

State of Europe 2024
The festival of politics and ideas
6 & 7 November 2024



**6 & 7
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**STATE OF
EUROPE**

**Voices, choices and leadership
A tipping point for the EU?**

THE STATE OF EUROPE 2024

VOICES, CHOICES AND LEADERSHIP: A TIPPING POINT FOR EUROPE?

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In the 2024 edition, State of Europe will again blend a range of diverse formats to offer lively exchange and fresh thinking. In addition to early bird masterclasses and high-level sessions, we will host screenings of (short) films and documentaries, idea-sharing talks, and high-level, closed-door meetings for a limited number of senior stakeholders to offer insights on the way forward for the most pressing issues challenging Europe.

By the end of 2024, Europe will likely still be at war and more than two billion voters around the world will have been invited to the polls to make their voices heard. This unprecedented election year is poised to have profound effects, heralding an era of significant global transformation and opportunity. Election results are also expected to mirror a broader global sentiment: an increasing disillusionment with present politicians' promises for the future, reflecting a deep-seated scepticism towards the notion of progress.

The European elections will not only provide insights into citizens' present-day concerns, but also gauge what hope there is for a future challenged by war, the climate emergency, high levels of public debt and growing socio-economic disparities, to name but a few.

The pace, scope, and depth of social, economic, political, and technological change from 2019 to 2024 have been remarkable, setting a breathtaking context for future possibilities. We can realistically expect even faster and more profound changes in the coming term. More likely than not, the coming years will bring about even greater polarisation. However, as political leadership changes across the world and a new European mandate begins, 2025 has the potential to kick-start an era in which Europe delivers the governance its citizens need: a social and competitive Europe that keeps Europeans safe and meets economic ambitions, while retaining social imperatives at the centre of all considerations.

We must tear up the old rule book and reimagine a new one better suited for today's challenges. Our approach to fiscal policy and budgeting must be rethought, as traditional methods will not be effective in managing our time crises. We must reimagine the tools at our disposal and the EU must now overhaul the social contract established in the last century to ensure its survival.

Friends of Europe argues for a Renewed Social Contract as the key to achieving the inclusive and fair transitions, peace and security and social prosperity needed for Europe to care for its citizens and retain its role on the global stage. Building upon the ideas set out in Friends of Europe's recently published '10 policy choices for a Renewed Social Contract for Europe', the 21st State of Europe high-level roundtable will be dedicated to sketching the Europe we want the new European Commission to work towards.

By the time we meet on 6-7 November, Europe will be different - how different we don't know. In particular, the ongoing war in Ukraine and the potential for Donald Trump's re-election make Europe's future even more unpredictable.

Wednesday, 6 November

18:30 | **President's Gala Dinner**

On the eve of State of Europe, Count Etienne Davignon, President of the Board of Trustees of Friends of Europe, and Thomas Leysen, President of the Governing Board of Friends of Europe, will invite several hundred high-level guests to the President's Gala Dinner. The President's Gala Dinner is an informal, yet intellectually stimulating and entertaining, opportunity for guests to connect ahead of the next day's debates.



Thursday, 7 November

08:30 | **State of Europe high-level roundtable**

17:20

The annual State of Europe high-level roundtable gathers 200+ influential figures from more than 40 countries: sitting and former (prime) ministers, CEOs, NGO leaders, top European officials, members of parliaments, influencers, top journalists, and European Young Leaders (EYL40) to generate new ideas in a novel and productive way.

The landscape and challenges European politicians face today are incomparable with those of the 2019 European elections. As political leadership changes across the world in this 'ultimate election year' and a new European mandate begins, 2025 has the potential to kick-start a new era of governance. State of Europe 2024 will focus on deliberating the choices Europe must make to deliver the governance its citizens need in an increasingly challenging environment – one that includes the Ukraine war, intensifying great-power competition, and a deteriorating climate-social crisis.



08:30 | Early-Bird Briefings

09:20 | **A tale of three powers: China, Europe, United States**

This series of early-bird briefings, hosted by leading experts across various disciplines, will serve as a stock-taking exercise. The sessions will include concise, engaging discussions aimed at exploring Europe's role on the global stage, particularly in relation to China and the United States.

09:20 | Welcome

09:30

09:30 | Opening Plenary Session

10:00 | **Yes, we can! Financing Europe's Renewed Social Contract**

As the EU and its Member States navigate through fluctuating unemployment rates, diverse national debt scenarios about GDP, and the allocation of government expenditure across crucial sectors, Friends of Europe seizes the opportunity to reimagine Europe's social contract in a manner that harmonizes economic resilience with social solidarity. With a particular focus on the financial underpinnings of a Renewed Social Contract and dispelling the myth that caring for its citizens and maintaining geopolitical prowess are mutually exclusive goals for Europe, we invite policymakers, economists, thought leaders and citizens to brainstorm as to the financial underpinnings of a fair and competitive Europe.

10:00 | Opening Plenary Session

11:00 | **A social and competitive Europe**

As a new European Commission mandate begins, the focus is expected to pivot towards boosting industrial competitiveness, bolstering defence in response to the war in Ukraine and fortifying the single market – all amidst mounting pressures to foster green industrial development and secure strategic autonomy in the face of global challenges.

Recent years have been marked by the devastating impacts of natural and human-made crises, the uncertainty brought about by emerging technologies and digital developments and increased polarisation. These significant events and transitions have underscored citizens' calls for a more social Europe, which transcends mere economic success to address energy poverty, provide robust social services and uphold European values. The ending mandate's emphasis on social needs, intensified by the pandemic's fallout, showcased the essential role of state intervention in safeguarding employment and supporting the vulnerable, suggesting a broad endorsement of more comprehensive social policies.

The landscape and challenges politicians face today are incomparable with those of the 2019 European elections. As Europe embarks on a new mandate and navigates an increasingly complex landscape, all actors in society must work together to reconcile the imperative of economic vitality – paramount to providing the components for a good life, but insufficient in itself – with the equally crucial need for social solidarity and inclusion. As was shown during the current ending mandate, economic growth and social growth can only go hand in hand.

- *How can the new European mandate balance competitiveness, economic growth, and social prosperity?*
- *In what ways can state interventions contribute to building economic resilience?*
- *What strategies should Europe adopt to reinforce its social agenda and enhancing the quality of life for all while facing global challenges?*

11.00 Coffee break
11.30

11.30 Session I
11:45 **Idea Sharing**

11:45 Session I
13.00 **Ukraine: reimagining defence and security**

While the costs of the Russian invasion of Ukraine borne by Europe are high, the toll in lives and broader political and socio-economic implications of a Ukrainian non-victory scenario will be much higher. Despite sanctions against Russia and increased military support for Ukraine underscoring the EU's commitment to upholding international law and supporting Ukraine's sovereignty, there is an urgent necessity for a more unified and robust European response.

As the war in Ukraine continues, its ability to mobilise support and engage Europeans has begun to wane, hinting at fatigue considering the multiple crises impacting European citizens' lives.

The war in Ukraine and the increasing threat of a Russian attack on NATO in the coming years have created an important impetus for Europe to reimagine its defence industrial readiness and cooperation. Boosting Europe's defence capabilities will benefit Ukraine, the European Union, and the broader NATO Alliance, solidifying transatlantic security guarantees and reassuring North American allies. While the EU has taken unprecedented leaps forward in the form of the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) and the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP), which aim to enhance the Union's defence industrial readiness and reinforce its capacity to protect its citizens, efforts must continue under the next mandate.

- *Drawing from the insights gained through the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing full-scale conflict, how can Europe enhance its preparedness for war and conflict situations?*
- *What have the past two years taught us about the effectiveness of multilateral organisations in preserving peace and encouraging dialogue and cooperation?*
- *How can we better foster European resilience and security in hard times?*
- *How can cooperation between the Ukrainian and EU/NATO defence sectors be better and further promoted?*

11.30 | Session II
11:45 | **Idea Sharing**

11:45 | Session II
13.00 | **Climate Adaptation, a Key Challenge for the European Green Deal**

The climate in Europe is changing quickly. The Earth is now about 1.1 degrees warmer than in the 1800s, and Europe is the fastest-warming continent on the planet. Recent extreme weather events indicate what is to come under future warming conditions.

More frequent and intensive flooding has cost many lives and destroyed livelihoods across Europe. At the same time, more than half of the continent is suffering from extreme drought conditions.

As global temperatures rise and the incidence of extreme weather events in Europe increases, more and more people will be exposed to the hazardous impacts of climate change. In recent years, European policymakers have made important progress on climate mitigation, but as the impacts of climate change become greater, the EU needs to ensure a greater emphasis on improving its adaptive capacity and strengthening climate resilience. Systemic climate adaptation will mean preparing for different impacts across Europe; it will require sustained investment, political support, and a coherent institutional approach. None of these variables can be guaranteed in the new EU mandate.

- *What are the specific challenges and opportunities of aligning the European Union's climate adaptation strategies with the European Green Deal's broader goals?*
- *How can European policymakers and institutions ensure sustained investment and political support for climate resilience and adaptation, especially under the constraints of the new EU mandate?*
- *What role does systemic climate adaptation play in safeguarding livelihoods and ecosystems in Europe and how can a coherent institutional approach be developed to manage this?*

13:00 | Lunch
14:00

14:00 Session III
14:15 Idea Sharing

14:15 Session III
15.30 **Enlarging Europe: at what cost and what structure?**

In the wake of geopolitical upheavals, notably Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the European Union is at a critical juncture with renewed momentum for its enlargement process. This newfound consensus and momentum – in stark contrast with pre-war enlargement fatigue – offer an unparalleled opportunity for strategic reforms that would fundamentally enhance the EU's institutional readiness and policy coherence as well as facilitate its enlargement.

Future EU accessions will be negotiated under increasingly complex circumstances and against the backdrop of an accelerating climate crisis, the threat of war spreading in Europe and increasingly polarised societies and politics. The next accession wave will also be the first since the EU committed to reaching net-zero by 2050, a commitment underwritten by the European Climate Law, distinguishing future EU enlargement from previous accession processes. As the EU contemplates this expansion, the imperative for internal integration intensifies, underscored by global uncertainties and the demand for swift, unified action across foreign, defence and economic policies. EU ambitions across various policies, including that of the Green Deal, will likely need to be adapted to fit the new reality of an enlarged Europe. Similarly, the approach to enlargement will need to be designed to accommodate current and incoming member states' collective ambition.

The 'if' of European enlargement seems to have been replaced by a 'when'. The incoming European Commission will hold a pivotal role in shaping the future of the European Union by navigating the complex path of enlargement alongside critical reforms, ensuring that expansion strengthens – rather than dilutes – the Union's foundational values and objectives.

- *Given the urgent climate objectives outlined in the European Green Deal, how will the EU reconcile the environmental policies of incoming states with its commitment to reach net-zero by 2050, without hindering their economic development?*
- *As societal polarization and political fragmentation continue to rise within the EU, what measures will be taken to ensure that the enlargement process strengthens rather than exacerbates these divisions?*
- *Considering the complex and often slow-moving nature of EU policy reforms, what specific steps will the incoming European Commission take to accelerate internal integration and policy coherence in preparation for future enlargements?*

14:00 Session IV
14:15 **Idea Sharing**

14:15 Session IV
15:30 **Digital Horizons: catalysing the EU's Industrial Evolution Through Innovation**

As the new EU mandate takes form in autumn 2024, how prepared will it be to harness the digital potential of the continent?

The rise of emerging technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), holds great promise for the future of Europe. These digital breakthroughs present opportunities to better optimise energy use, improve connectivity, and economise the use of resources. In 2024, Europe is a more digitalised continent than it was in 2019, but as we move deeper into the digital age, policymakers should prioritise the equitable distribution of these technological benefits, ensuring no communities are left behind.

By leveraging technology, data and connectivity, a robust digital plan of action could redefine the EU economic and industrial fabric, at a time of increasing geo-economic competition. . If successfully harnessed, they could help to establish Europe as a digital powerhouse, pioneering technological solutions to address competitiveness and sustainability concerns, for example.

The European digital landscape is a patchwork of digital initiatives, connectivity and critical infrastructure. If digitalisation is to remain a top European priority, policymakers, business leaders, and civil society organisations will need to work together so that regulatory frameworks can be adapted to foster innovation and expedite the rollout of digital infrastructure, while, at the same time, adhering to rigorous standards that protect, and promote, the social good. As Europe forges ahead with its industrial evolution, three guiding questions emerge for stakeholders at all levels:

- *In what ways can emerging technologies, including AI, support the Union's goal for a green transition, particularly in terms of energy efficiency and carbon reduction?*
- *How can European industries harness emerging technologies in ways that both enhance competitiveness and meet the sustainability goals set forth in the European Green Deal?*
- *What strategies can be implemented to foster a robust digital infrastructure and workforce capable of supporting the EU's ambitions in a rapidly evolving global tech landscape?*

15:30
16:00 Coffee break

16:00 Closing Plenary Session

17:30 ***Fresh off the press*** - Transatlantic ties reimagined: a new vision for EU-US cooperation

In partnership, the EU and the US, are committed to jointly supporting the principles of freedom, democracy, and the rule of law worldwide. They are each other's primary strategic partners, and their economic partnership is the single-most important driver of global economic growth, trade, and prosperity. Taken together, the economies of both territories constitute close to one third of world GDP purchasing power. To navigate the complexities of the 21st century, however, the US-EU partnership must be revitalized and recalibrated to ensure mutual prosperity and benefits of existing arrangements of trade, economy, and security and defence. In an era marked by rapid technological advancements, geopolitical shifts, and emerging global challenges, the transatlantic alliance faces unprecedented opportunities and challenges.

With the world standing at a crossroads, the outcomes of the upcoming elections on both sides of the Atlantic are poised to redefine the contours of EU-US cooperation, and heavily determine the tone of 21st century geopolitics. Designed to unfold in the immediate aftermath of the US Presidential elections, this discussion will come at a crucial juncture as the new European Parliament will have taken its place, and the United States will have voted their 47th President just two days prior. Beyond acknowledging election results and the trajectory of the next five years, the State of Europe will be the occasion for all present to make sense of the future and tenacity of the transatlantic bond as well as the very meaning of Western ideals.

- *Given the urgent need for climate action, how will the EU and US reconcile their economic and industrial ambitions with the environmental imperatives of the Paris Agreement, particularly considering competing interests and the global energy crisis?*
- *How can the EU and US collaboratively ensure their approach to global challenges does not inadvertently marginalize emerging economies or exacerbate global inequities?*
- *Considering Trump's previous stance on NATO and defence spending, how might his re-election affect the future of EU-US security alliances and defence collaborations?*



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