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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Draft Strategic Agenda 2024-2029

Draft**Strategic Agenda 2024-2029**

The European Union was founded on the imperative of securing peace in Europe, building on cooperation and common economic prosperity. This original promise still guides us and serves as the basis for our vision for a stronger and more sovereign Europe.

The global political landscape is being reshaped by geopolitical competition and attacks against the rules-based international order. Russia has brought war back to our continent. In our neighbourhood, the situation in the Middle East is dramatic. Our natural environment is facing increasing damage and disruption due to climate change.

These unprecedented challenges have led the European Union to break new ground in our cooperation and integration in the past five years. Together, we set up a major recovery fund in response to the pandemic that affected our societies in unforeseeable ways. Together, we protected our economies during the energy crisis. And together, we have been providing Ukraine with significant military and economic support as it fights against Russia's war of aggression. But we will not rest here. We will live up to the call of our founding fathers and ensure that the creativity of our responses matches the size of the challenges ahead of us.

As the Union and Member States, we will combine our strengths and resources to face the coming years with unity and resolve. We will build a cleaner future and make a success of the green and digital transitions. We will take the necessary responsibility for our security and defence and become more influential in the world. We will be a leader in addressing global challenges, championing international law and institutions, fair global governance, inclusive multilateralism and sustainable growth and development.

Strong and competitive social market economies will be the driving force in achieving our ambitions. In today's hyper competitive world, we need to unleash the European spirit of entrepreneurship. Europe is a continent of doers, makers, and innovators. Trusting our companies to turn risks into opportunities will spur investments, boost economic growth and make Europe a veritable powerhouse.

Values will remain our guiding compass, both internally and externally. They are the foundation for a stronger, more prosperous, and more democratic Union for our people.

The European Council agrees on the following priorities and invites the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission to put them into action during the next institutional cycle, respecting the institutional balance of powers and the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. The next Multiannual Financial Framework for the Union will have to accurately reflect these priorities.

A free and democratic Europe

Upholding European values within the Union

Our values are our strength. We will continue to ensure that our founding values – respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights – remain the cornerstone of our Union.

We will promote and safeguard the respect of the rule of law which is the basis of European cooperation. We will strengthen our democratic resilience, including by deepening citizen engagement, protecting a free media, tackling foreign interference, and countering attempts at destabilisation, including through disinformation. We will fight crime offline and online, redoubling our efforts to prevent and tackle organised crime and corruption, using all the law enforcement and judicial cooperation tools of our Union.

Living up to our values at global level

The European Union shall continue to be the strongest supporter of the international legal order, steadfastly upholding the United Nations and the principles enshrined in the UN Charter. In particular, the European Union will pursue efforts to promote global peace, justice, and stability as well as democracy and universal human rights in all international fora. We will strive for a reformed multilateral system, making it more inclusive and more effective.

A strong and secure Europe

Ensuring a coherent and influential external action

The world around us has become more confrontational, transactional and uncertain. We will adapt to the ever-evolving circumstances, asserting the European Union's sovereignty and its place as a strategic global player in the new multipolar geopolitical context.

We will intensify our work to promote security, stability and prosperity in our neighbourhood and beyond. The European Union will stand by Ukraine in its legitimate defence, its reconstruction and pursuit of a just peace.

At global level, we will closely engage with partners, promote international cooperation to address shared challenges and develop mutually beneficial strategic partnerships. We will leverage both internal and external EU policies in the best interests of the Union in a well-coordinated manner.

Strengthening our security and defence

The European Union and Member States have taken bold steps to strengthen the Union's defence readiness and capacity, including increased defence spending. Going forward, we will invest substantially more and better together.

Increasing our security requires a solid economic base. We will mobilise the necessary instruments to bolster our security and the protection of our citizens, and to respond to new emerging threats. We will urgently improve conditions for scaling up the European defence industry by creating a better integrated European defence market, promoting joint procurement and flagship projects of common interest. We will also improve access to public and private finance, exploring innovative options, including through the enhanced role of the European Investment Bank Group.

The European Union will strengthen its resilience, preparedness and crisis response capacities to protect our citizens and societies against different crises, including natural disasters and health emergencies. We will step up our collective response to cyber and hybrid warfare, foreign manipulation and interference and threats to our critical infrastructure. We will pay particular attention to enhancing societal endurance. We will fight attempts to sow division, radicalisation, terrorism and violent extremism within the Union.

Strengthening our security and defence will be done in cooperation with our transatlantic partners while respecting the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States and taking into account the security and defence interests of all.

Preparing for a bigger and stronger Union

The new geopolitical reality underscores the importance of enlargement as a geostrategic investment in peace, security, stability and prosperity. There is new dynamism in the enlargement process. Both the EU and aspiring members now have a responsibility to make the most out of this opportunity and communicate this clearly.

The EU will follow a merit-based approach to accession with tangible incentives. This means that the European Union will support aspiring members in meeting the accession criteria through established and new instruments and will use all possibilities for the gradual integration. It will also encourage regional integration, good neighbourly relations, reconciliation, and resolution of bilateral disputes.

In parallel, the European Union will undertake the necessary internal reforms to ensure that our policies are fit for the future and financed in a sustainable manner and that the EU institutions continue to function effectively.

Pursuing a comprehensive approach to migration

Ensuring that citizens can move freely within the EU is a fundamental achievement of the European Union and requires the smooth functioning of the Schengen area.

With this freedom comes the responsibility to effectively protect the EU's external borders and counter irregular migration and its instrumentalisation. The European Union will continue to cooperate in a mutually beneficial way with countries of origin and transit. Together, we will address the long-term challenges of migration and its root causes, and work on returns. We will also explore opportunities of migration, including through legal pathways. We will fight smuggling networks and break the business model of those who profit from this inhumane trade.

A prosperous and competitive Europe

Bolstering our competitiveness

We are determined to strengthen the basis of our long-term competitiveness and address citizens' economic concerns. We will increase our sovereignty in strategic sectors and close our growth, productivity and innovation gaps with international partners and main competitors. This requires a significant collective investment effort, mobilising both public and private funding, including through the European Investment Bank.

Our greatest asset in that endeavour is the Single Market, the long-term engine of prosperity and convergence, that enables economies of scale. We will therefore develop it further and remove barriers, particularly on services and essential goods. To unlock the necessary investment potential, we will gear up financial integration by achieving the Capital Markets Union and completing the Banking Union, creating truly integrated European capital markets which are accessible to all citizens and businesses across the Union. To preserve the integrity of the Single Market, we will ensure a balanced state aid policy.

Learning from our experience, we will not allow the undermining of our open markets. We will pursue an ambitious, robust, open and sustainable trade policy while diversifying and securing strategic supply chains. We will strengthen our economic security and reduce harmful dependencies. We will build up our own capacity in sensitive sectors and key technologies of the future such as defence, space, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, 5G/6G, health, biotechnologies, net-zero technologies, mobility, chemicals and advanced materials. Promoting innovation and research is crucial in this endeavour.

Making a success of the green and digital transitions

On our path towards climate neutrality by 2050, we will harness the potential of the green and digital transitions to create the markets, industries and high-quality jobs of the future. We will invest in an ample infrastructure for energy, transport and communications.

We will pursue a just and fair climate transition, with the aim of staying competitive globally and increasing our energy sovereignty. Accelerating the energy transition, we will build a genuine energy union, securing the supply of abundant, affordable and clean energy. We will develop a more circular and resource-efficient economy, driving forward the industrial development of clean technologies, reaping the full benefits of bioeconomy, embracing clean mobility and building adequate smart network infrastructure and interconnections. This will increase real income and purchasing power, thereby improving living standards for all EU citizens.

We will exploit the untapped potential of data and encourage investment in game-changing digital technologies, promoting their application throughout the economy.

The European Union will promote a competitive, sustainable and resilient agricultural sector that continues to ensure food security. We will continue to protect nature and reverse the degradation of ecosystems.

Promoting an innovation- and business-friendly environment

In an increasingly knowledge- and data-driven economy and a global and competitive market, Europe will accompany, nurture and grow its businesses and industry, attract and retain talent, and remain an attractive location for investment.

We will boost Europe's innovation capacity in emerging and enabling technologies, including for dual use. Achieving industrial strength in key sectors also requires the Union to safeguard fair competition, fight unfair practices, promote reciprocity and ensure a level playing field both internally and globally.

For businesses to flourish, we will ambitiously reduce the bureaucratic burden and reform administrative procedures to reflect the needs of a modern, dynamic and consumer-friendly investment environment. We commit to improving better regulation, including by making the best use of digital government. We will work in an integrated and coordinated way across all policy areas and put special focus on implementation and enforcement of agreed policies.

Advancing together

Economic growth needs to benefit all citizens. We will uphold the social dimension of the Single Market so that everyone can seize the opportunities offered by the green and digital transitions. In view of demographic challenges, we will ensure that the European economic model and welfare systems support a thriving longevity society.

We will invest in people's skills and education throughout their lives and encourage talent mobility within the European Union and beyond. Recalling the European Pillar of Social Rights, the EU and Member States will aim to strengthen social dialogue, uphold equal opportunities and reduce inequalities. Increasing participation in the labour market will be of key importance in the next years.

In a spirit of solidarity, we will enhance economic, social and territorial cohesion aiming for continuous upward convergence, reducing disparities and stimulating long-term growth across the Union.

Our destiny is in our own hands. We have the talent, courage and vision to successfully shape our future. This Strategic Agenda is our joint pledge to unequivocally serve our citizens and fulfil our founding objective of peace and prosperity.