



E3G

BRIEFING PAPER APRIL 2024

SECURING SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CLIMATE STABILITY THROUGH THE EU STRATEGIC AGENDA

AN ORIENTATION BRIEFING AHEAD OF THE APRIL EUROPEAN COUNCIL

MANON DUFOUR, SANDRA TZVETKOVA, PEPE ESCRIG

European leaders will soon meet to begin re-hashing the EU's priorities for the next five years. Amid crisis upon crisis, they will be looking to forge security – geopolitical, economic and social. Reinstating the EU's previous priority of a climate-neutral, green and fair Europe can serve as a strategic north star, guiding the way to both security and resilience.

This orientation briefing sheds light on the drivers and personalities at play at this important crossroads. We set out four benchmarks for how the Strategic Agenda can address leaders' concerns and European challenges.

Context

Heads of state and governments will meet during an Informal European Council on 17–18 April to pick up discussions on the EU Strategic Agenda for 2024–2029, which started in June 2023 in Granada. With this meeting, and the looming European elections, the window of opportunity to shape the contours of the next political cycle is beginning to narrow.

Numerous high-level topics such as security and defence, competitiveness, migration and EU enlargement are now vying for attention – all shaped by a sustained context of geopolitical crises and rising domestic socio-economic tensions. This intermediary meeting among EU leaders will signal the direction of travel.



E3G

What to look out for

European leaders' mission will be to set the tone and direction for the rest of the decade – applying foresight and strategic thinking – all in the midst of ongoing wars, a transatlantic cleantech race, growing climate impacts, and the social fallout from a cost-of-living crisis.

Despite fears of an (overstated¹) green backlash, sustained climate action is not at odds with securing social cohesion and stability, long-term competitiveness, and economic security. The political conditions needed to achieve these goals are the same.

E3G will be looking at the following benchmarks for success in the upcoming Strategic Agenda discussions:

- 1. Keeping climate firmly on the agenda.** The European Green Deal was set up as the EU's blueprint for modernising the economy, ramping up competitiveness, and building energy and socio-economic security. 2024–2029 is the time to update and accelerate the plan by agreeing an ambitious 2040 target, strengthening climate resilience and risk preparedness, materially addressing its social dimension, and turning policies into action.
- 2. Taking industrial policy and investment to the next level.** Compared to the investment and ambition signalled by Chinese and US plans, the EU's industrial strategies and policies deployed to date have struggled to make impact. However, the EU has unique assets to strengthen its position as a green leader if it can make bolder and faster decisions moving forward – making Europe's industrial strategy, private finance, and public funding² work in unison towards a shared vision.
- 3. Boosting social protection and a just transition.** The only way to navigate the EU's challenges is with the support of Europeans. This requires a stronger focus on addressing the unequal social distribution of the impacts and opportunities of Europe's overlapping economic transformations – be that with regards to climate and industrial policy, trade, or digitalisation. Hallmarks of a green and just transition would include envisaging more social protection and participation – via, for example, a Just Transition Policy

¹ Jacques Delors Centre, March 2024, **Debunking the backlash – Uncovering European voters' climate preferences**

² E3G, ShareAction, WWF March 2024, **Investing in Europe's Prosperity – A vision for financing the transition to sustainability 2024-2030**



E3G

Framework³ – and equipping countries and regions to democratise decision making and boost resilience against climate impacts.

- 4. Establishing Europe as a reliable partner globally.** The world has started the shift towards a new energy system, bringing with it a new era of geopolitics. Themes such as fragmentation, major power competition and nationalism have gained traction, but there is a need to set aside space for cooperation. An integrated and strategic Team EU approach to clean partnerships with emerging economies would rebuild trust with the Global South, address fears of overdependence on China, and ultimately preserve Europe’s influence in the world.⁴

What’s next?

Process. Following this first focused exchange, European leaders will finalise their Strategic Agenda during the 27–28 June European Council. During this crucial meeting, leaders will also attempt to agree on nominees for the EU’s “top jobs”.

What about the European elections? The results of the European elections are an important but uncertain factor in this process. They will shape the outcome by boosting or weakening the status of certain priorities, and specific political players. In 2019, a strong green vote boosted the place of the green transition in the agenda.

What about the Commission’s priorities? The European Council nominee for President of the European Commission will have the tricky task of developing priorities that align with the guidance from European leaders, while convincing a majority of newly elected MEPs to give her/him the job.

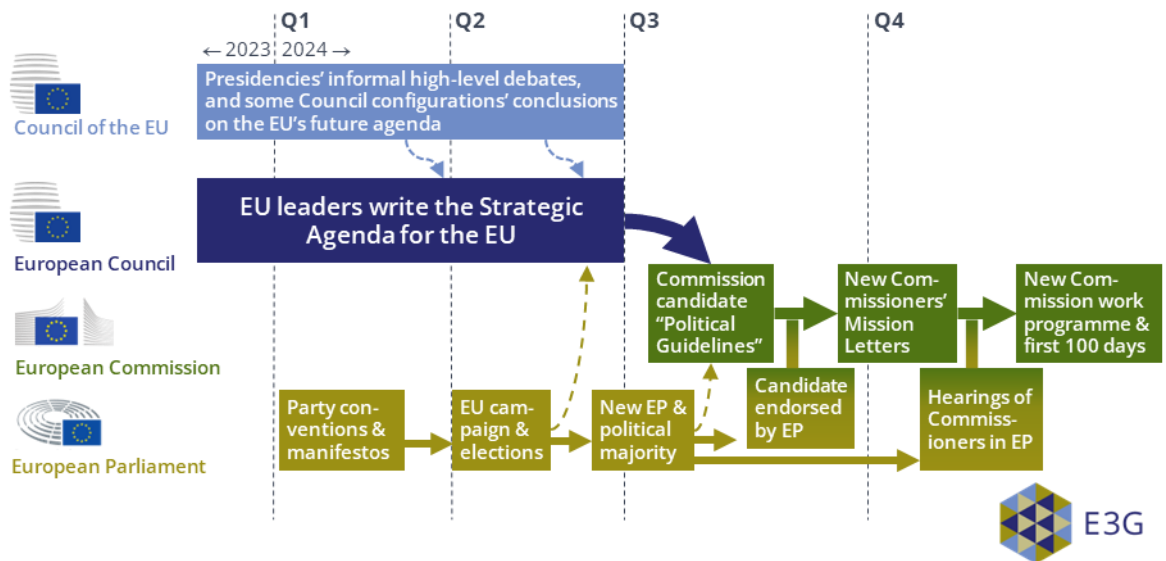
³ EESC, December 2023, **Advancing the EU’s just transition policy framework: what measures are necessary**

⁴ E3G, March 2024, **EU clean transition partnerships with emerging economies**



E3G

Shaping the next EU agenda The Strategic Agenda is a major input to the new Commission's work programme



People to watch

European Council President Charles Michel. The man talking to European heads of state and governments and holding the pen. The Strategic Agenda will be part of his legacy, and an important item on his resumé as he looks for his next job.

Emmanuel Macron, Olaf Scholz. The Franco–German “engine” usually has to agree in order for something to become an EU priority. But issues like nuclear energy and defence spending have recently put this relationship on the rocks.

Donald Tusk. The Polish Prime Minister is making a comeback to the EU stage following his electoral victory in 2023. He brings heaps of personal experience, a need to deliver for Poland, and an opportunity to shape the future of the EU following years of frail EU–Poland relations.

Farmers. While in 2019 mass grassroots mobilisation gave the green light for the European Green Deal, farmers’ protests in 2024 have in some cases levelled criticism at precisely this headline package. Yet, the reality of these protests is more complex than meets the eye,⁵ and leaders will have to manage this background pressure.

⁵ DeSmog, 8 February 2024, **Revealed: The climate denial network behind ‘classic astro turf’ farmers’ campaign**



E3G

About E3G

E3G is an independent climate change think tank with a global outlook. We work on the frontier of the climate landscape, tackling the barriers and advancing the solutions to a safe climate. Our goal is to translate climate politics, economics and policies into action.

E3G builds broad-based coalitions to deliver a safe climate, working closely with like-minded partners in government, politics, civil society, science, the media, public interest foundations and elsewhere to leverage change.

More information is available at www.e3g.org

Copyright

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 License. © E3G 2024