



Brussels Info Flash

09 October 2026

H/Advisors' Analysis

Commission prepares EU policies and budget for future enlargement

Brussels sets out reforms to make the Union ready for new members, linking enlargement to governance, budgetary capacity, rule of law and Europe's geopolitical role

The **European Commission** has adopted a package of **pre-enlargement policy reviews** aimed at preparing the EU for future accessions. The initiative responds to the political priority set by President **von der Leyen** and the mandate given by the **European Council**, recognising that enlargement is no longer only a foreign policy objective, but a structural challenge for the Union itself.

The package focuses on adapting the EU's **governance**, policies and budget to ensure that a wider Union can continue to function effectively. This includes preparing decision-making, financing and policy frameworks for a larger membership, while preserving the Union's capacity to act. It also places strong emphasis on the protection of **EU values** and the **rule of law**, signalling that enlargement will remain linked to institutional credibility and democratic standards.

Politically, the proposal reflects the EU's attempt to reconcile enlargement with internal reform. As candidate countries move forward, Brussels is increasingly aware that the Union must prepare itself as much as future members. The package therefore marks an important step in turning enlargement from a long-term aspiration into a practical agenda for institutional readiness, budgetary planning and geopolitical influence.

Highlights of the week

- **Enlargement and EU readiness.** The Commission put enlargement at the centre of the agenda, linking future accessions to EU governance, budgetary capacity and rule-of-law safeguards.
- **Defence, Ukraine and hybrid threats.** EU institutions advanced defence funding, Ukraine support and Russia-related sanctions, including SAFE payments, Ukraine defence aid and the extension of hybrid sanctions.
- **Competitiveness and financial markets.** ECOFIN focused on the Savings and Investments Union, banking competitiveness and market supervision, while the Commission pushed faster European standardisation.
- **Affordability and resilience.** Parliament addressed housing, cost of living and energy pressures, while the Commission approved fuel-cost support and disaster recovery funding for affected Member States.

Main Issues in the EU

The Council

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- **Economic and Financial Affairs Council.** Finance ministers are set to discuss the Savings and Investments Union and the market integration and supervision package, banking sector competitiveness, the economic impact of Russia's war against Ukraine, RRF implementation, the European Semester, fiscal governance, tax jurisdictions, G20 preparations and climate finance ahead of COP31.

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- **European Council.** President António Costa invited EU leaders to the 15–16 October European Council, setting an agenda focused on competitiveness, energy prices, the 2028–2034 MFF, Ukraine, Russian hybrid threats, defence readiness, migration, enlargement and the Middle East, including freedom of navigation and maritime security.
- **Russia hybrid sanctions.** The Council prolonged restrictive measures against those responsible for Russia's destabilising activities abroad until 9 October 2027, citing continued and intensified hybrid activities, including foreign information manipulation and interference against the EU, its Member States and partners.

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- **EU-Moldova Association Council.** The EU and Moldova held their 10th Association Council, reaffirming Moldova's EU accession path and announcing the disbursement of €157 million under Growth Plan funding, while highlighting progress on reforms, resilience against Russian hybrid threats, energy security, defence cooperation and gradual integration into the EU internal market.
- **Eurogroup.** Euro area finance ministers met to discuss exchange rate developments ahead of the IMF and World Bank annual meetings, the Savings and Investments Union and capital markets progress, the effectiveness of public finances and the impact of energy markets on the euro area economy.

The Commission

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- **Armenia trade preferences.** The EU granted temporary trade preferences to Armenia for two years, liberalising almost 80% of Armenian exports to the EU following recent Russian trade restrictions.

- **Green cities.** Zaragoza was named European Green Capital 2028, while Benidorm and Estarreja won the European Green Leaf awards, recognising their sustainability and climate resilience efforts.
- **Tax jurisdictions.** The EU updated its list of non-cooperative tax jurisdictions, removing Panama and Viet Nam from Annex I while adding a new deficiency for Anguilla.
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- **Global health.** The Commission and Member States announced almost €170 million in Team Europe investments to strengthen health systems, health security and access to health products in Africa. Pasted text
- **French State aid.** The Commission approved €40.5 million in French State aid to support agricultural, fishery, aquaculture and transport companies facing higher fuel prices linked to the Middle East crisis.

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- **EU Ecolabel.** A new Eurobarometer showed growing consumer trust in the EU Ecolabel, with 81% of consumers confident that labelled products have a lower environmental impact than similar products.
- **Livestock emissions.** The Commission adopted new EU rules for large poultry and pig farms under the Industrial and Livestock Rearing Emissions Directive, aiming to reduce ammonia, nitrogen and phosphorus emissions while limiting administrative burden for farmers.
- **EU Solidarity Fund.** The Commission granted €134.8 million in EU Solidarity Fund support to Spain and Romania following wildfires, drought, heatwaves and floods in 2025.
- **Merger enforcement.** The Commission fined Kingspan €40 million for providing incorrect and misleading information during its 2021 merger investigation into the planned acquisition of Trimo.
- **Maltese State aid.** The Commission approved an €8 million Maltese State aid scheme to support maritime transport companies facing higher fuel prices linked to the Middle East crisis.
- **EU budget.** The Commission welcomed the European Court of Auditors' 2025 Annual Report, which gave the EU annual accounts a clean bill of health for the 19th consecutive year.

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- **NextGenerationEU.** The Commission presented its fifth annual RRF report, noting that €450 billion has been disbursed so far and that the remaining €123 billion is expected to be completed by the end of 2026.
- **French hydropower market.** The Commission closed two infringement cases against France after new hydropower legislation addressed competition concerns by opening part of France's hydropower capacity to EDF's competitors.
- **Spanish State aid.** The Commission approved a €750,000 Spanish State aid scheme for agricultural companies in the Balearic Islands facing increased fuel prices linked to the Middle East crisis.
- **Ukraine defence support.** The Commission disbursed €1.24 billion under the defence component of the Ukraine Support Loan to support Ukraine's procurement of drones and missiles.

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- **SAFE defence instrument.** Belgium and Czechia received their first payments under the SAFE defence instrument, with €1.2 billion for Belgium and €309 million for Czechia to support defence investments, joint procurement and military capability modernisation.
- **European standardisation.** The Commission proposed to modernise the European standardisation system, aiming to accelerate standards development, improve SME representation and strengthen EU competitiveness in strategic sectors such as clean tech, cybersecurity and advanced manufacturing.
- **Research and medical innovation.** EU-funded researcher Peter Hegemann won the 2026 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for discoveries in optogenetics, highlighting EU support for frontier research with potential medical applications.
- **EU enlargement.** The Commission adopted a package on pre-enlargement policy reviews, setting out how the EU's governance, policies and budget should prepare for future enlargements while protecting EU values and the rule of law.

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- **NextGenerationEU.** The Commission positively assessed Finland's fifth €229.2 million payment request under the Recovery and Resilience Facility, covering reforms and investments in decarbonisation, environmental sustainability, digitalisation, cybersecurity, healthcare, continuous learning and research infrastructure.
- **Drone and counter-drone capabilities.** The Commission announced an additional €130 million to strengthen Member States' drone and counter-drone capabilities, border surveillance and responses to unauthorised or hostile drone activity.

- **Moldova Growth Plan.** The Commission disbursed €157 million to Moldova under the Growth Plan, following progress on reforms linked to economic resilience, energy, the green transition, good governance and access to the EU Single Market.
- **Education and skills.** The Commission published its EU analysis of the OECD's PISA 2025 results, warning of a sustained decline in basic skills and major equity gaps ahead of the forthcoming Education Package.
- **Polish State aid.** The Commission found Poland's planned support for the expansion of MAN Trucks' factory in Niepołomice incompatible with EU State aid rules, meaning the aid cannot be disbursed.

The European Parliament

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- **Russia and Ukraine.** Parliament voted on a resolution denouncing Russia's parliamentary elections as undemocratic and condemning illegal voting in occupied Ukrainian territories.
- **Anti-corruption.** Parliament voted on its proposals to strengthen the EU's anti-corruption framework ahead of the Commission's first EU anti-corruption strategy.
- **EU-Africa trade and investment.** Parliament voted on the state of play of EU-Africa trade and investment relations, following the plenary debate.
- **Human rights and democracy.** MEPs voted on urgent resolutions on Iran, Georgia and Azerbaijan, following debates on human rights, democracy and rule-of-law concerns.
- **Islands, coastal communities and outermost regions.** MEPs debated EU strategies for islands, coastal communities and outermost regions.

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- **EU long-term budget.** Parliament debated negotiations on the 2028–2034 MFF, with MEPs insisting on higher funding for defence, competitiveness, cohesion and agriculture, as well as new EU own resources.
- **Cost of living.** MEPs debated the cost-of-living crisis, including energy and transport costs, the Social Climate Fund and EU initiatives to lower energy bills for vulnerable consumers.
- **EU support for workers.** Parliament was expected to back €6.91 million from the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund to support dismissed workers in Belgium, Spain and Finland.

- **Anti-corruption.** MEPs debated Parliament's proposals for the forthcoming EU anti-corruption strategy, focusing on prevention, transparency, institutional integrity, stronger enforcement and cross-border cooperation.
- **EU-Africa trade and investment.** MEPs debated the state of play of EU-Africa trade and investment relations, ahead of a vote on Thursday.

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- **October European Council.** MEPs debated Parliament's priorities for the 15–16 October European Council, focusing on competitiveness, Ukraine, the 2028–2034 MFF, the Middle East, defence and security, migration and enlargement.
- **Defence innovation.** Parliament voted on AGILE, a €115 million programme to support rapid defence innovation by SMEs, start-ups and scale-ups in response to the security environment shaped by Russia's war against Ukraine.
- **Housing and methane.** MEPs debated the Affordable Housing Act and questioned the Commission on the implementation of the Methane Regulation, including the impact of new import requirements on supply security and gas prices.
- **EU-China relations.** Parliament debated EU-China political relations, including trade imbalances, Russia's war against Ukraine, Indo-Pacific security and human rights.
- **Children online.** MEPs debated the Commission's KIDS Act proposal, including age restrictions for social media, safer digital services and privacy-preserving age checks.
- **Workers' protection.** Parliament voted on new rules to protect workers from exposure to carcinogens, mutagens and reprotoxic substances, including new limit values for chemicals used in battery, steel, textile and rubber production.

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- **Falsified medicines.** MEPs debated plans to protect citizens from illegal and falsified medicines sold online, focusing on stronger enforcement and cross-border cooperation.
- **Mental health at work.** Parliament debated the need for new EU legislation to protect workers from work-related psychosocial risks, stress and mental health challenges.
- **Ukraine.** MEPs debated the humanitarian situation in Ukraine, ahead of a broader debate on Russia's parliamentary elections and their implications.

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