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The policy priorities of the von der Leyen II Commission

State of play ahead of the 2025 State of the Union address

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

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This EPRS paper analyses how the European Commission is delivering on the policy agenda set by its President, Ursula von der Leyen, and her College of Commissioners, since taking office in December 2024. It provides a first assessment of the delivery of the agenda's seven priorities, on the eve of the first State of the Union address of von der Leyen's second mandate as Commission President.
The von der Leyen II Commission has set seven new priorities – none of which continues directly from the six priorities of her first mandate – and has so far announced some 250 initiatives with which to achieve them. Half of these initiatives fall under the first priority, on prosperity and competitiveness.
Further details on the legislative proposals tabled by the Commission, including all those mentioned in this publication, can be found on the European Parliament's Legislative Train Schedule website, developed by EPRS.

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Introduction

On the eve of the first State of the Union address of Ursula von der Leyen's second mandate as European Commission President, this paper provides an assessment of the commitments the Commission has made since it took office on 1 December 2024, and how it is delivering on them.

The von der Leyen II Commission has articulated its programme around **seven new priorities**, which have been redefined and reorganised compared to six priorities of the previous mandate. For example, the European Green Deal, the 'number one' initiative during the first mandate, does not exist as such anymore, and measures pertaining to this objective are now spread over several priorities. Given the geopolitical shifts of the past few years, defence and security have been propelled to a new second priority: 'A new era for European defence and security'. The former second (digital) and third (economy) policy areas now largely fall under the new first priority: 'A new plan for Europe's sustainable prosperity and competitiveness'.

To map the Commission's commitments, the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) has monitored the **announcements made in three major political speeches to Parliament's plenary**, together with their supporting documents: the political guidelines, delivered on 17 July 2024; the presentation of the College of Commissioners and its programme, on 27 November 2024; and the Commission's 2025 work programme, on 11 February 2025.

This assessment follows the Commission's initiatives on **legislative, budgetary and external matters**. Legislation makes up a substantial part of the initiatives monitored here, with proposals for new directives and regulations but also a number of **omnibus** texts (see Priority 1) that aim to revise provisions set out in (mostly) recently adopted legislation, by postponing application dates or reducing administrative requirements.

In the area of budgetary matters, the **next seven-year budget (the multiannual financial framework, or MFF)** receives special attention in this publication. While the 2020–2027 MFF is still applicable for the next two years, the 2028–2034 MFF will impact all priorities later in the mandate since it will define the financial means allocated to the respective policies. With a first package of proposals adopted on 16 July 2025 and a second expected in early September, the MFF will be high on the agenda for some time to come, with interinstitutional negotiations just starting (see Priority 7 below).

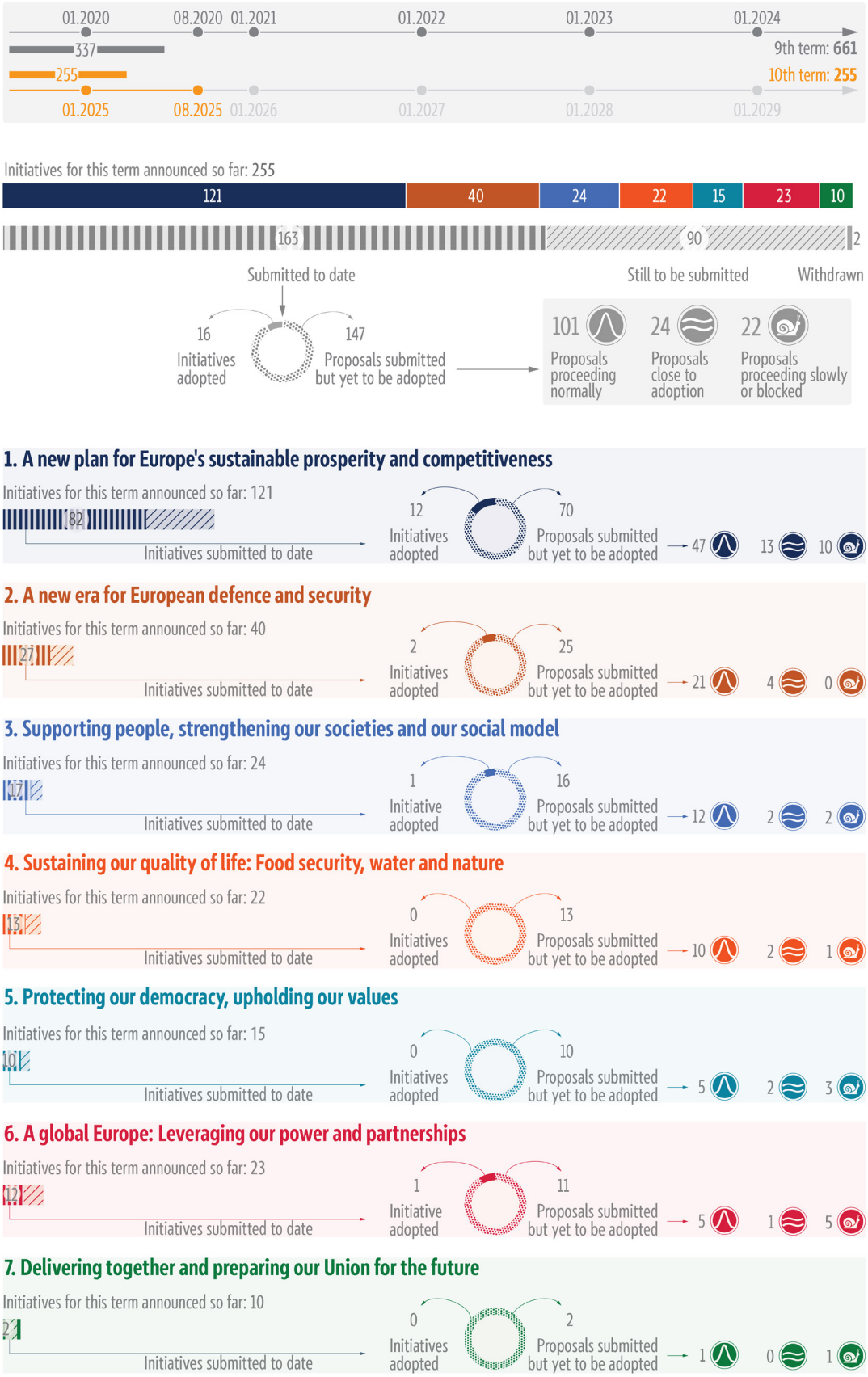
It is worth noting that, at this early point in the tenth legislative term, a substantial part of the initiatives monitored in this publication were not tabled by the von der Leyen II Commission but are **the continuation of work from the ninth term carried over to the tenth** (see the previous issue in this series under the References section).

The first priority, at this stage of the mandate, in both ranking and in number of initiatives, is prosperity and competitiveness. This comes as no surprise given the prominence of this objective on the EU political agenda, especially since the Letta and Draghi reports requested by von der Leyen and published in April and September 2024 respectively. Almost half of the initiatives covered in this assessment fall under this priority, including most of the 16 initiatives adopted by the Commission in these first nine months. Defence and security (Priority 2) comes next, followed by Supporting people, strengthening our societies and our social model (Priority 3), then A global Europe: Leveraging our power and partnerships (Priority 6), and Sustaining our quality of life: Food security, water and nature (Priority 4).

This analysis covers all seven of the Commission's priorities. The infographic (see Figure 1) illustrates the degree of progress numerically – both overall and by priority, while the two-page commentary on each priority focuses on the major themes and developments in that area. EPRS will publish new issues in this series twice a year, in spring and ahead of the annual State of the Union address, throughout the von der Leyen II Commission's mandate. The series continues those of similar publications covering the work of the first von der Leyen Commission and the previous Commission under Jean-Claude Juncker.

For more information on how the von der Leyen II Commission's agenda is progressing, readers are invited to consult the proposal-by-proposal assessment on the European Parliament's Legislative Train Schedule website, developed and regularly updated by EPRS.

Figure 1 – The von der Leyen Commission's seven priorities: Legislative and non-legislative delivery as of 31 August 2025



NB: Initiatives in this graphic include 'pending proposals' listed in the Commission 2025 work programme.

1. A new plan for Europe's sustainable prosperity and competitiveness

On 29 January 2025, the Commission unveiled the competitiveness compass, its five-year roadmap outlining priority actions that the EU should take to boost economic growth across the EU. The compass is structured around the three main areas for action identified in the Draghi report on the future of European competitiveness: closing the innovation gap with the United States and China, developing a roadmap for decarbonisation and competitiveness, and reducing dependencies and increasing security. It also highlights the need for cross-cutting actions to enhance competitiveness, such as simplifying regulation, fully leveraging the single market, mobilising financing, developing skills, and improving policy coordination at both EU and national levels.

On 11 February 2025, the Commission published a communication on implementation and simplification alongside its work programme for 2025. By the end of its mandate, the Commission intends to reduce recurring administrative costs by at least 25 % for all companies (equivalent to savings of €37.5 billion) – and by 35 % for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Central to this effort is the announcement of a set of legislative 'omnibus' proposals (see Box 1).

Box 1 – Six omnibus packages to simplify several pieces of EU legislation at the same time

On 26 February 2025, the Commission put forward the first two proposals: the **omnibus I** package includes three legislative proposals: (i) the 'stop-the-clock' proposal, postponing the dates of application of certain requirements under the Corporate Sustainability Reporting (CSRD) and the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence (CSDDD) Directives. The new Directive (EU) 2025/794, adopted in record time, must be transposed by Member States by 31 December 2025; (ii) a proposal aiming to simplify and streamline the provisions of the CSRD and the CSDDD; (iii) a proposal with the purpose of simplifying the carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM). The Commission also aims to amend three delegated acts under the EU taxonomy to make certain requirements for companies more flexible and to reduce the amount of data they have to provide.

The **omnibus II** package includes a proposal amending the InvestEU programme, seeking to enhance its financial capacity to invest in key sectors, and to reduce the administrative burden on stakeholders. In total, €50 billion in additional public and private investment could be mobilised.

The **omnibus III** package of 14 May 2025 concerns the common agricultural policy (see Priority 4).

The **omnibus IV** package of 21 May 2025 includes: (i) two proposals for a regulation and a directive aiming to extend mitigating measures available for SMEs under a range of EU legal acts to small mid-caps (SMCs, i.e. companies that are slightly larger than SMEs) and proposing further streamlining of EU rules; (ii) two proposals for a directive and a regulation designed to rationalise and digitalise economic operators' obligations under various EU legal acts; (iii) a proposal for a regulation postponing by two years the date of application of the battery due diligence obligations.

The **omnibus V** package ('Defence readiness omnibus') of 17 June 2025 seeks to reduce administrative burdens, unlock investment in defence capabilities, strengthen industry planning certainty, and simplify access to EU funding.

The **omnibus VI** package, published on 8 July 2025, concerns chemicals (see Priority 4).

Despite substantial progress in building the single market, recent analyses, including those by Enrico Letta and Mario Draghi, have shown that significant fragmentation persists. On 21 May 2025, the Commission adopted its strategy for making the single market simple, seamless and strong. It focuses on removing the 10 most harmful barriers to the single market, boosting services markets in the EU, facilitating SME activity in cross-border trade, promoting digitalisation of procedures, and better enforcing single market rules.

On 26 February 2025, the Commission unveiled the clean industrial deal, a strategy designed to enhance the competitiveness and accelerate the decarbonisation of Europe's industry (see Box 2). The strategy seeks to strengthen the business case for large climate-neutral investments in energy-intensive industries and clean technology within the EU.

Box 2 – Clean industrial deal's six priorities

1. Ensuring access to affordable energy
2. Creating lead markets for decarbonised products
3. Boosting public and private investments
4. Promoting circularity
5. Ensuring access to global markets and a level playing field for EU industry
6. ensuring the availability of necessary skills.

The Commission has already put forward a number of deliverables announced in the strategy, both legislative (such as the extension of the Gas Storage Regulation until the end of 2027, due to the tight situation in the global gas market, on which a political agreement was reached in June 2025) and non-legislative ones (such as the action plans for affordable energy and for the European automotive, European steel and metals and chemicals sectors, as well as the clean industrial deal State aid framework). Under the action plan for the automotive sector, the co-legislators agreed in May 2025 on amendments to Regulation (EU) 2019/631, introducing additional flexibility for carmakers to comply with their CO_2 emissions reduction targets. On 6 May 2025, the Commission adopted a nine-measure roadmap towards ending Russian energy imports, while safeguarding security of supply and minimising impacts on prices and market stability. Its first legislative proposal on phasing out Russian natural gas imports and improving monitoring of potential energy dependencies was tabled on 17 June 2025.

On 28 May 2025, the Commission published a strategy aimed at removing the barriers hindering the growth of start-ups and scale-ups in the EU. The strategy puts forward both legislative and non-legislative actions seeking to develop an innovation-friendly regulatory environment, improve access to finance, enable fast market uptake and expansion, provide support for the best talent, and improve access to infrastructure, networks and services. On 25 June 2025, the Commission adopted its vision for the European space economy and a proposal for an EU space act, intended to enhance the safety, resilience and environmental sustainability of space services and to increase the competitiveness of the space industry in the EU. On 2 July 2025, the Commission published a strategy to make the EU the world's most attractive place for life sciences by 2030.

On 19 March 2025, the Commission adopted a communication on a savings and investments union (SIU). While the EU has been faced with unprecedented investment needs to finance its strategic goals, the SIU aims to improve the way the EU financial system channels savings to productive investment. On 17 June 2025, the Commission tabled a package of measures to expand securitisation activity in the EU while maintaining safeguards to ensure financial stability.

In February 2025, the Commission President launched InvestAI, an initiative to mobilise €200 billion for investment in artificial intelligence (AI), including a new European fund of €20 billion for AI gigafactories. On 9 April 2025, the Commission presented its action plan aimed at making the EU a leading AI continent. On 5 June 2025, the Commission and the High Representative/Vice-President of the Commission (HR/VP) adopted the EU's international digital strategy, intended to boost competitiveness through economic cooperation with the EU's partners and allies, for instance in the area of emerging technologies such as semiconductors, and quantum and high-performance computing. On 2 July 2025, the Commission published a quantum strategy for the EU, to boost the development and deployment of world-leading quantum technologies in Europe.

On 16 July 2025, the Commission proposed a €409 billion **European Competitiveness Fund** as part of the MFF for 2028-2034 (see Priority 7).

2. A new era for European defence and security

The war in Ukraine has ushered in a new era for European defence, underlining the need to support Ukraine and strengthen Europe's capabilities. In her 2024-2029 political guidelines, von der Leyen inter alia called for a European defence union (EDU), with a Commissioner responsible for defence and a defence white paper, stronger cyber and internal security, and enhanced border protection.

Bringing the EDU to life and creating a preparedness union

The first-ever Commissioner for Defence and Space took office in December 2024. In line with the commitment to 'spend more', EU Member States had raised their collective defence budgets to €326 billion in 2024, up from €218 billion in 2021. To support Ukraine, the EU has financed €6.1 billion in military support through the European Peace Facility (EPF) (with total EU and national contributions, this rises to €50.8 billion). To boost the defence industry, the EU is finalising negotiations on the European defence industry programme (EDIP).

In March 2025, von der Leyen introduced the ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030, proposing €150 billion in EU-backed loans through the Security Action for Europe (SAFE) (adopted in May 2025 – see Priority 7) and other funding tools to leverage up to €800 billion in defence spending. The white paper for European defence – Readiness 2030, also presented in March 2025, identified key capability gaps and seven defence priorities, calling for deeper cooperation and joint investment.

In June 2025, the Commission published the interim evaluation of the European Defence Fund, which has invested €5.4 billion to boost cross-border defence research and development and develop next-generation capabilities. Finally, to make progress towards a true single market for defence, the Commission published a defence readiness omnibus (see Priority 1), which proposes legislative changes to speed up defence projects, ease procurement and transfers, fast-track permitting, balance regulations, and improve financing.

These initiatives were complemented by a broader strategic effort to improve both civilian and military crisis and security preparedness, culminating in the European preparedness union strategy in March 2025. It aims to enhance the EU's civilian and military readiness for future crises; supports national preparedness by improving coordination and efficiency within existing strategies, and fostering a culture of resilience; and, building on the 2024 Niinistö report, includes an action plan towards a preparedness union. The strategy rests on three principles: an integrated all-hazards, whole-of-government, and whole-of-society approach. Its action plan sets out 63 measures, including 30 key actions (13 due in 2025) to be completed by 2028, addressing foresight, societal functions, preparedness, public-private and civil-military cooperation, crisis coordination, and external partnerships. It emphasises solidarity by advancing the operationalisation of the mutual assistance (Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union, TEU) and solidarity (Article 222 TFEU) clauses.

A safer and more secure Europe

Owing to the increasing complexity of maintaining and defending the EU's internal security, ProtectEU, the new EU internal security strategy, proposes involving all stakeholders, mainstreaming security across EU laws, policies and programmes, and increasing public security spending. It announces new legislation to strengthen Europol and Frontex, modernise rules on organised crime and drug precursors, and revise the regulation on explosives precursors. As proof

of this renewed focus, von der Leyen announced a new security College in the Commission to ensure that College members receive regular updates on security developments.

Most legislative proposals made during the previous mandate have been adopted, but some have remained on the table, such as permanent rules to combat child sexual abuse online. Parliament reached its position in November 2023 and awaits the Council's. A proposal for a recast of the 2011 Directive on combating child sexual abuse was submitted in February 2024; with the Council reaching a position in December 2024 and Parliament doing so in June 2025, the file is now ready for interinstitutional negotiations. Negotiations on the November 2023 Commission proposal to enhance police cooperation against migrant smuggling and trafficking are also ready to start, following the Council's and Parliament's positions (reached in June 2024 and May 2025 respectively). Talks are ongoing on the May 2023 proposal for a directive on combating corruption.

The Commission has announced legislative proposals on common criminal law standards on illicit firearms trafficking and on new rules on drug precursors, both for autumn 2025.

Stronger common borders and standing firm on migration

In response to increased irregular migration and hybrid threats at EU borders, the EU has taken resolute steps to strengthen its external borders. In the European integrated border management communication, the Commission identified strategic challenges and established a five-year strategic policy cycle (2023-2027). In line with its reinforced mandate, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) has expanded its role and aims to establish a 10 000-strong standing corps by 2027. On top of that, the Commission has announced plans to triple the number of border and coast guard personnel in the future.

Efforts continue to upgrade EU border and security information systems. After an upgraded Schengen Information System became operational in 2023, and a revised framework for advance passenger information was adopted in 2024, the entry-exit system is expected to start operating in October 2025. The EU has acted against attempts by hostile countries to instrumentalise migrants to pressure its borders, with the Commission announcing new countermeasures.

Two proposals to strengthen EU rules on migrant smuggling, tabled during the previous legislature and carried over to the current one, are under discussion. A new Screening Regulation must be implemented by Member States by June 2026, while work is ongoing to revise the visa suspension mechanism. To ensure a functioning Schengen area, the EU has revised the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism and adopted a new governance model. The Schengen Borders Code was revised in 2024 to address new threats, including through temporary checks at internal borders and the swift transfer of irregular migrants across internal borders. Despite reforms, many Schengen States still maintain internal checks. After the full Schengen accession of Bulgaria and Romania in January 2025, Cyprus is the only Member State with its accession procedure still open.

While Schengen governance continues to evolve, the EU is simultaneously confronted with broader challenges shaping its migration policies. After the adoption of the migration and asylum pact, under the previous legislature in 2024, focus has shifted to its implementation by July 2026. To improve the EU's returns policy, in March 2025 the Commission adopted a proposal for a regulation establishing a common system for returning third-country nationals staying illegally. The Commission has also prioritised cooperation with countries of origin and transit on smuggling and border management and stepped up its existing cooperation with Lebanon, Türkiye, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania and Senegal. The latest partnership was concluded with Jordan in 2025.

3. Supporting people, strengthening our societies and our social model

To sustain and improve the European quality of life, von der Leyen promised in her political guidelines to promote social fairness, strengthen social and regional cohesion, and ensure equal opportunities for all. Stemming from this promise, the **main objectives** for the Commission's term are to deliver opportunities, stability and well-being for everyone, to strengthen our social market model to ensure a just transition for all, and to tackle inequality, regional disparities and discrimination. Given the limited competence in social policy provided to the EU by the Treaties, the initiatives envisaged so far are mostly non-legislative.

Promoting social fairness in the modern economy

Social fairness has been the underlying objective of the 2017 European Pillar of Social Rights, spelled out in its 20 principles and operationalised in a 2021 action plan. To give new impetus to the 'social pillar' implementation and reach the 2030 social headline targets, von der Leyen has announced a new action plan by the end of 2025. Specific initiatives would target the impact of digitalisation on the world of work through AI management, telework and the 'always on' culture, and introduce the right to disconnect.

To ensure a **just transition** for all as industries and economies change, the Commission will put forward a quality jobs roadmap, to be developed with the social partners. The aim is to support fair wages, good working conditions, training and fair job transitions for both workers and self-employed people, by increasing coverage of collective bargaining. In parallel, the Commission will seek to increase just transition funding in the next long-term budget (see Priority 7). While the new action plan for the social pillar and the quality jobs roadmap are yet to come according to its 2025 work programme, the Commission has already delivered on its commitment to a stronger social dialogue by signing with social partners a new pact for European social dialogue on 5 March 2025.

As part of the 2025 European Semester cycle, the Commission proposed policy recommendations and guidelines to the Member States in line with the social convergence framework, now embedded in the revised economic governance framework.

Von der Leyen wants to step up EU action against poverty with a first EU **anti-poverty strategy**, which would address its root causes. In parallel, the European Child Guarantee (technically a 2021 Council recommendation), which aims to prevent and fight social exclusion through education, healthcare and other essential public services, is to be strengthened.

To address the worsening **housing** situation in a coordinated way, housing has been made a new, distinct part of a Commissioner's portfolio and is to be addressed with a first **European affordable housing plan**. Actions to support investment in housing would include the setting up of a **pan-European investment platform** for affordable and sustainable housing (the first step has been initiated), the roll-out of the Social Climate Fund and the adaptation of **cohesion policy** rules. Accordingly, on 1 April 2025 the Commission proposed in the cohesion policy mid-term review to amend the regulatory framework of the cohesion policy funds, seeking to re-align investment priorities with recent developments and give Member States greater flexibility. Once the rules are adopted by the co-legislators, Member States will have broader possibilities to promote investments – among others – in affordable housing. Von der Leyen further pledged to tackle the root causes of **demographic change** and to reduce **regional disparities**, with a specific focus on **islands**.

Considering consumers as key actors in the social market economy and **consumer protection** as contributing to sustainable growth and a more competitive single market, the Commission is to present a new consumer agenda (2025-2030), including a **new action plan on consumers** in the single market to address shortcomings, protect vulnerable consumers and strengthen enforcement. These will be put forward by the end of 2025.

Reuniting our societies and supporting young people

To address the growing divisions in society and increase solidarity among citizens, von der Leyen made '**intergenerational fairness**' a distinct part of a Commissioner's portfolio. A 'strategy on intergenerational fairness' will be developed, with a dedicated platform following the process, leading up to a Commission communication scheduled for early 2026. The Commission will work on safeguarding the **rights of minorities** and make it easier for people to benefit from Europe's rich and diverse **cultural heritage**.

This thematic area has a strong focus on **young people**. The political guidelines aim to strengthen Erasmus+, including for vocational education and training (VET), and the Commission aims to make the programme more inclusive and accessible for all, paying special attention to learners with fewer opportunities. Von der Leyen wants her Commissioners to organise annual Youth Policy Dialogues, and to set up a **Youth Advisory Board** with young people from all Member States, which would advise her on issues that matter to young people. Considering the protection of mental health of children and young people one of the biggest challenges, von der Leyen announced the launch of an EU-wide enquiry on the broader **impacts of social media** on well-being. She has pledged to confront the unethical techniques used by online platforms and take action on the **addictive design of online services**, such as infinite scroll, default auto play or constant push, and prepare an action plan against **cyberbullying**.

By the end of 2025, the Commission intends to table a new strategic framework for culture: the **Culture Compass for Europe**. It should give long-term direction to culture in EU policymaking, put culture at the centre of EU policies and make it more accessible for all, especially for young people.

Building a true union of equality

Building on its long-standing efforts to combat discrimination, the Commission plans to develop a new strategy for gender equality after 2025. In March 2025, it put forward a roadmap for women's rights and is working to update the strategy for LGBTIQ equality and develop the first anti-racism strategy.

4. Sustaining our quality of life: Food security, water and nature

Quality of life in the EU is closely tied to natural resources and to the ability to transform them into healthy and high-quality food. The agri-food sector and the environment face growing challenges, especially from climate change. Ensuring food security and food sovereignty is a key priority in von der Leyen's political guidelines, calling for resilient agriculture and fisheries, in terms not only of competitiveness but also of preparedness for future shocks and protection of water and nature.

Building a competitive and resilient agriculture and food system and safeguarding biodiversity

On 19 February 2025, the Commission presented its vision for agriculture and food. This communication sets out the future of farming and food in the EU towards 2040, focusing on attractiveness, competitiveness, future-proofing, and reconnecting people with food and territories. It lays out goals and proposes legislative and non-legislative actions.

To make agriculture more attractive for farmers, especially young people, the Commission seeks to improve fair income opportunities, access to support, and market transparency. Aiming to strengthen the position of farmers in the supply chain, the Commission adopted two legislative proposals in December 2024: one with targeted amendments to the regulation on the common organisation of the markets in agricultural products (CMO Regulation), the other on enforcement of the Unfair Trading Practices Directive. A review of the latter is planned by the end of 2026.

To boost competitiveness and resilience, the EU will continue to prioritise food security and sovereignty by diversifying trade, creating new export opportunities, reducing dependence on critical imports, and working towards stronger alignment of standards for imported products, notably on food safety, pesticide use and animal welfare.

To develop a long-term policy for a sustainable livestock sector, the Commission launched a livestock workstream. It also plans to review the existing animal welfare legislation by the end of 2026, including a commitment to phase out cages, the latter following a European citizens' initiative.

Agriculture plays an important role in the transition to a low-carbon economy. To help farmers adopt nature-friendly practices, the Commission launched a 'roadmap towards nature credits'. It also plans to propose accelerating access for biopesticides to the EU market.

An updated rural action plan will help keep rural areas vibrant and connected to the EU's cultural and natural heritage. To support local products and short supply chains, the Commission will present a proposal to strengthen the role of public procurement.

All policy actions will be guided by cross-cutting themes: simplification, research and innovation, and digitalisation. In May 2025, the Commission adopted a proposal for a simplification package to reduce administrative burdens for farmers and authorities. Legislative simplification in other policies will follow, as will an EU digital strategy for agriculture.

The common agricultural policy (CAP) remains the main tool to ensure food security, encourage sustainable farming and support farmers and rural areas. In July 2025, in the context of the new MFF (see Priority 7), the Commission presented the 'new CAP after 2027', aligned with the vision for agriculture and intended as a key tool to deliver on its objectives. It includes a proposal that would lay down conditions for the implementation of EU support for the CAP. The CAP would align with

the EU financing mechanisms under the new MFF. To increase support for farmers in case of market disturbances, a larger Unity safety net would be established.

The Commission also proposed a targeted review of the CMO Regulation. The proposed changes aim to support the growth of the plant protein sector, protect traditional meat product designations, and introduce a legal basis for country-of-origin labelling in the future. The EU school scheme, which supports healthy eating through the distribution of fruit, vegetables and dairy products to schoolchildren, would prioritise EU-grown products. New rules would also improve the EU's preparedness for future challenges, including the creation of food reserves.

Seas and oceans are under increasing pressure. The European ocean pact, adopted on 5 June 2025, sets out a holistic approach to ocean-related policies, aiming to protect ocean health, boost the EU's blue economy, and support coastal communities. Actions include: evaluating the common fisheries policy; revising the marine strategy framework directive; proposing an industrial maritime strategy and an EU ports strategy; launching a sustainable tourism strategy; presenting a strategy for EU coastal communities; consulting stakeholders on a new strategy for EU islands; updating the 2022 strategy for outermost regions; launching an ocean research and innovation strategy; and developing a strategic approach to EU fisheries external action. A proposal for an ocean act – a legislative act based on a revision of the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive – is scheduled by 2027 to achieve the targets set out in the ocean pact.

Water supply is increasingly at risk. The European water resilience strategy, adopted on 4 June 2025, pursues the following goals: restoring and protecting the water cycle from source to sea; adopting water-smart practices and green infrastructure to improve water retention on land; preventing water pollution and tackling pollutants in drinking water; building a competitive water-smart economy; attracting investment and promoting the EU's water industry; improving water efficiency and sustainable water management; and ensuring access to clean and affordable water and sanitation for all.

Boosting climate adaptation, preparedness and solidarity

One of the biggest risks not only to the agri-food sector but also to our way of life is climate change. The EU civil protection mechanism provides a coordinated response to extreme weather events, but more shared resources are needed. The Commission wants to develop a European civil defence mechanism with a comprehensive approach to crisis and disaster management.

The Commission aims to increase work on climate adaptation, resilience and readiness. This includes mapping risks and preparedness needs for infrastructure, energy, water, food, and land in cities and rural areas, as well as needs for data and early-warning systems. A European climate adaptation plan, to be presented in 2026, will guide the work, ensure regular science-based risk assessments, and support Member States in preparedness and planning.

The EU Climate Law requires the Commission to propose an intermediate climate target for 2040. In a communication of February 2024, the previous Commission recommended a net greenhouse gas emissions reduction of 90 % by 2040, relative to 1990. The communication opened the political debate on setting an EU 2040 climate target and prepared the ground for the current Commission to adopt the legislative proposal embedding the 2040 target in the European Climate Law.

5. Protecting our democracy, upholding our values

This priority combines long-standing elements, already present under the von der Leyen I Commission (strengthening the rule of law and putting citizens at the heart of our democracies) with a stronger focus on protecting our democracy, with the European democracy shield.

Protecting our democracy

Against the backdrop of growing threats from internal and foreign state and non-state actors against European democracy and values, von der Leyen has proposed a new **European democracy shield** that would counter foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) online, boost societal resilience and preparedness, build a European network of fact-checkers, step up digital enforcement, address deepfakes, and preserve and promote free speech.

During the past two legislatures, the EU's growing toolbox to address FIMI has evolved into a whole-of-society approach that involves citizens, civil society organisations (including fact-checkers), governments, businesses, media, and academia. The proposed European democracy shield builds on existing measures and legislation, broadening the scope and responsibilities to solidify the response. The main responsibility lies with the Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, the Rule of Law and Consumer Protection, Michael McGrath. As reflected in his mission letter, he is expected to: 1) include the work to combat disinformation and FIMI in the new democracy shield; 2) preserve the fairness and integrity of elections, and protect political candidates; 3) introduce and implement proposals to support and protect media and journalists; and 4) set up a civil society platform; protect civil society and human rights defenders.

McGrath reports to the Commissioner for Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy, Vice-President Henna Virkkunen, who is tasked with enforcing relevant legislation , including the Digital Services Act (DSA), the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Act and the European Media Freedom Act. She is also responsible for addressing 'increasingly complex' security threats, including in the digital realm, such as hybrid and cyber threats, attacks on critical infrastructure, foreign information manipulation and interference, and the weaponisation of people and policies. A Commissioners' project group on democracy, set up in January and chaired by McGrath, is composed of seven Commissioners, including Virkkunen and the High Representative (HR/VP) Kaja Kallas. The EEAS plays a key role in countering FIMI and developing the EU's FIMI toolbox, and Kallas's mission letter includes FIMI in the context of hybrid threats and attacks.

The Commission launched a €5 million call for proposals on 27 May 2025 to support the growth of a European network of fact-checkers. Contributions to the public consultation on the European democracy shield, which concluded on 26 May 2025, will feed into the Commission's work on a communication, which is expected towards the end of the year.

Parliament voted to set up a special Committee on the European democracy shield (EUDS), chaired by Nathalie Loiseau (Renew, France), on 18 December 2024. EUDS thus started its work before the Commission's work programme was published, further building on the outcome of two previous special committees on foreign interference. During its 12-month term, EUDS will prepare recommendations on further measures and initiatives. As an early contribution, EUDS published a working document on 29 April 2025, proposing a new independent EU-level structure for fighting FIMI. It also emphasised the need to boost digital defence, independent media and civil society, and focused on the role of sanctions, the need for democratic resilience beyond EU borders, and for fostering civil preparedness in the face of multidimensional crises. EUDS is set to discuss the draft

own-initiative report from September 2025, with the committee vote scheduled for November and the plenary vote then expected in January 2026.

Strengthening the rule of law

In July 2025, the Commission published its sixth rule of law report addressing the **state of play of judicial independence, the fight against corruption, media pluralism, and checks and balances** in each Member State and in selected candidate countries. The Commission formulated new recommendations to each Member State and (since the last edition) candidate countries too, analysing the progress made with regard to the implementation of its 2024 recommendations, as well as formulating new tasks.

On 18 June 2025, Parliament adopted its resolution on the previous, fifth rule of law report (procedure 2024/2078(INI)), calling on the Commission to expand the scope of the report in order to cover the entire scope of Article 2 TEU and include additional indicators, such as media independence, the role of civil society, fundamental rights, academic and artistic freedom, gender equality, the protection of minorities and vulnerable groups, respect for international law, free and fair elections and the functioning of democratic institutions. Parliament also urged the Commission to link the monitoring exercise to 'real consequences' for the Member States, and called for a greater focus on implementing country-specific recommendations, with timelines and measurable benchmarks.

Concerning **Article 7 TEU breach of values procedures**, the procedure against Hungary, launched in 2018, is still ongoing. No major development has taken place since the beginning of the von der Leyen II mandate.

Putting citizens at the heart of our democracies

The Commission continues to engage European citizens through the **European Citizens' Panels** (ECPs), a deliberative format initiated under von der Leyen's first mandate, notably for the Conference on the Future of Europe (2021-2022), and intended to become a 'regular feature of our democratic life'. In 2025, a European Citizens' Panel took place on 'A European budget fit for our ambitions' and ran from March until May 2025, concluding its work with a set of recommendations to the Commission (see Priority 7).

Following von der Leyen's commitment in her political guidelines, a first youth dialogue took place in Perl, Germany, in December 2024 with Commissioner Magnus Brunner and 30 teenagers, aged 16 to 18, to discuss the topic of internal security, migration, and the future of the Schengen area. Several others have taken place in 2025, including one at the European Youth Event in May 2025 with Commissioner Glenn Micallef. The Commission has announced a non-legislative initiative on an EU strategy to support, protect and empower civil society for autumn 2025.

6. A global Europe: Leveraging our power and partnerships

The EU is affected by major global political and economic challenges: Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine; the war in Gaza following the terrorist attacks against Israel; divergences in transatlantic relations; unfair economic competition from China; and the emergence of democratic and authoritarian powers that actively challenge the international rules-based order, multilateral organisations and democracy. The Draghi report on the future of European competitiveness emphasises the need to enhance economic security and to reduce external dependencies. Against this geopolitical and economic backdrop, the EU's foreign and security policy focuses in particular on the following objectives: enlargement, the wider neighbourhood, and economic foreign policy.

Enlarging the European Union to strengthen resilience

The political priorities consider enlargement to be a 'geopolitical imperative'. In April 2025, the target for possible accession of new candidate countries by 2030 was confirmed as 'realistic' for leading candidate countries by Enlargement Commissioner Marta Kos. For Ukraine and Moldova's accession negotiations, the Commission aims to open all clusters of accession talks in 2025.

On 1 April 2025, the Commission disbursed a third regular payment of nearly €3.5 billion as part of the Ukraine Facility, which brings total EU support to Ukraine under the facility to approximately €25.4 billion (with a total budget of €50 billion for 2024-2027). The EU and its Member States have provided over €147 billion in financial, economic, humanitarian and military support for Ukraine.

Regarding accession negotiations in the Balkans, the most critical task at present is to complete the comprehensive agreement between Kosovo and Serbia within the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. Türkiye remains a candidate country eligible for EU financial support, but, as mentioned in a 7 May 2025 parliamentary resolution, negotiations have effectively been at a standstill since 2018, owing to the deterioration of the rule of law and democracy. On 28 May 2025, a new strategy for a stable and secure Black Sea region was adopted.

A wider neighbourhood to promote peace and economic stability

The EU has expanded its engagement with Mediterranean and Middle Eastern partners, responding to regional crises while strengthening strategic partnerships. The Commission intends to present a new pact for the Mediterranean in autumn 2025, serving as an umbrella for bilateral partnerships with 10 Mediterranean partners.

Von der Leyen announced a comprehensive EU Middle East strategy centred on the two-state solution for an Israeli and a Palestinian state, as well as on strengthening partnerships with key regional stakeholders. In April 2025, during the first high-level political dialogue with the Palestinian Authority, the Commission proposed a €1.6 billion multiannual comprehensive support programme. The EU has provided over €450 million in humanitarian aid since 2023, including a €120 million package in January 2025. The EU Humanitarian Air Bridge had delivered over 4 700 tonnes of aid as of April 2025. HR/VP Kaja Kallas announced a review of the EU's association agreement with Israel in May 2025 due to the intensification of Israeli military operations and the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza. On 29 July 2025, the Commission proposed a partial suspension of Israel's participation in the Horizon Europe programme due to the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Following the fall of the Assad regime, the EU lifted economic sanctions on Syria in May 2025, providing €235 million in humanitarian aid and pledging nearly €2.5 billion for transition support. A €1 billion EU assistance package has been announced for Lebanon, while the EU and Jordan

concluded a Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership accompanied by a €3 billion assistance package for 2025-2027. Egypt is benefiting from a €7.4 billion aid package under the March 2024 EU-Egypt Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership. The first EU-Gulf Cooperation Council summit took place in October 2024, while restrictive measures against Iran continue due to concerns regarding human rights violations, military support for Russia and armed groups in the Middle East, and nuclear proliferation.

Since Russia launched its illegal and unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the EU has adopted 18 packages of sanctions against Russia – the latest four during the current mandate. The 18th package of sanctions, adopted on 18 July, strengthens previous measures aimed at cutting Russia's energy revenues, hitting its banking sector, further weakening its military-industrial complex, strengthening anti-circumvention measures, and holding Russia accountable for its crimes against Ukrainian children and cultural heritage. EU economic and personal sanctions are part of an even broader set of EU measures targeting Russia's hybrid activities, domestic violations of human rights and the use of riot control agents by Russian forces in Ukraine. This was complemented with increased tariffs on Russian and Belarusian fertilisers and a roadmap to decouple the EU from Russian fossil fuels by 2027 and phase out its dependence on Russian uranium and other nuclear material. Beyond sanctions, the Commission has been instrumental in maintaining the EU's unwavering support to Ukraine, in close partnership with the UK, including in the delicate phase of possible peace negotiations kicked off by the Trump-Putin meeting in Alaska on 15 August.

Pursuing a new economic foreign policy

The new foreign economic policy consists of three central planks – economic security, trade, and investment in partnerships – aimed at increasing the EU's security and reducing dependencies. The Global Gateway is central to the EU's international partnerships, aimed at mobilising up to €300 billion of investment in partner countries through a coordinated Team Europe approach, and focusing on key sectors like digital and energy while also helping to secure critical raw materials. The Commission plans to align the Global Gateway more closely with trade and other economic foreign policy tools. According to the January 2025 communication on the Competitiveness Compass, the EU will seek, in particular through its trade policy, new ways of deepening partnerships by applying sustainable investment facilitation agreements, digital trade agreements, mutual recognition agreements, partnerships on sustainable raw materials, and new clean trade and investment partnerships (CTIPs). Negotiations on a first CTIP with South Africa took place on 13 March 2025.

The Commission announced a political agreement on the partnership agreement with Mercosur (on 6 December 2024) and the conclusion of negotiations on a modernised Global Agreement with Mexico (on 17 January 2025). As for the world's largest bilateral trade and investment relationship, on 27 July 2025, von der Leyen and US President Trump agreed on a trade deal that, among other things, establishes a single, all-inclusive US tariff ceiling of 15 % on the vast majority of EU exports. Next steps were then set out in a 21 August joint statement. In addition: the 2025 work programme announced the adoption of a new strategic EU-India agenda following the College's visit to New Delhi and the second meeting of the EU-India Trade and Technology Council (TTC) on 27-28 February 2025; a digital trade agreement with South Korea was reached on 10 March 2025; at the G7 Leaders' Summit in Canada in June 2025, the EU and Australia agreed on negotiations on a Security and Defence Partnership (SDP) and on their renewed engagement to conclude an Australia-EU FTA; on 4 April 2025, the first Central Asia-EU Summit was held in Uzbekistan, where leaders agreed to elevate relations between the two regions by establishing a strategic partnership; summits with the African Union and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States are scheduled to take place later this year.

7. Delivering together and preparing our Union for the future

A substantial and much expected part of this priority are the legislative proposals for the EU's post-2027 financial plan, also known as the multiannual financial framework (MFF), which the Commission presented on 16 July 2025. Beyond finances, the EU needs to be solid against geopolitical challenges and equipped for enlargement (see also Priority 6). This section also looks at the Commission's commitment to enhance cooperation with the Parliament and reform the EU.

What budget is needed for the EU's ambitions?

The Commission proposes an EU budget of **€1 763 billion** (2025 prices) for 2028-2034, which corresponds to 1.26 % of the EU's gross national income (GNI). This amount would include €149.3 billion (0.11 % of EU GNI) to cover the repayment costs for the Next Generation EU (NGEU) temporary instrument. Excluding this expenditure, the proposed MFF would stand at 1.15 % of EU GNI, a **slightly higher** rate than the current one (1.13 % when adopted – see Figure 1).

The Commission proposes to significantly restructure and **streamline** the EU budget, considering that this would provide more flexibility in spending and enhance synergies. EU funding has to respect the **rule of law** and the **EU Charter of Fundamental Rights**.

The first heading (€946.4 billion) would group the programmes implemented under shared management (common agricultural policy, cohesion funds, migration and border management) into **national and regional partnership plans** (€771.3 billion), one for each Member State. Funding would be conditional on meeting milestones and targets, like those that apply for NGEU (see Box 3 below).

In heading 2 (€522.2 billion), a second major pooling of resources is proposed under a **European Competitiveness Fund** (€362.3 billion). It would group 11 programmes (Horizon Europe, defence programmes, space programme, digital programmes and others) and see a substantial increase overall.

Figure 2 – Comparison of the 2021-2027 MFF and the 2028-2034 MFF proposal

Commitments, € billion and EU GNI %, 2025 prices

Data source: European Commission proposals on the 2028-2034 MFF (COM(2025) 570 final) and Council Regulation 2020/2093 laying down the 2021-2027 MFF.

Heading 3 (€190.0 billion) would cover expenditure for external action under a new **Global Europe Instrument** (€176.8 billion), i.e. partnerships with each geographical area, support to candidate countries and the financing of global actions.

The majority of the European Parliament's group leaders stated that they will defend a more ambitious budget for all Europeans, aligned with the Union's values and fundamental rights. They criticised the design of the 'national and regional partnership plans', which could hinder the European dimension of the EU budget and lead to more centralisation at national level. The discussion on this key file is just starting and is expected to last for a couple of years.

Reforming the EU

Inspired by the results of the Conference on the Future of Europe (2021-2022), in 2022 Parliament called for a **convention to reform the EU**, and in 2023 adopted a resolution putting forward numerous amendments to the Treaties. Parliament's proposed reform was meant to **enhance the EU's capacity to act and shore up its democratic legitimacy and accountability**. Furthermore, it would help the EU tackle geopolitical challenges and equip it for enlargement.

The Commission had previously expressed support for Parliament's intention to use its powers acquired after the Lisbon Treaty regarding proposals to reform the EU. In this vein, von der Leyen's political guidelines express a willingness to follow up on the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe as well as the belief that Treaty changes are needed where they can improve the EU. However, no initiative has yet been adopted. The far-reaching Treaty amendments proposed by Parliament would require the ordinary revision procedure. Parliament's proposals have been submitted to the European Council and are still under consideration by this institution under Article 48(3) TEU.

Box 3 – Lessons from Next Generation EU: Towards a more effective and strategic EU budget

The **Commission**'s political guidelines note the benefits that have stemmed from linking investment with reforms, creating additional fiscal space in times of crisis and a performance-based approach that supports strategic priorities.

The **European Parliament** highlights the important role played by the recovery instrument, while noting that implementation has also revealed shortcomings. Looking ahead, Parliament stresses that future EU instruments should address these challenges by enhancing transparency in implementation and final recipients, setting spending objectives for cross-border and multi-country investments, and strengthening technical support for national administrations. Parliament should be granted a stronger role in the governance and oversight of future performance-based tools, which must focus on delivering European public goods.

The **European Fiscal Board** noted that the debate on a permanent fiscal capacity 'should pick up'.

Delivering together with the European Parliament

The use of Article 122 TFEU by the Commission and Council to enact laws without Parliament's participation is currently under scrutiny. This article provides for **two non-legislative legal bases** for adopting **executive legal acts**, enabling the Council to adopt measures based on a Commission proposal **without involving the European Parliament**. This procedure can be used if Member States face **economic difficulties**, in particular severe difficulties in the supply of e.g. energy (Article 122(1)), or if they need **financial assistance**, e.g. following natural disasters (Article 122(2)). Notably, the article does not provide for any decision-making role for Parliament, raising questions of democratic legitimacy over using it to enact new laws.

The Commission used this legal basis for its proposal for a financial instrument – **Security Action for Europe** (SAFE) for common defence procurement in critical areas – on 19 March 2025. The support (a **loan**) is backed by the headroom of the EU budget. Parliament has challenged not the content but the legal basis and referred the Council to the Court of Justice of the EU. Parliament, the Council and the Commission had agreed in 2020 to apply a budgetary scrutiny procedure for acts proposed under Article 122 – this concession, hard-won by Parliament at the time of NGEU, applies only to budgetary aspects. Two meetings under this procedure took place (on 8 April and 21 May 2025) with the Council and the Commission, and Parliament's delegation concluded that the SAFE instrument has an **impact on the EU budget**.

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The von der Leyen II Commission has set seven new priorities – none of which continues directly from the six priorities of her first mandate – and has so far announced some 250 initiatives with which to achieve them. Half of these initiatives fall under the first priority, on prosperity and competitiveness.

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