



GENERAL AFFAIRS Council

17-18 November 2015 in Brussels

The Council will start work on **Tuesday 17 November** at 14.00.

Ministers will prepare for the **European Council on 17-18 December 2015** by discussing an annotated draft agenda.

They will hold their annual **rule of law dialogue** established in December 2014 to promote and safeguard the rule of law.

They will exchange views on the **interinstitutional agreement on better regulation**.

Ministers will hear a presentation and exchange views on the **Commission work programme for 2016**.

They will hear a presentation by the Luxembourg and incoming Netherlands presidencies of the 2016 **European Semester** roadmap.

The Council meeting on **Wednesday 18 November** will be dedicated to issues related to EU **cohesion policy**. Starting at 10.00 the Council will adopt three sets of conclusions on:

- The shift towards low-carbon economy: the contribution of the European structural and investment funds
- 25 years of Interreg: the contribution of the structural funds to cross-border and trans-national cooperation
- Simplification: priorities and expectations of member states in the field of the European structural and investment funds

Presidency press conferences will be held both days at the end of the meeting (+/- 18.30 on Tuesday and on +/- 13.00 on Wednesday)

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Press conferences and public events by video streaming: <http://video.consilium.europa.eu>

Video coverage in broadcast quality (MPEG4) and photo gallery on: www.eucouncil.tv

¹ This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the Press Office.

Preparation for the December European Council

The Council will examine an [annotated draft agenda](#) for the European Council meeting to be held on 17 and 18 December 2015.

The European Council will focus on:

- migration; it will take stock of the implementation of its decisions taken in response to the migration crisis and agree further orientations in light of the situation on the ground
- economic and monetary union: the European Council will discuss the follow-up to the Presidents' report on completing the Economic and Monetary Union
- single market: the European Council will address the completion of the European single market in all its dimensions following the publication of the Commission communication "Upgrading the Single Market: more opportunities for people and business"
- United Kingdom: the European Council will revert to the UK plans for an (in/out) referendum
- other items: in light of developments the European Council will come back to relations with Russia and the situation in Ukraine.

The annotated draft agenda will serve as the basis for draft conclusions, to be prepared in the run-up to the meeting.

Rule of law dialogue

The Council will hold its first annual rule of law dialogue.

The Council will hear a presentation by the Commission on the results of its colloquium on fundamental rights "Tolerance and respect: prevention and fight against anti-Semitism and the anti-Islam hate in Europe" held on 1 and 2 October 2015.

Ministers are invited to share examples of best practices and challenges faced at national level in the field of rule of law, and present the approach chosen to respond to them.

Ministers will also have the opportunity to discuss the rule of law in the digital era, on the basis of a [presidency paper](#).

The rule of law dialogue was established in December 2014 to promote and safeguard the rule of law in the framework of the Treaties.

Interinstitutional agreement on better regulation

The presidency will inform ministers on the state of play of the negotiations on an agreement between the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council on better regulation.

Ministers will exchange views on the basis of a presidency note and provide guidance to the presidency in view of finalising the negotiations with the Parliament and the Commission.

The interinstitutional agreement on better regulation has been proposed by the Commission with the objective of securing a common commitment of the three institutions to improve the way the EU legislates.

Commission work programme for 2016

Ministers will hear a presentation and exchange views on the [Commission work programme for 2016](#) adopted on 27 October.

2016 European Semester roadmap

The Council will take note of a presentation by the Luxembourg and forthcoming Netherlands presidencies of the [roadmap for the 2016 European Semester](#). The roadmap sets out how work will be taken forward in the coming months and in the first semester of 2016. The objective of the roadmap is to ensure that all relevant Council formations work in a coordinated manner and to enable the General Affairs Council to oversee the process.

The European Semester is a cycle of economic and fiscal policy coordination within the EU. Its task is to help the member states to coordinate their economic, employment and fiscal policies better and to make sure they reflect the EU-level goal.

COHESION

Shift towards low-carbon economy

In view of the UN climate conference in Paris in December the Council will adopt conclusions on the contribution of the European structural and investment funds 2014-2020 to supporting the shift towards low-carbon economy. Together with an explanatory note of the Commission, the conclusions will reflect the member states engagement in the fight against climate change through the European structural and investment funds (ESIF). The ESIF for the 2014-2020 period provide substantial funding of €110 billion for climate-related measures in the EU (for mitigation and adaptation) across all thematic objectives, out of which €45 billion for supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy (thematic objective 4).

European territorial cooperation

The Council is invited to adopt conclusions designed to take stock of the 25 years existence of the European territorial cooperation, Interreg. The conclusions will built on the results of an Interreg-conference held in Luxembourg in September and will reflect the role that Interreg-activities play within the structural funds.

Simplification for the European structural and investment funds

The Council will adopt conclusions setting out the priorities and expectations that member states attach to the simplification of the European structural and investment funds. The Commission has set up a high level group of independent experts to reflect on and monitor simplifying the structural funds for the benefit of the beneficiaries.
