” “*create tomorrow’s markets, industries and high-quality jobs;*” pursue a transition that “increases real income and purchasing power;” etc.;
- The reduction of the “bureaucratic burden”, needed to support the capacity of economic actors to meet the challenges created by an [intense legislative cycle](#), does not seem to foreshadow a sizeable unravelling of the Green Deal, as might be implied by a minimalist interpretation of the corporate commitment expressed in the [Antwerp Declaration](#) of January 2024.

Principles to be applied and strengthened

These principles must be effectively applied and some of them strengthened. Five points seem important.

Staying on course

- Ensuring green transition-based competitiveness means staying on the course given to economic actors in the previous term: specifically those goals that include a review clause, such as reform of the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS2); the Renewable Energy Directive; the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM); and the ban on the sale of new internal combustion engine vehicles from 2035. Equally, to stay on course for achieving carbon neutrality, the political process for establishing [climate and energy targets for 2040](#) and the EU's contribution (CDN) toward COP30 in Brazil must be urgently clarified.

Developing an integrated, pan-European industrial and social strategy

- To respond to this course, establishing a clear and targeted pan-European industrial strategy is a priority. The law for net-zero industry (NZIA) requires that at least 40% of annual strategic technology requirements be manufactured in Europe. As IDDRI underscores about the [transition of the European electricity system](#), a differentiated, sector-based approach and a search for leaders in high-end, high-value added sectors is needed to

respond to the dual objective of rapid deployment and reindustrialization. Therefore, we also make a series of proposals for [rolling out electric vehicles](#) based on developing activities upstream and downstream of the battery value chain in Europe and for establishing a European environmental score.

- Such a strategy should integrate social challenges in their rightful place. This means establishing a full and consistent set of policies in each sector (e.g., for the two sectors mentioned above, developing “renewable energy communities,” social leasing and a used- electric car market) according to cross-cutting action principles; aimed at (1) anticipating future changes; (2) supporting individuals, companies, and communities in these changes; (3) providing citizens with products, services, and an environment that empowers them to act; (4) topping up the Just Transition Fund and the Social Fund; (5) [directing industry toward accessible low-carbon solutions](#); etc.

Filling in how challenges are perceived and strengthening dialog with partners

- Although the green transition is a challenge and a lever of competition, it is also a major source of security and resilience for Europe. Whereas the impacts of climate change (drought, flooding), the loss of biodiversity (loss of ecosystemic services such as pollination and soil fertility), and pollution (access to clean air and water) are well-known and have major consequences for the security of European citizens, we must do more than “protect (them) in terms of natural disasters and health emergencies.” Adapting to the effects of climate change, protecting biodiversity, and reducing pollution will inevitably have to return to the top of Europe's agenda. [The vision of the future of European agriculture will also have to be discussed](#) so that a sustainable economic, social, and environmental path can be proposed to actors in the various sectors and to consumers.
- At a time when mistrust of the West, and more specifically of Europe, is at its height, when the previous term's methods as applied to the third world lacked consultation and were roundly criticized, and when Europe needs more than ever before to secure supply for the green transition, it must make [significant diplomatic](#) efforts toward its partners; this should be based on dialog and the principle of [equal partnerships](#), allowing partner countries to develop their own economies and proposing distinctive value added, for example compared to China's Belt & Road initiative.

Enlargement and its consequences

Among the great challenges mentioned in the strategic agenda are the negotiations on enlargement of the European Union to include Ukraine and Moldavia, which began on June 25. Although the timetable for this potential enlargement is still uncertain, officially recognizing these countries as candidates for joining the EU will soon have both budgetary and political implications.

In July 2025 at the latest, the Commission will publish its proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028–2034, which should reflect the strategic agenda's priorities while taking account of the joining process. Specifically, [having a large agricultural country like Ukraine](#) joining could require reform of the European agricultural policy (which now represents a third of the European budget).

Moreover, several countries, including France and Germany, believe that the EU needs to reform before any enlargement, and suggest extending qualified majority voting to foreign and tax policy issues within the Council.

Next steps

The French legislative elections will be decisive at national level and could have significant repercussions at European level, in terms of the political color of ministers representing France in the Council and of the French European commissioner.

At European institution level, Parliament's first plenary session of July 15-18 should elect its president and approve the nomination of the president of the Commission. Then, governments will put forward their commissioners, who will be questioned by the Parliament with a final vote expected in the fall. The new 5-year Commission term will then be able to begin with effect.

Meanwhile, Hungary will be in the chair of the EU's rotating presidency in the second semester of 2024. Although Viktor Orbán has announced a "Make Europe Great Again" plan, centered on competitiveness, and denounced the wishful thinking of European competitiveness based on the green transition, it is unlikely that any significant texts will emerge in those six months. A key challenge will be preparing for the Donald Tusk-led Polish presidency in the first semester of 2025, which should see the effective start of action by renewed European institutions.

¹ E3G, CISL, ZOE Inst. (2024). [Building a new European competitiveness deal. Six tests for a prosperous, resilient, fair and green economy.](#)

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