

EU Institutions & Governance

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European Commission — von der Leyen II (2024-2029)

Ursula von der Leyen secured a second term as Commission President after the 2024 European Parliament elections, backed by EPP, S&D, and Renew. Her second-term priorities are built around the **EU Strategic Agenda 2024-2029**, focusing on security, competitiveness, and climate transition — but with the political centre of gravity shifted rightwards.

Key new commissioners and portfolio shifts

Post-2024 election reshuffle gave more influence to EPP-aligned commissioners. Key portfolios:

- **Competitiveness and industrial policy** — elevated as the dominant agenda, reflecting pressure from member states to prioritise economic growth over regulation
- **Defence and security** — a new dedicated portfolio reflecting the post-Ukraine war, post-Trump shift
- **Migration and border management** — hardened line, reflecting the Pact on Migration's adoption and the broader European rightward shift

Political direction

- Von der Leyen has shifted the Commission steadily rightward on migration and competitiveness
- **"Stealth migration drop"** — Politico reported (Nov 2025) that the Commission pushed restrictive measures through without full parliamentary scrutiny
- The Green Deal remains formally intact but has been deprioritised relative to industrial competitiveness
- The 2040 climate target (90% net reduction) was proposed July 2025 but softened by member state pushback

European Parliament — 2024-2029 Term

Composition after June 2024 elections:

- EPP (centre-right): largest group ~185 seats
- S&D (social democrats): second ~135 seats
- Renew Europe (liberals): third ~80 seats
- **Patriots for Europe (far right)**: ~84 seats — led by Jordan Bardella (RN)
- ECR (hard right): ~70 seats — led by Meloni's Fratelli d'Italia
- Greens/EFA: declined to ~50 seats
- The Left: ~35 seats
- ESN (far right, including AfD): ~25 seats

The pro-EU coalition (EPP+S&D+Renew) still holds a majority but is narrower than in 2019-2024. The far right now controls roughly 25-28% of seats across three groups (PfE, ECR, ESN). This has shifted the political centre of gravity — the EPP increasingly votes with the right on migration and competitiveness issues.

European Council — Key Dynamics

- **Orbán's fall (April 2026)** is the single biggest shift — Hungary under Péter Magyar is now pro-EU, pro-rule of law. This removes the most consistent veto player on Ukraine aid, sanctions, and enlargement.
 - **Macron** is serving out his final year (lame duck, cannot run again 2027)
 - **Scholz** replaced by **Friedrich Merz** (CDU) after Germany's Feb 2025 election — more Atlanticist on defence, more conservative on migration
 - **Meloni** remains in power but weakened by March 2026 constitutional referendum defeat
 - **Tusk** (Poland) back at the table after PiS lost power — driving rule of law restoration and EU fund unlocking
 - **Rutte** is now NATO Secretary-General (since Oct 2024) — replaced by Dick Schoof then Rob Jetten in the Netherlands
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Qualified Majority Voting Reform

The debate around moving foreign policy and taxation to QMV (away from national veto) has intensified:

- **Enlargement reform:** Phased accession and QMV on enlargement decisions being discussed as necessary for a 35+ member EU
 - **Sanctions:** Orbán's serial vetoes on Russia sanctions before his fall strengthened the case for QMV
 - **Taxation:** Still unanimous — no progress on moving to QMV
 - **Foreign policy:** Some member states (Germany, France, Benelux) pushing for QMV on foreign policy decisions; others (smaller states) resisting
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Rule of Law — Article 7 and Member States

Hungary (Post-Orbán)

The biggest rule of law story of 2026. Péter Magyar's Tisza Party won a landslide in the April 2026 election, ending 16 years of Fidesz rule. Key developments:

- EU frozen funds now likely to be unblocked — Magyar met von der Leyen in April 2026 to discuss
- Article 7 proceedings likely to be wound down
- The European Parliament's rule of law rapporteur has already signalled a reset in relations

Poland (Under Tusk)

- Tusk's government has been systematically reversing PiS's judicial reforms
- EU funds (€137 billion in RRF and cohesion) were unblocked in early 2024 after milestones were met
- However, PiS-allied President Duda (until Aug 2025) used veto powers to block some reforms — and PiS-aligned Karol Nawrocki won the 2025 presidential election, giving PiS-aligned veto power until 2030
- **Next PiS trial:** Former Justice Minister Zbigniew Ziobro is reportedly a fugitive in the US facing 26 charges

Slovakia (Under Fico)

- Fico's third-term government is moving to dismantle rule of law protections
 - Whistleblower protections under threat (blocked by courts Dec 2025)
 - Party of European Socialists permanently expelled Smer for its far-right turn (Sept 2025)
 - Pro-Russia, anti-Ukraine stance isolates Slovakia within the EU
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Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 — Priorities

1. **A prosperous and competitive Europe** — industrial policy, single market deepening, regulatory simplification
 2. **A green and just transition** — Green Deal, REPowerEU, Fit for 55 delivery
 3. **A secure Europe** — defence integration, security partnerships, border management
 4. **A Europe that protects democracy** — rule of law, media freedom, anti-disinformation
 5. **A stronger Europe in the world** — enlargement, neighbourhood policy, global partnerships
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Next MFF Negotiations (2028-2034)

- The next Multiannual Financial Framework will be the first negotiated with a potential EU of 30+ members
 - Key debates: defence spending (new European Defence Fund expected to be substantially larger), agricultural subsidies (CAP reform inevitable with Ukrainian accession reducing budget for existing members), cohesion policy reform
 - Net contributor countries (Germany, Netherlands, Sweden) pushing for budget discipline
 - EU's own resources debate continues — digital levy, CBAM revenues, ETS expansion as potential new EU-level revenues
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