

Strategic Agenda 2024–2029: Continuity or paradigm shift?

The EU's leaders took two crucial decisions at their summit on 27 June to set the framework for the new institutional cycle: one on high-level appointments, the other on the Union's political priorities for the next 5 years, the Strategic Agenda 2024–2029. Since the adoption of the previous edition of the EU's long-term priorities in 2019, the EU has had to face major crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the energy crisis, and the change in the security environment following Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine.

Are these global challenges reflected in the EU's new long-term political priorities or has the list of political orientations remained unchanged? Is the new Strategic Agenda more of a continuation or does it constitute a real shift? To answer these questions, this briefing examines the new Strategic Agenda, outlining its content, developments in its substance during the adoption process, and similarities and differences with the political priorities set in the previous institutional cycles.

The findings of the analysis (see the table in the Annex) show that the Strategic Agenda 2024–2029 constitutes an important shift in the EU's political priorities compared with the previous Strategic Agenda, but that elements of continuity remain quite apparent nevertheless. The most obvious changes are the significance of security and defence, the importance granted to enlargement, the addition of new elements on EU competitiveness, and the salience of democracy (within the Union and in relations with third countries), which is a headline priority for the first time. Another noteworthy development is that less attention is paid to climate and environmental issues, even if some points were introduced during the drafting process.

At the same time, there is a substantial degree of continuity with the Strategic Agenda 2019–2024. Less than 20 % of the policy aspects are completely new, even though the length of the Strategic Agenda document has increased by 25 %. This observation tends to indicate that the previous EU priorities remain relevant and that a reshaping of the Agenda (rather than starting from scratch) was considered sufficient. Interestingly, many of the elements added seem to be a reiteration of policy issues addressed by the European Council in its conclusions over the last 5 years. Thus, the document appears to be a collection of previously agreed positions rather than a new set of guidelines. While the impact of Russia's war against Ukraine and the change in the geopolitical context have fed into the new Strategic Agenda, other major issues of recent years such as health and energy are less explicitly referred to than could have been expected considering the severity of the crises with which the EU has been confronted.

The European Council's role in setting the EU's political priorities

The European Council is composed of the Heads of State or Government of the EU Member States, as well as its President and the President of the European Commission. Its role, as defined in Article 15 (1) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), is to 'provide the Union with the necessary impetus for its development' and to define its 'general political directions and priorities'. The European Council sets the 5-year political priorities for the EU, at the [start of the institutional cycle](#), shortly after the European elections, in a document known as the Strategic Agenda.



The Strategic Agenda influences the political priorities of the new Commission President and feeds into the subsequent Commission annual work programmes. Therefore, the guidelines outlined in the Strategic Agenda are likely to be reflected in the legislative proposals put forward by the Commission and, in turn, in the legislative work of the Parliament and the Council.

The Strategic Agenda 2024–2029

This section provides an overview of the [new political priorities](#) for 2024–2029 adopted by EU leaders at their meeting of 27 June 2024. It also highlights the changes between various drafts put forward in the adoption process of the Strategic Agenda 2024–2029.

The headline priorities of the Strategic Agenda 2024–2029

The Strategic Agenda 2024–2029 builds on three pillars: 1) 'A free and democratic Europe'; 2) 'A strong and secure Europe'; and 3) 'A prosperous and competitive Europe'. While the first pillar has two sub-priorities, the others have four.

Figure 1 – Strategic Agenda 2024–2029



Source: EPRS.

The document, before outlining the EU policy priorities, starts with a preamble listing both the challenges the EU has had to face in recent years and those that lie ahead. In this context, unity was highlighted as the key in responding to past challenges and external shocks, and EU leaders pledged that this unity would hold in the future. The preamble ends with the invitation to other EU institutions to put these political guidelines into practice during the next institutional cycle.

Developments during the drafting process

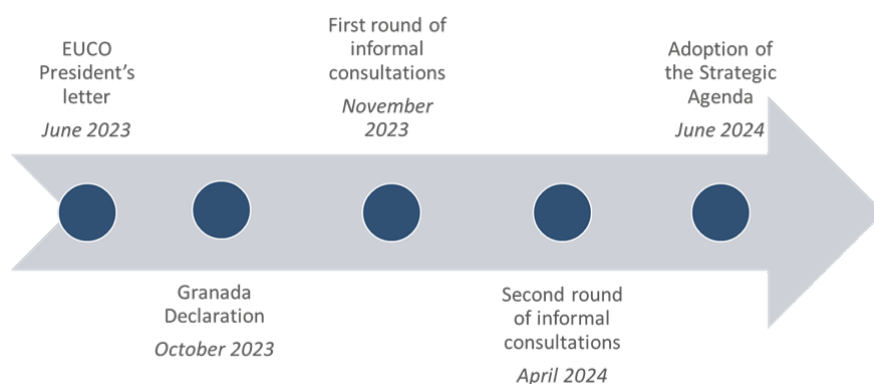
The Strategic Agenda is constructed around the abovementioned three priorities, which have remained unchanged throughout the multiple drafts. However, the order of priorities has changed, with the 'free and democratic Europe' priority moved from third to first place. Another major development is the progressive addition of more elements on the fight against climate change and the boosting of the green transition. In the first draft, this issue was mentioned in the context of promoting research and preparing for the new realities stemming from climate change. In contrast, the final version explicitly mentions the goal of climate neutrality by 2050 and proposes several measures to achieve this aim.

While elements of detail were added to existing policy issues as the work on the Strategic Agenda advanced, entirely new elements were also introduced, such as the references to health, youth employment and digital security and privacy. Similarly, Ukraine was not directly mentioned in the first drafts, but was included in the final version, with EU leaders devoting an entire paragraph to the war-torn country. It is also worth mentioning that the reference to 'farmers' position in the food supply chains' was added in later versions, possibly in response to the farmers' protests.

There are barely any deletions from one draft version to the next, with a few exceptions. A striking example is the removal of 'promoting reciprocity in trade relations', [supposedly](#) as a result of Germany's intervention. There are, however, significant changes in the wording. In the area of defence policy, for instance, it was considered the EU's task to promote 'flagship projects and defence initiatives of common interest across the EU' in the version dated 26 June. Yet, following a [push](#) by France and Germany, the final version now reads: 'we welcome flagship projects and defence initiatives by Member States', thus shifting the responsibility back to the Member States. Overall, the Strategic Agenda became larger due to the insertion of additional topics raised by various Member States. Next to policy issues that are considered to be important now, these additions also include elements from the previous Strategic Agenda – EU leaders probably wanted to avoid giving the impression that a given issue, important to their country in the past, had lost its significance.

Process

Figure 2 – Timeline of the reflection process for the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029



Source: EPRS.

The priority-setting process for the 2024-2029 institutional cycle started in June 2023, when the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, [invited](#) EU leaders to start reflecting on priorities for the upcoming 5-year institutional cycle, with a view to incorporating them into the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029.

Compared to the drafting process in 2019, this was a very early start. Back then, EU leaders had begun discussing political priorities quite late, launching the process at their [informal meeting of 9 May](#) in Sibiu, and adopting the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 at their regular meeting of [20 June 2019](#). At the same time, the process took place in the wider context of the debate on the future of Europe, which had been launched in 2016.

This time around, the focus was set solely on the Strategic Agenda. After the launch in June 2023, the next step in the reflection process took the form of a [discussion](#) at an informal European Council meeting in Granada on [5-6 October 2023](#). Some EU institutions and Member States offered input for the future strategic priorities and potential Treaty reform in the context of EU enlargement, and the Spanish Presidency put forward its own paper, [Resilient EU2030](#). The Commission [contributed](#) to the future policy priorities by outlining ways of increasing EU resilience, competitiveness and

sustainability. There was also a much-discussed Franco-German [reflection paper](#) on the future of the EU, in addition to the proposals resulting from the Conference on the Future of Europe – at which Member States, EU institutions and citizens together indicated political priorities for the future.

The discussion in Granada was followed by a [series of meetings](#), each with a small number of EU leaders representing a mix of geographical regions, political party affiliations and diverse opinions. Four meetings took place in late 2023: on [13 November](#) in Berlin, [14 November](#) in Copenhagen, [16 November](#) in Zagreb, and [29 November](#) in Paris. A second [series of small group meetings](#) took place on [2 April](#) in Vilnius, [3 April](#) in Bucharest, [11 April](#) in Warsaw, and [12 April](#) in Vienna. Just ahead of this series, Germany and France offered a joint [input](#) regarding the EU's future competitiveness. The first version of the Strategic Agenda was the result of these consultations and contributions; it was later subject to numerous changes, as discussed above. The EU leaders completed the process with the adoption of the Strategic Agenda 2024–2029 at the 27 June European Council meeting.

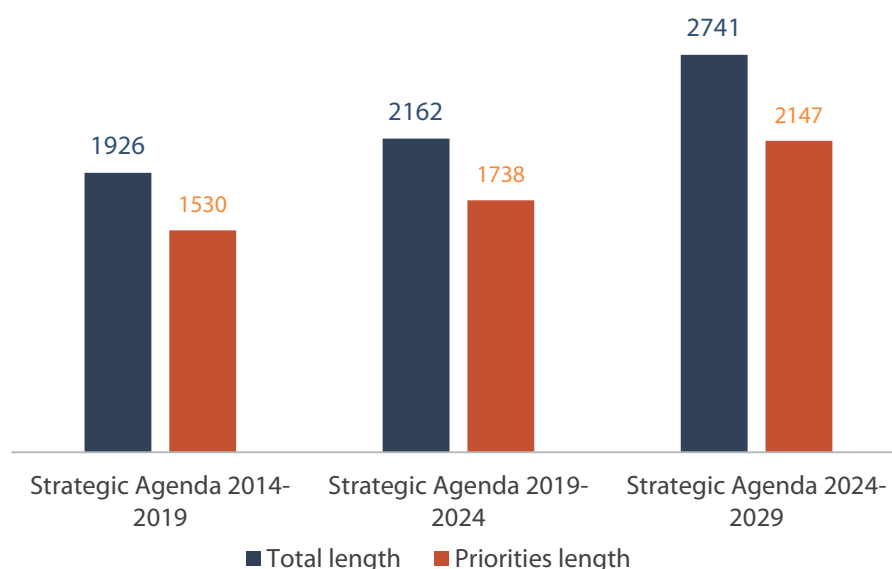
Comparing the new Strategic Agenda with its predecessors

The Strategic Agenda 2024–2029 is the third of its kind, following those for [2014–2019](#) and [2019–2024](#). In order to fully appreciate the role of the latest version as an instrument for setting the Union's political priorities for the new institutional cycle, it is useful to compare it with its two predecessors in terms of their length, the number and order of political priorities, and the attention paid to the different policy clusters.

Length

The length of the Strategic Agenda has steadily increased from one institutional cycle to the next. Figure 3 shows that, from 2019–2024 to the 2024–2029 period, the length of the document increased by over 25 %. At the same time, the ratio between the policy part of the text and other parts (such as the preamble or the chapter on implementing measures) remained stable at around 80 %.

Figure 3 – Length of the various strategic agendas



Source: EPRS.

Development of EU priorities in strategic agendas over time

As outlined above, the new Strategic Agenda is organised around three priorities. The two previous institutional cycles had a greater number of headline political priorities – four and five respectively.

The order of the main priorities and the change in content are especially interesting. For the first time, there is now a specific priority on democracy, which tops the list of priorities. At the same time,

there is no longer a reference to climate, green or social issues in the top priorities; these policy issues now constitute sub-priorities. The priority 'Developing our economic base' is similar to 'A prosperous and competitive Europe' in the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029.

The new policy priority 'A strong and secure Europe' brings together policy priorities which had been considered as separate policy fields until recently, namely 'Protecting citizens and freedoms' and 'Promoting Europe's interests and values in the world'. This merger reflects the changing geopolitical situation as well as the close connection between internal and external security, and the impact on the Union of the situation in the EU's immediate neighbourhood. This policy priority also includes a sub-priority 'Preparing for a bigger and stronger Union', which addresses the potential enlargement of the EU, a topic not mentioned at all in the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024.

As the section on horizontal and institutional issues will show later on, the list of challenges facing the Union mentioned in the new Strategic Agenda differ from those mentioned 5 years ago.

Table 1 – Order of priorities in the various strategic agendas

Strategic Agenda 2014-2019	Strategic Agenda 2019-2024	Strategic Agenda 2024-2029
1) A union of jobs, growth and competitiveness	1) Protecting citizens and freedoms	1) A free and democratic Europe
2) A Union that empowers and protects all citizens	2) Developing our economic base: the European model for the future	2) A strong and secure Europe
3) Towards an Energy Union with a forward-looking climate policy	3) Building a climate-neutral, green, fair and social future	3) A prosperous and competitive Europe
4) A Union of freedom, security and justice	4) Promoting Europe's interests and values in the world	
5) The Union as a strong global actor		

Source: EPRS.

Policy clusters

As outlined above, the main priorities between the old and new strategic agendas vary in their denomination, their order and the policy issues included. Therefore, to be able to analyse whether policy issues have been added, (dis)continued, or changed, the comparison is organised by policy cluster: i) Justice and home affairs; ii) Economic policies; iii) Employment and social affairs; iv) External policies; and v) Energy and climate. Figure 4 shows how the attention (expressed in word count) paid to the different policy clusters has developed over time.

Figure 4 – Attention to different policy clusters in the various strategic agendas

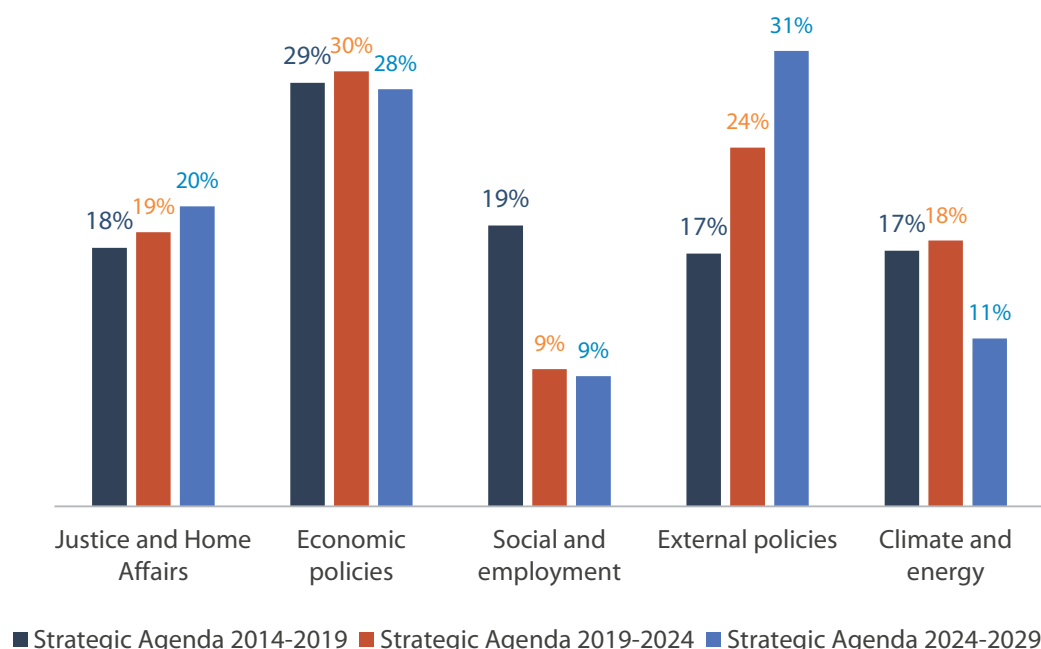
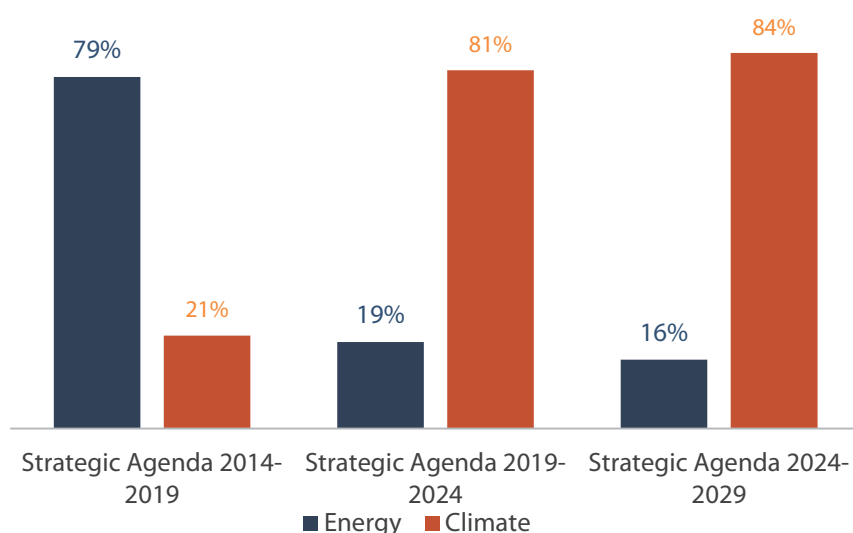


Figure 5 – Attention paid to climate and energy in the various strategic agendas



Source: EPRS.

Since 2014, the attention paid to 'Justice and home affairs' and 'External policies' has nearly doubled. In the field of justice and home affairs, this increased salience results, from the impact of the migration crisis in 2015 and the terrorist attacks in Europe in 2016–2017. The increased attention paid to external policies can be explained, inter alia, by the situation in the EU's southern and eastern neighbourhood, the war in Syria, the situation in the Middle East and the repeated crises involving Ukraine, which escalated with Russia's invasion in February 2022.

Conversely, the attention paid to 'Climate and energy' and 'Social and employment' has fallen. After a peak in 2017 in connection with the proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the informal meeting of [EU leaders in Gothenburg](#), the social and employment cluster has shrunk to half its former size. Meanwhile, climate and energy, despite intense discussions around the Paris Climate Conference in 2015, subsequent efforts to build a climate-neutral EU and the 2022–2023 energy crisis, was never a main topic for attention.

Now that the energy crisis has eased, and following the criticism expressed of certain measures included in the Commission's Green Deal, these issues have seen their share of attention fall in the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 (even if some points were reintroduced as the drafting went on). Interestingly, however, the overall balance in the climate and energy policy cluster has tilted even more in the direction of climate than was the case before.

The attention paid to economic policies has remained very stable over time, but the focus of economic policy orientations has evolved. While the Strategic Agenda 2014-2019 was adopted in the context of the economic and financial crisis, the following one was shaped around the need to strengthen the EU's edge in environmental technologies and in the digital field. With a series of severe economic and inflation crises following the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as looming trade wars, the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 has put a strong focus on competitiveness and on the need for a business-friendly environment. The economic policy chapter has the highest number of new policy points (see section on new policy elements below).

Comparing 2019-2024 and 2024-2029

This section looks at the different policy areas in more detail and analyses whether or not, and how, policy points have been added, (dis)continued, or changed.

The Annex provides a detailed overview of the continuation and change between the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 and the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029.

Something old, something new...

In total, the analysis has identified 83 policy issues in the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 and 114 in the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029. This already indicates a clear increase in the number of topics in the new Strategic Agenda, which is not surprising considering that it increased in length by 25 %.

As policy issues (for example, the 'fight against terrorism and cross border crime') often include various aspects (such as offline and online crime, corruption, law enforcement, judicial cooperation, radicalisation, and violent extremism), a total of 163 policy aspects are examined in the new Strategic Agenda. These are differentiated according to aspects which are either i) continued, ii) elaborated, iii) discontinued, iv) which have changed focus, or v) which are new.

Policy aspects that are continued

A policy aspect is considered to be continued when it appears, potentially rephrased, in both strategic agendas. This is the case, for example, for the functioning of Schengen, external border control, support for the UN and climate neutrality. The analysis shows that 50 % of all aspects have been taken over from the previous Strategic Agenda. This is similar to the level of continuation between the 2014-2019 and the 2019-2024 Strategic Agendas, for which [there was a 52 % continuation rate](#). Although not a highly salient subject overall, the policy cluster with the highest level of continuity is employment and social affairs, with 67 % of the aspects remaining the same as before. Energy and climate also has a high level of continuity, with 56 %, followed by external policies with 54 %.

Policy aspects that have been elaborated

Of the policy aspects mentioned in the previous Strategic Agenda, 32 % have been further detailed in the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, sometimes including additional components. One clear example is 'preparedness for emergencies and disasters'. The Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 spoke more generally of 'resilience against both natural and man-made disasters'. While that point has been kept in the new Strategic Agenda, EU leaders decided to go into more detail on health emergencies following the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this point on health policy is not as substantial as one could have expected after the pandemic and following repeated calls to expand EU-level cooperation on health. Another case in point concerns defence investment, which plays an important role in both strategic agendas. However, while the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 took a

general approach, the new Strategic Agenda specifies that defence investment could be enhanced by having a better integrated defence market.

Policy aspects in the area of digital services have also been further elaborated. In both documents, EU leaders underline the importance of creating high-quality e-services. However, in the Strategic Agenda 2024–2029 they specify that this is to be carried out by building on the EU's digital identity. When an aspect is more developed in the Strategic Agenda 2024–2029 than previously, it tends to indicate that discussions have taken place at EU level on those topics over the last 5 years, and that certain agreements have been found. These often originated in European Council conclusions (see below).

Policy aspects that are discontinued

Only 11 policy aspects were not continued between the different strategic agendas. Some of the discontinued aspects were simply completed during the last institutional cycle; this is the case, for example, for 'finding consensus on the Dublin regulation'. For other discontinued policy aspects, such as asylum policy or tax, there is disagreement between Member States on the way forward. It is less obvious why other topics, such as a 'more solid and resilient EMU' or 'adequate consumer/employee protection' are not continued. Another surprising removal is the reference to the need to 'address the fragmentation of European research, development and innovation', as it is [argued](#) that 'the EU market remains fragmented and is not sufficiently innovation friendly'.

Policy aspects that have changed focus

Cases where there is a clear change of focus, meaning that the policy aspect was maintained but with a different connotation or placed in a different context, only took place in four instances: in the policy clusters on justice and home affairs (1), external policies (1) and energy and climate (2). This applies in particular to the issue of food policy, for which the focus on food standards was changed to 'ensuring food security'. Regarding external policies, the development concerns 'countering cyber and hybrid threats', which was previously solely an issue of internal security, but which is now acknowledged also in the context of defence.

A similar change of scope applies to the 'improved environment in cities & countryside', as it was called in the previous Strategic Agenda, where there are two changes. Firstly, the focus is on rural communities and farmers, while cities are not mentioned. Secondly, the emphasis is less on the environment than food supply chains and the strengthening of rural communities. Another change of focus in the climate and energy cluster concerns the approach to climate change. The previous document treats this as an 'existential threat', whereas the new one states the need to be 'pragmatic' on the path to climate neutrality.

New policy aspects

Of the policy aspects, 15 % are completely new, meaning that there was nothing on these points in the previous Strategic Agenda. The two policy clusters with the highest percentage of new aspects are external relations (19%) and economic policies (20 %). Most of the additions in the economic policies cluster are on the issue of 'competitiveness'; examples include 'reinforce sovereignty in strategic sectors', 'closing [the EU's] growth, productivity and innovation gaps with international partners and main competitors' and 'reduce harmful dependencies and diversify and secure strategic supply chains'.

The main additions to the external relations policy cluster concern support for Ukraine, as well as two entire paragraphs on enlargement and an extensive part on security and defence. This clearly shows the reorientation between the previous and new strategic agendas, taking the experiences of the recent crises into account.

Additions to the justice and home affairs cluster include 'pathways for legal migration', 'strengthen democratic resilience' and 'safeguarding democratic dialogue online'. The main additions in the area of employment and social affairs are 'strengthen health cooperation at European and international

level and improve access to medicines' and 'encourage talent mobility within the EU and beyond'. New elements in the policy cluster on energy and climate include 'scaling up Europe's manufacturing capacity for net-zero technologies and products' and 'driving forward the industrial development of clean technologies'.

As indicated earlier, even if some points are new in the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 it does not necessarily mean that the European Council has never mentioned them before. As was the case for policy aspects on which the European Council has elaborated, many new additions are based on previous European Council conclusions. The fact that some issues appear first in the European Council conclusions and then in the Strategic Agenda indicates that they are considered to be significant, not just in the short term, but also in the medium and long term. The section below on 'External inspiration and comparisons' exemplifies some of the overlap between the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 and earlier European Council conclusions.

Institutional and horizontal issues

The new Strategic Agenda consists not only of policy-specific issues, but also addresses horizontal and institutional issues, which are worth comparing with those included in the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 (see Table 2).

Three horizontal issues could be identified. 'EU values' are mentioned in both documents, although in the new one EU values have been upgraded to a priority. The strategic agendas differ regarding challenges. In the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024, they are spread across the document, whereas the new one lists them in the preamble. Moreover, the specific challenges are different – including technological, security and sustainability challenges in the old Strategic Agenda, and the geopolitical situation (Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, the Middle East) and climate change in the new one. This reflects events in Europe and beyond in recent years. Finally, this time around EU leaders put more emphasis on unity; as mentioned previously, this was a core theme in the part of the preamble discussing the responses to challenges facing the Union.

Out of seven institutional issues identified, four present similar messages. Both strategic agendas mention the balance of power between the institutions and the need for them to reform as well as the need to respect the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality in the context of cooperation between the EU and Member States. Regarding resources, the message included in the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024, according to which 'the EU must give itself the means to match its ambitions', is reiterated in the new Strategic Agenda by stating that 'the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) should reflect the priorities agreed in the Strategic Agenda'. However, this time more details have been added, notably a reference to 'the possible introduction of new own resources'. Finally, both documents argue for an integrated approach to internal and external policy – although this line is more visible in the new Strategic Agenda, as the example of cyber and hybrid threats, mentioned earlier, shows.

There are some points of difference, though. Both strategic agendas mention the involvement of other actors. However, in the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 it was 'citizens, civil society, social partners, and regional and local actors'. The Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 shares this to some extent (mentioning citizens' engagement and social partners), but focuses more on strengthening 'democratic discourse' and 'democratic resilience'. Interestingly, one aspect from the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 that was discontinued is the emphasis on follow-up and results. Last time, EU leaders devoted a whole section to it, while the new document does not elaborate on that point. A final new element is the mention of the possibility of 'gradual integration'. However, it must be underlined that this possibility only applies to the enlargement process – and not the integration of the Member States that are already part of the EU.

Table 2 – Horizontal and institutional issues in the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 versus the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024

HORIZONTAL ISSUES	
EU values	Similar messages
Important challenges facing the EU	Different messages
Unity	New elements in the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029
INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES	
Working of the institutions	Similar messages
Cooperation between EU institutions and Member States	
Financial resources	
Integrated approach to internal and external policy	
Involvement of other actors	Different messages
Emphasis on follow-up and results	Discontinued in the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029
Varying levels of integration	New elements in the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029

Source: EPRS.

External inspiration and comparisons

The process of drawing up the EU's long-term political priorities, as defined in the Strategic Agenda, does not take place in a vacuum. This section explores potential links between the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 and other processes, initiatives, documents and Member State contributions that potentially provided inspiration. These are, notably, the [Granada](#) and [Versailles](#) Declarations, earlier European Council conclusions, the final report of the Conference on the Future of Europe and the 'This is Europe' debates in the European Parliament.

The Granada and Versailles Declarations

The European Council [adopted](#) the Versailles Declaration shortly after the beginning of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine. As the invasion radically disrupted the European security, economic and energy environment, EU leaders used the Versailles Declaration to indicate how the EU should adapt to the new situation. The Granada Declaration, on the contrary, was an integral part of the [adoption process](#) of the new Strategic Agenda, pointing to 'the Union's general political directions and priorities for the years to come'. Therefore, the Versailles Declaration was more reactive, while the Granada Declaration was a more proactive document.

When comparing these declarations with the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, the biggest difference concerns the rule of law and democracy. This priority, which was mentioned in neither the Granada nor the Versailles Declaration, is now the first headline priority. The same goes for migration, which was taken out of the Granada Declaration due to the position of Hungary. Enlargement is an area covered in the Strategic Agenda and in the Granada Declaration – but not in the Versailles Declaration, as it was issued before the European Council's [decision](#) to grant Ukraine and Moldova EU candidate country status, which gave new impetus to the general debate about possible EU enlargement. What all three documents have in common, though, is their focus on diversification of energy and other supplies, competitiveness and the reduction of administrative burdens.

Conference on the Future of Europe

The Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 is the first one that has been adopted after the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE), which ended in May 2022. This strategic document provided an opportunity to include the citizens' recommendations contained in the [final report](#) into the EU's Agenda for the next 5 years. [EPRS research](#) has shown that there was a high degree of convergence between citizens' recommendations and the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 and subsequent European Council conclusions. When comparing the CoFoE final report with the new Strategic Agenda, there are both differences and similarities. The former focuses more on health, culture and citizens' participation, areas which are less covered in the Strategic Agenda. The latter puts more emphasis on enlargement, defence, external relations and migration than the CoFoE recommendations. There is also a difference in approach to economic policy. The CoFoE final report emphasises more the social dimension, whereas the Strategic Agenda is more business-oriented. In areas such as the rule of law and the protection of fundamental rights, climate and digital policies, the documents overlap.

'This is Europe' debates in the European Parliament

The 'This is Europe' debates in Parliament provided the opportunity for EU leaders to present their vision for Europe and its future. The initiative was launched by the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, in 2022, and 13 Heads of State or Government addressed Parliament over a period of 2 years.

A similar initiative with EU Heads of State or Government, called '[Debates on the Future of Europe](#)', took place in the European Parliament in the period preceding the adoption of the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024. As [EPRS research](#) has shown, during the 'This is Europe' debates EU leaders addressed a variety of topics, starting with the war in Ukraine (combined with the need to bolster EU security), enlargement and energy. Each of these topics has found its place in the new Strategic Agenda. The same goes for food security, which was referenced by some speakers. In contrast, they did not devote much of their attention to digital policies or social affairs. All of the EU leaders highlighted the importance of EU values, which was later included as the first priority of the Strategic Agenda. Analysing the impact of the 'This is Europe' debates, it should be borne in mind that not all EU leaders presented their vision for the future.

Strategic Agenda and European Council conclusions

Next to the Strategic Agenda, another way for the European Council to shape the EU's political priorities is to use its conclusions published after each formal meeting. This gives EU Heads of State or Government the opportunity to further detail or complement the objectives given in the Strategic Agenda, and to take internal EU developments, as well as global developments, into consideration.

EPRS research has shown that the amount of additional details and follow-up provided by the European Council in its conclusions on the policy priorities of the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 varied between policy areas. Topics such as the citizen dimension, education, migration and social issues received little to no further mention in the conclusions. In contrast, other topics mentioned in the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 – for instance, the need to reduce strategic dependence – were further developed over time (for more details, see [The Conference on the Future of Europe and the European Council](#)). Additionally, the European Council has addressed new priorities in its conclusions in response to the series of crises the EU was faced with during the previous institutional cycle, not least COVID-19, the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis. Of the policy responses to the three crises, and the detailed European Council conclusions adopted over time, the lessons learned from the energy crisis are probably least reflected in the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, with no additional elements added on energy and the topics mainly continued, with one even discontinued.

When analysing the substance of the new Strategic Agenda, many of the additions (either categorised as 'new' or 'elaborated') are policy aspects which have been mentioned in European Council conclusions over the last 5 years; therefore, the content of the new Strategic Agenda could be seen as a kind of 'codification'. Identifying all of the aspects in the Strategic Agenda which are

based on previous conclusions of the European Council goes beyond the scope of this analysis, but examples include 'instrumentalisation of migrants', 'radicalisation', 'hate speech', 'breaking the business model of human trafficking', 'check tech giants' role in safeguarding democracy', 'merit based enlargement' and 'reinforce sovereignty in strategic sectors'.

Citizens' concerns: Eurobarometer

The political priorities should, in principle, reflect the topics that are of concern for EU citizens and are relevant at EU level. In 2019, for instance, Eurobarometer [surveys](#) showed that the three main topics of concern for EU citizens were migration, fighting terrorism and the economy. As a result, the first priority of the Strategic Agenda 2019–2024 was 'protecting citizens', including migration and fighting terrorism. A similar link between political priorities and citizens' views, as expressed in Eurobarometer surveys, can be observed for the Strategic Agenda 2024–2029. The key priorities, particularly those mentioned under 'a strong and secure Europe', also reflect issues such as the war in Ukraine (35 %), migration (24 %) and the international situation (22 %), which have been major concerns for EU citizens in recent years, as shown in [Eurobarometer](#) surveys conducted in [2023](#) and [2024](#). Conversely, the concern expressed by citizens in relation to the environment ranks only fifth, with 16 %, and is thus not reflected in the same way in the new Strategic Agenda.

Conclusion

This analysis has examined whether the new Strategic Agenda presents a continuation of or a real change in the EU's policy priorities. The findings show that the Strategic Agenda 2024–2029 constitutes an important shift in the EU's political priorities in comparison to the previous Strategic Agenda, but that the elements of continuity remain quite apparent nevertheless. The most obvious changes are the significance of security and defence, the importance granted to enlargement, the addition of new elements on EU competitiveness, and the salience of democracy inside the Union and elsewhere, which is a headline priority for the first time. Another noteworthy development is that less attention is paid to climate and environmental issues, even if some points were introduced during the drafting process of the new Strategic Agenda. At the same time, there is a substantial degree of continuity with the topics contained in the Strategic Agenda 2019–2024.

Less than 20 % of the policy elements are completely new, although the length of the Strategic Agenda document has increased by 25 %. This observation tends to indicate that the previous EU priorities remain relevant, and that a reshaping of the Strategic Agenda (rather than starting from scratch) was considered sufficient. Interestingly, many of the elements added seem to be a reiteration of policy issues addressed by the European Council in its conclusions over the last 5 years. Thus, the document appears to be a revised collection of previously agreed positions rather than a new set of guidelines.

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Annex: Comparing the policy clusters and policy issues in Strategic Agendas 2019–2024 and 2024–2029

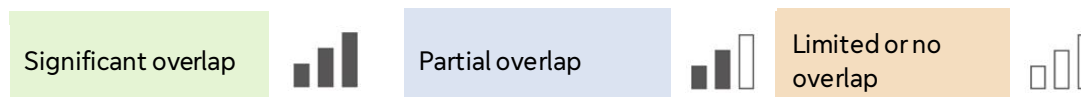
The 114 policy issues have been categorised in five policy clusters:

- Justice and home affairs
- Economic policies
- Employment and social affairs
- External policies
- Energy and climate

The analysis indicates whether the 163 policy aspects in the policy issues have been (dis)continued or changed from the Strategic Agenda 2019–2024 or have been newly added in the Strategic Agenda 2024–2029. Data for the Strategic Agenda 2019–2024 have been taken from previous [EPRS research](#) on the subject.

- **Continued:** Policy aspects are present both in the Strategic Agenda 2019–2024 and Strategic Agenda 2024–2029 without significant changes.
- **Elaborated:** Policy aspects are present in both strategic agendas, but the 2024–2029 one lists more details or includes some additional components.
- **New:** Policy aspects are present only in the Strategic Agenda 2024–2029.
- **Discontinued:** Policy aspects are present only in the Strategic Agenda 2019–2024.
- **Change in focus:** Although the policy aspect is present in both strategic agendas, it has a new meaning or is placed in a different context – for instance, the policy element has been moved from one policy cluster to the other.

Based on this categorisation for policy elements, the analysis provides a second dimension judging whether policy issues (which can have several policy elements) in the Strategic Agenda 2024–2029 have i) significant, ii) partial or iii) limited or no overlap with the same policy issues in the Strategic Agenda 2019–2024. The methodology builds on the methodology of previous [EPRS research](#) on convergence between the Conference on the Future of Europe final report and the Strategic Agenda 2019–2024.



JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

Topic	Strategic Agenda 2019-2024	Strategic Agenda 2024-2029	Level of change/Assessment of overlap
Security	Resilience to natural and man-made disasters	Strengthen resilience, preparedness, crisis prevention and response capacities, in an all-hazards and whole-of-society approach, to protect citizens and societies against different crises, including natural disasters and health emergencies	Continued - Resilience - Different crises, including natural disasters Elaborated - Preparedness, crisis prevention and response capacities - All-hazards and whole-of-society approach - Health emergencies
	Malicious cyber activities, hybrid threats and disinformation	Tackling foreign interference and countering attempts at destabilisation, including through disinformation and hate speech	Continued - Disinformation Elaborated - Destabilisation - Foreign interference - Hate speech
	Fight against terrorism and cross-border crime	Fight attempts to sow division, radicalisation, terrorism and violent extremism Fight crime offline and online and prevent and tackle corruption, using all the law enforcement and judicial cooperation tools of the Union Be resolute against organised crime and disrupt the flow of illicit profits from cross-border criminal activity	Continued - Terrorism - Cross-border crime Elaborated - Fight crime offline and online - Tackle corruption - Using law enforcement and judicial cooperation tools - Disrupt flow of illicit profits from cross-border criminal activity - Division - Radicalisation - Violent extremism
	<i>Food standards</i>	Ensure food security	Change in focus Food was moved from 'social policy' to 'security', highlighting different approach
Migration	Consensus on Dublin regulation		Discontinued
	Asylum policy		Discontinued

Topic	Strategic Agenda 2019–2024	Strategic Agenda 2024–2029	Level of change/Assessment of overlap
	Fight human trafficking	Fight smuggling networks and break the business model of those who profit from this inhumane trade	Continued - Smuggling networks - Human trafficking Elaborated - Break the business model of human traffickers
	Ensure effective returns	Work on returns	Continued Returns
	Functioning of Schengen	Proper functioning of the Schengen area	Continued Schengen
	Cooperation with third countries	Cooperate in a mutually beneficial way with countries of origin and transit	Continued - Cooperation on migration Elaborated - Mutually beneficial cooperation
	Fight irregular/illegal migration	Address the long-term challenges of irregular migration and its root causes Consider new ways to prevent and counter irregular migration Find joint solutions to the security threat of instrumentalised migration	Continued - Long term-challenges of irregular migration Elaborated - Consider new ways to prevent and counter irregular migration - Joint solutions to instrumentalised migration
	Border control	Responsibility to fulfil and implement our common obligations and protect the EU's external borders effectively Prerequisite for guaranteeing security and upholding law and order, in line with our principles and values	Continued - External border protection - Guaranteeing security, upholding law and order in line with the EU's principles and values
		Explore the opportunities of migration, including through legal pathways	New
Europe and Justice	Rule of law	Promote and safeguard respect for the rule of law, which is the basis of European cooperation, upholding the principles of objectivity, non-discrimination and equal treatment of Member States	Continued Rule of law protection Elaborated

Topic	Strategic Agenda 2019-2024	Strategic Agenda 2024-2029	Level of change/Assessment of overlap
			Upholding principles of objectivity, non-discrimination and equal treatment of Member States
	Fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens (fundamental rights, including data protection)	Protect and promote our founding values – respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities – which remain the cornerstone of our Union Ensuring digital privacy and security	Continued - EU values, including fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens - Data protection
		Strengthen democratic resilience, including by deepening citizen engagement, and protecting free and pluralistic media and civil society	New
		Strengthen democratic discourse and ensure that tech giants take their responsibility for safeguarding democratic dialogue online	New

ECONOMIC POLICIES

Topic	Strategic Agenda 2019–2024	Strategic Agenda 2024–2029	Convergence
Competitiveness	Fighting unfair practices from third countries	Safeguard fair competition, fight unfair practices	Continued - Fight unfair practices Elaborated - Safeguard fair competition
	Promote level playing field, including trade	Ensure a level playing field both internally and globally	Continued Level playing field
	Promoting market access	Not allow the undermining of open markets	Continued Market access
	Strong industrial base Comprehensive industrial policy fit for the future	Achieving industrial strength	Continued Industrial strength
	Thriving agriculture	Promote a competitive and resilient agricultural sector	Continued - Agriculture Elaborated - Competitive - Resilient
	Finance growth of economy and business, including SMEs	SMEs will remain central to Europe's economic and social fabric Accompany, nurture and grow businesses and industry	Continued - SMEs - Grow businesses and industry
	Key importance of strong economic base for Europe's competitiveness	Strengthen the basis of our long-term competitiveness and address citizens' economic and social wellbeing Increase citizens' purchasing power, create good jobs and assure the quality of goods and services in Europe	Continued - Competitiveness - Prosperity and citizens' economic and social wellbeing Elaborated - Quality of goods and services

Topic	Strategic Agenda 2019-2024	Strategic Agenda 2024-2029	Convergence
	Encouraging and supporting public and private investment	Collective investment effort, mobilising public and private funding, including through the EIB	Continued - Public and private investment Elaborated - EIB
		Reinforce sovereignty in strategic sectors and make Europe a technological and industrial powerhouse, while promoting an open economy	New
		Close our growth, productivity and innovation gaps with international partners and main competitors	New
		Strengthen economic security, reduce harmful dependencies and diversify and secure strategic supply chains, including by enhancing our maritime security	New
		Build up own capacity in sensitive sectors and key technologies of the future, such as defence, space, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, semiconductors, 5G/6G, health, biotechnologies, net-zero technologies, mobility, pharmaceuticals, chemicals and advanced materials	New
		Attract and retain talent	New
		Remain an attractive location for investment	New
		Ambitiously reduce the bureaucratic and regulatory burden at all levels, and simplify, accelerate and digitise administrative procedures, including permitting, to meet the needs of a modern, dynamic and consumer-friendly investment environment	New
		Commit to better regulation, including by making the best use of digital government and taking into account the needs of SMEs and start-ups	New

Topic	Strategic Agenda 2019–2024	Strategic Agenda 2024–2029	Convergence
		Work in an integrated and coordinated way across all policy areas and put special focus on implementation and enforcement of agreed policies	New
Digital capacities	Connectivity	Promote data interoperability	Continued Data interoperability
	Services	Building on the EU digital identity, create new EU-wide high-quality e-services	Continued - High quality e-services Elaborated - EU digital identity
	Data	Exploit the untapped potential of data	Continued Exploit data potential
	Digital transformation and artificial intelligence	Boost Europe's research and innovation capacity in emerging and enabling technologies, including for dual use Harness the potential of the digital transition to create the markets, industries and high-quality jobs of the future	Continued - Boost research and innovation capacity in emerging and enabling technologies Elaborated - Harness potential of digital transition
	Investment in infrastructure	Encourage investment in game-changing digital technologies in Europe, advancing their application throughout the economy Invest in ample cross-border infrastructure for energy, water, transport and communications	Continued - Investment in infrastructure and digital technologies Elaborated - Cross-border infrastructure for energy, water, transport and communications
Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)	More solid and resilient EMU		Discontinued
	Completing Banking and Capital Markets Union	Achieving the Capital Markets Union and completing the Banking Union Create truly integrated European capital markets, which are accessible and attractive to all citizens and businesses and benefit all Member States	Continued - Capital Markets Union - Banking Union Elaborated - Accessible capital markets

Topic	Strategic Agenda 2019-2024	Strategic Agenda 2024-2029	Convergence
Entrepreneurship and job creation	Foster entrepreneurship	Unleash the European spirit of entrepreneurship	Continued Entrepreneurship
Research and innovation (R&D)	Especially address fragmentation of European research, development and innovation		Discontinued
	Investment in innovation and research	Promoting innovation and research, as well as leveraging tools such as public procurement, is crucial in this endeavour	Continued - Innovation and research Elaborated - Public procurement
	Increase research efforts		
Taxation	Fair and effective taxation		Discontinued
Trade	Multilateral trade agreements in a reformed WTO	Strongly promote the central role of the WTO	Continued - WTO Discontinued - Reformed WTO
	Ambitious and robust trade policy ensuring fair competition	Pursue an ambitious, robust, open and sustainable trade policy that allows fair trade agreements, opens third-country markets to EU companies, defends EU interests, allows resilient and reliable supply chains to develop, guarantees a true level playing field and creates reciprocal market access opportunities	
Single market	Completing the single market in products/services	Deepen the single market further, notably in the areas of energy, finance and telecommunications Remove remaining barriers, particularly in relation to services and essential goods, and ensure equal access to the single market through improved connectivity	Continued - Deepen the single market - Remove barriers on services and goods Elaborated - Energy, finance and telecommunications - Equal access to the single market through improved connectivity

Topic	Strategic Agenda 2019–2024	Strategic Agenda 2024–2029	Convergence
		Ensure a balanced and effective state aid and competition framework to preserve the integrity of the single market and a level playing field	New

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Topic	Strategic Agenda 2019-2024	Strategic Agenda 2024-2029	Convergence
Employment	Adequate consumer/employee protection		Discontinued
	Investment in skills, education	Invest in people's skills and education throughout their lives	Continued - Skills and education Elaborated - Continuing education
	Inclusive labour markets	Increasing participation in the labour market	Continued Inclusive labour market
Social affairs	Efficient, fair and future-oriented social protection system	Ensure that the European economic model and welfare systems support a thriving longevity society	Continued - Welfare system Elaborated - Thriving longevity society
	Implement European Pillar of Social Rights at EU and Member State level	Recalling the European Pillar of Social Rights, the EU and Member States will strengthen social dialogue	Continued - European Pillar of Social Rights Elaborated - Strengthen social dialogue
	Inequality (especially affecting young people)	Reduce inequalities Promote youth employment	Continued - Reduce inequalities - Youth
	Opportunities and rights for all Equality between women and men	Uphold equal opportunities	Continued Equal opportunities
	Cohesion	Enhance economic, social and territorial cohesion	Continued Cohesion
		Encourage talent mobility within the EU and beyond	New
	Keen attention to social issues	Uphold the social dimension of the European Union	Continued Social dimension

Topic	Strategic Agenda 2019–2024	Strategic Agenda 2024–2029	Convergence
	Inclusive growth	Aiming for continuous upward convergence, reducing disparities, increasing resilience and competitiveness and stimulating long-term growth	Continued Inclusive growth
	Addressing the demographic challenges	Address in a comprehensive way demographic challenges and their impact on competitiveness, human capital and equality	Continued Demographic challenges
		Strengthen health cooperation at European and international level and improve access to medicines	New
Culture	Investment in culture and cultural heritage	Promote our cultural diversity and heritage	Continued - Culture and heritage Elaborated - Cultural diversity

EXTERNAL POLICIES

Topic	Strategic Agenda 2019-2024	Strategic Agenda 2024-2029	Convergence
Streamline EU foreign policy action	Synergies between EU bilateral levels		Discontinued
	Being more united in stances		Discontinued
	Increase assertiveness and effectiveness Act autonomously to safeguard EU's interests	Asserting the European Union's ambition and role as a strategic global player in the new multipolar geopolitical context	Continued - Asserting the EU's ambition and role Elaborated - Strategic global player in new geopolitical context
	Promote global peace and stability	Promote global peace, justice, and stability in all international fora	Continued Promotion of peace, justice and stability
		Stand by Ukraine as it fights to retain its independence and sovereignty and regain its territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders Support Ukraine's reconstruction and the pursuit of a just peace	New
Defence	Capability development	Strengthen the Union's defence readiness and capacity	Continued Defence readiness and capacity
	Operational readiness	Reduce strategic dependencies, scale up the capacities	Elaborated Reduce strategic dependencies
	More responsive and active EU CFSP/CSDP policy	Take the necessary responsibility for our security and defence and reinforce our capacity to act to defend our interests and become more influential in the world	Continued Active defence and foreign policy
	Better usage of available resources	Invest substantially more and better in defence	Continued More investment
	Enhancing defence investment	Strengthen the European defence technological and industrial base accordingly Creating a better integrated European defence market and promoting joint procurement	Elaborated - Strengthen technological and industrial base - Promote joint procurement

Topic	Strategic Agenda 2019–2024	Strategic Agenda 2024–2029	Convergence
			Better integrated defence market
	Strengthening the common security and defence policy in compliance/cooperation with NATO	Contribute positively to global and transatlantic security and be complementary to NATO, which remains, for those States that are members of it, the foundation of their collective defence	Continued - Strengthening security and defence in cooperation with transatlantic partners and NATO Elaborated - Complementary role to NATO
	Stronger European defence industry	Urgently improve conditions for scaling up the European defence industry	Continued Scaling up the European defence industry
	Protect citizens against existing and emerging threats	Mobilise the necessary instruments to bolster our security and the protection of citizens, and to respond to new emerging threats	Continued - Protect citizens - Existing and new threats
	<i>Malicious cyber activities, hybrid threats and disinformation</i>	Response to cyber and hybrid warfare, foreign manipulation and threats to critical infrastructure	Change in focus Cyber and hybrid threats is also added in defence policy, and not treated only as an internal security issue
		Enhance interoperability between European armed forces	New
		Improve access to public and private finance, exploring innovative options, including through the EIB Group as a catalyst	New
		Enhancing societal resilience	New
	In full respect of the principles set out in the Treaties, including the principles of inclusiveness, reciprocity and the decision-making autonomy of the EU	In full respect of the principles set out in the Treaties and by the European Council, without prejudice to the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States and taking into account the security and defence interests of all Member States	Continued Specific character of security and defence policy of certain Member States
Development policy	Implement the 2030 Agenda	Promote the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all international fora	Continued Sustainable Development Goals
	Promote sustainable development	Leader in sustainable growth and development	Continued

Topic	Strategic Agenda 2019-2024	Strategic Agenda 2024-2029	Convergence
			Sustainable growth and development
EU's strategic interests	Clearer priority to European economic, political and security interests	Leverage both internal and external EU policies in the best interests of the Union in a well-coordinated manner	Continued Interest of the EU
Neighbourhood policy	Ambitious neighbourhood policy (including a comprehensive partnership with Africa)	Promote security, stability and prosperity in the neighbourhood and beyond	Continued - Neighbourhood policy Discontinued - Partnership with Africa
Enlargement	Reaffirming the European perspective for those 'able and willing' to join	Support aspiring members in meeting the accession criteria through appropriate instruments	Continued Support for enlargement
		Use all possibilities to further advance gradual integration	New
		Encourage reform efforts, notably with regard to the rule of law, as well as regional integration, good neighbourly relations, reconciliation and the resolution of bilateral disputes	New
		Follow a merit-based approach to accession with tangible incentives	New
Human rights	Promote democracy and human rights	Promote democracy and universal human rights in all international fora	Continued Promotion of democracy and human rights
Engage with global strategic actors	Bilateral cooperation with partners	Closely engage with partners and develop mutually beneficial strategic partnerships to address shared challenges	Continued - Cooperation with partners Elaborated - Develop mutually beneficial strategic partnerships
	Strengthen the transatlantic link	Cooperate with transatlantic partners and NATO	Continued Cooperation with transatlantic partners and NATO
	Cooperation with NATO		

Topic	Strategic Agenda 2019–2024	Strategic Agenda 2024–2029	Convergence
	Multilateralism and global rules-based international order	Continue to be the strongest supporter of the international legal order Strive for a reformed multilateral system, making it more inclusive and more effective	Continued - Support for international legal order Elaborated - Reformed multilateral system
	Support UN and key multilateral organisations (multilateral fora)	Steadfastly upholding the United Nations and the principles enshrined in the UN Charter	Continued Support UN

ENERGY AND CLIMATE

Topic	Strategic Agenda 2019-2024	Strategic Agenda 2024-2029	Convergence
Energy	Mobilisation (planning framework) of private and public investment		Discontinued
	Reduced dependency on outside energy sources	Increasing energy sovereignty	Continued Energy sovereignty
	Integrated and interconnected European energy market	Build a genuine energy union, securing the supply of abundant, affordable and clean energy	Continued - Energy union Elaborated - Abundant, affordable and clean energy - Securing supply
	Increased energy efficiency	Electrification using all net-zero and low-carbon solutions, and investment in grids, storage and interconnections	Continued Energy efficiency
Climate	Policy consistency with Paris Agreement	Climate neutrality by 2050	Continued Climate neutrality
	Improved environment in cities and countryside	Champion vibrant rural communities Strengthen the position of farmers in the food supply chain	Change in focus Special focus on rural communities and farmers
	Air and water quality	Strengthen water resilience across the Union	Continued - Water resilience Discontinued - Air
	Loss of biodiversity	Reverse the degradation of ecosystems	Continued Reverse degradation of ecosystems
	Sustainable agriculture	Promote a sustainable agricultural sector	Continued Sustainable agricultural sector
	Climate change as an existential threat	Pragmatic approach to climate transition Pursue a just and fair climate transition	Change in focus Pragmatic approach to climate transition

Topic	Strategic Agenda 2019–2024	Strategic Agenda 2024–2029	Convergence
	Transformation of economy and society to achieve climate neutrality in a way that is socially just		Continued - Climate transition - Just and fair transition
	Become global leader of green economy	Be pragmatic and harness the potential of the green and digital transitions to create the markets, industries and high-quality jobs of the future Staying competitive globally	Continued - Harness potential of the green transition Elaborated - Create markets, industries and high-quality jobs of the future - Staying competitive
	Circular economy	Develop a more circular and resource-efficient economy, driving forward the industrial development of clean technologies, reaping the full benefits of the bioeconomy, and embracing clean and smart mobility with adequate network infrastructure	Continued - Circular economy Elaborated - Resource-efficient economy
	Preserve environmental systems, including oceans	Protect nature Reverse the degradation of oceans	Continued - Protect nature - Oceans
		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	New
		Provide a stable and predictable framework and create a more supportive environment for scaling up Europe's manufacturing capacity for net-zero technologies and products	New
		Invest in ample cross-border infrastructure for energy, water, transport and communications	New