

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



**6 & 7  
NOV  
2024**

**STATE OF  
EUROPE**

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

#StateofEU

In partnership with:



## Voices, choices and leadership: a tipping point for Europe?

*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, 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 2024 European Parliamentary elections were expected to deliver a dramatic far-right surge, but instead gave place to a more nuanced picture likely to further complicate consensus-building on important policy issues in the next institutional cycle. The elections impacted national politics, albeit differently according to the member state, underscoring dynamics at play between national and EU-level politics.

The European elections did not only provide insights into citizens' present-day concerns, but also gauged what hope there is for a future challenged by war, geopolitical shifts, heightened competition among global tech powers, 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 institutional cycle 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 healthy and safe, meets economic ambitions, and retains 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 as traditional methods will not be effective in managing our 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.



## 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

8.30-17.30

### State of Europe high-level roundtable

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.

# Thursday 7 November

08.00-08.30 Welcome coffee and registration

08.30-09.20 EARLY-BIRD BRIEFINGS

## Europe in the world

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, and particularly its relationships with Brazil, China, India, the African continent and the Middle East region.

09.30-10.00 SCENE-SETTING

## 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 harmonises 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.

09.45-11.00 OPENING SESSION

## A social and competitive Europe

As the European Union enters a new institutional cycle, 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, deliver resilient health systems, 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 and health 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 demonstrated during the 2019-2024 mandate, economic growth and social growth can only go hand in hand.

- How can the new European institutional cycle 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 enhance the quality of life for all while facing global challenges?
- What role can digitalisation play in boosting European competitiveness and social resilience?

11.00-11.30 Coffee break

11.30-11.45 IDEA SHARING

11.45-13.00 SESSION I

## 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. 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 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'. EU enlargement necessitates strategic reforms, enhanced policy coherence, and swift integration to ensure the Union's values and objectives remain robust.

The next enlargement of the European Union will change the situation for some member states, which will become net contributors. In the current geopolitical and geoeconomic situation, it will be essential to define what should be the priorities for the European Union in the next 10 or 20 years and which European policies bring the most value to all member states.

- As societal polarisation 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?
- What should be the priorities for the European Union in the next 10 or 20 years and which European policies bring the most value to all member states.
- What reforms would be necessary for the EU to manage the economic and financial impact of new member states with lower GDP per capita joining the Union?

13.00-14.00 Lunch

11.30-11.45 IDEA SHARING

11.45-13.00 SESSION II

## Stepping up: A new era for international climate leadership

The introduction of the European Green Deal, and the corresponding legal obligation to reach net-zero by 2050, were defining features of the 2019-2024 EU mandate. The implementation of Green Deal measures helped position the EU as a global leader in the fight against climate change.

Despite the progress of the last five years, support for the EU's 'man on the moon' moment is slipping. In 2024, we see European policymakers shift focus to the challenge of EU competitiveness and there have been calls by some European leaders to pause the introduction of new environmental regulations, altogether. However, data show that the EU has benefited from being a first-mover in its climate mitigation strategy and there are strong arguments that by scaling-and-speeding-up net-zero policies, European competitiveness can improve.

We cannot ignore the reality that we are heading towards climate overshoot, which will also bear public health consequences. As we enter the mid-point of 'the decade of climate action', it is clear that we need a new approach to international climate leadership. It is also clear that Europe cannot go at it alone and that any effort towards fighting climate change must be had in close collaboration with other countries and regions around the globe as well as international institutions such as the United Nations.

Regardless of the outcome of the US Presidential election, Europe will be engaging with partners in a highly fractured and uncertain international environment, rife with geoeconomic and geopolitical threats. In this era of profound political uncertainty, the EU, building on its Green Deal matrix, can take a more active role in international climate diplomacy. A more assertive EU in this domain, also putting forward health as well as economic and industrial arguments, would strengthen the block, send an important signal to investors of a long-term commitment to sustainability, and crucially, would help to avert runaway climate change.

In a period where unpredictability abounds, grounded and dependable international climate leadership is essential if we are to realise a climate-safe future for all.

- How can climate justice be mainstreamed in international climate accords?
- Are current EU energy diplomacy efforts compatible with the green transition ?
- In advance of COP29 in Baku, how credible is the COP system in 2024?
- Are European stakeholders understanding the co-benefits of climate action for public health ? What do citizens have to say on this?
- How can Europe better collaborate with global partners?

13.00-14.00 Lunch

14.00-14.15 IDEA SHARING

14.15-15.30 SESSION III

## 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.

- How can Europe enhance its preparedness for war and conflict situations and what role can non-EU countries such as the United Kingdom play in Europe's security and defence apparatus?
- What have the past two years taught us about the effectiveness of multilateral organisations in preserving peace and encouraging dialogue and cooperation?
- The nature of warfare is changing; how is the private sector, specifically tech and telecommunication companies, adapting?
- How can cooperation between the Ukrainian and EU/NATO defence sectors be better and further promoted?

15.30-16.00 Coffee break

14.00-14.15 IDEA SHARING

14.15-15.30 SESSION IV

## Digital horizons: catalysing the EU's industrial evolution through innovation

As the new EU institutional cycle approaches, the block's readiness to leverage the continent's digital potential will be critical. The integration of emerging technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), promises significant advancements for Europe. These digital innovations present opportunities to optimise energy consumption, enhance connectivity, and maximise resource efficiency. By 2024, Europe has advanced significantly in digitalisation compared to 2019. However, as we delve deeper into the digital era, policymakers must continue to focus on fostering a strong European technological infrastructure, promoting public-private partnerships, investing in and rolling out critical infrastructure, and ensuring the equitable distribution of digital dividends across all sectors and regions within the Single Market.

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 - and given the crucial importance of the Single Market for strengthening European competitiveness - 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.

- How can we facilitate growth and increase investment attractiveness in Europe for tech leaders, leading to stronger European competitiveness?
- What strategies can the EU adopt to enhance the performance and scalability of its companies to close the gap with US and Chinese counterparts?
- 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?
- How can European industries harness emerging technologies such as AI in ways that both enhance competitiveness and meet the sustainability goals set forth in the European Green Deal?

15.30-16.00 Coffee break

16.00-17.30 CLOSING SESSION

## Transatlantic ties reimagined: a new vision for 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.

- How will Europe and the US reconcile their economic and industrial ambitions with environmental imperatives, particularly considering competing interests and the global energy crisis?
- What is the framework for the future transatlantic relationship and is there a future role for the EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC)?
- How can the EU, the UK and US collaboratively ensure their approach to global challenges does not marginalise emerging economies or exacerbate global inequities?
- What does an increased geostrategic focus of the US on China and the Indo-Pacific mean for Europe?

17.30 End of the high level roundtable, followed by Friends of Europe's Board of Trustees meeting (by invitation only)



Thomas Van Vynckt  
Programme Manager State of Europe  
thomas.vanvynckt@friendsofeurope.org  
www.friendsofeurope.org