

State of the Union 2026

Quotes and initiatives

16 September 2026

“The state of our Union is the strongest it has ever been. The state of our Union can also feel as precarious as it has ever been. These two statements may seem incompatible. But they are both true. And they reflect these exceptional times. This complex age of great possibilities and great perils which all countries are seeking to navigate.

In this world, Europe has chosen to forge its own path. And a stronger, independent Europe is now emerging.

Ursula von der Leyen,
President of the European Commission



Competitiveness:

“When we took office, we put in place a bold plan. To build an economy where innovation and energy flow across borders. Where companies compete and grow across Europe, and savings finance our future. This is the logic of the Draghi and Letta reports. And together we are delivering.”

- Complete the historic overhaul of the Single Market by next year, on the basis of the **One Europe One Market Roadmap**.
- **A pact against gold-plating** that shows that we are serious about simplification.
- Establish a **European Corporation of Critical Raw Materials** to obtain and stockpile what we need for electric cars, chips, batteries, cleantech, defence and more.
- A **Banking Package** focused on simplification and tackling fragmentation.

Climate change, environment and food security:

“These were the hottest summer months ever – but probably the coolest of the years to come. Science is clear. Europe is warming at double the global rate. Of course, the transition is complex. And we will need to adjust and learn along the way. But there is no doubt: Europe can, must and will stay the course on our climate targets.”

- A **framework for Climate Resilience** to be presented in October, identifying 100 of the most vulnerable territories in Europe and assessing the risks.
- A **Climate Insurance Alliance** to cover the insurance gap and avoid that national budgets become the insurer of last resort.
- A **European Heatwave Plan** for better early warning and health preparedness.
- A **European Water Initiative** to improve risk management, because farmers and industry need water.
- A **European Firefighting Fleet** developed on the basis of proposals by some of Europe’s most senior firefighters and emergency responders. They will also look into preparedness, prevention, civil-military cooperation and the need for other new capabilities.
- Proposals to **improve risk management in agriculture** and address the insurance gap.



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Harnessing Artificial Intelligence:

“I am an optimist that AI has the potential to benefit humanity – if we get it right. But as with any powerful new technology, AI comes with a balance of possibilities and risks. Without addressing these risks, we will never be able to unlock AI’s possibilities.”

- **Bring together the main frontier labs** to discuss how Europe can support ongoing industry efforts to pace the frontier.
- Continue working with like-minded partners on **model evaluation, verification, early warning and more**.
- Game changing initiatives, to be presented in November, for **high-value sectors where industrial AI has big potential** and we have the data: **health, transport, agri-food, advanced manufacturing, and defence and space**. Member States, MEPs, industry and entrepreneurs will be invited to join.



A fair Union:

“Staying in the region is not a privilege. Care is not a privilege. Housing is not a privilege. They are rights. (...) Times may change, technologies may change, but our values do not.”

- A **Quality Jobs Act** by the end of the year to develop skills, improve quality jobs and give workers a fair chance.
- A **European Care Deal** to address the challenges linked to our demographic changes.
- A summit co-hosted with the President of the European Council, to uphold the principles of the **European Pillar of Social Rights**.



Europe in the world: stronger partnerships

“For some, the answer is to go it alone. But this is not an option for us. Europe will always lead when it comes to defending the rules-based system. But we can no longer rely on it as the only way to secure our interests. Or assume that its rules will shelter us from the complex threats that we face. In this new world, we must urgently reimagine our partnerships. And build global coalitions for our resilience and democracies.”

- Open the door for **Canada to become the first associate member of the EU** and build together an **Alliance for the Future**: to create a common prosperity and economic security space, create a tech alliance and integrate defence industrial bases.
- Invest in the **Middle Corridor** connecting the South Caucasus and Central Asia directly to the European market to diversify routes, triple trade flows and slash freight transit times by 2030.
- A **Regional Connectivity Summit** co-organised with the Prime Minister of Bulgaria.



Europe's security:

"Europe's belief in cooperation has always been driven by peace. It is our raison d'être. Today, that peace is threatened. We should be under no illusions about what is happening here: hybrid threats facing Europe are less and less hybrid and less and less threats."

- A new **European Security Strategy** presented together with the High Representative / Vice-President.
- An **Emergency Security Protocol** – Europe's own "NATO Article 4". When triggered by one Member State, all Member States would convene to shape a coordinated European response.
- A **European Security Council**, working closely with partners such as the Canada, Norway, the United Kingdom and Ukraine.
- A **European Instrument for Strategic Enablers**, fully aligned with NATO, to deliver the systems that we need from air and missile defence, strategic transport and air-to-air refuelling, to space and cyber.



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Ukraine's security:

"Because the people of Ukraine are fighting for something. They are fighting for the survival of their country, for their identity and for their freedom. And they are also fighting for our freedom and our self-determination. Our task remains to support Ukraine as best we can."

- **Continue supporting Ukraine into the winter** with all means, especially humanitarian aid and energy support.
- Develop together with Ukraine a **missile defence mechanism** starting with the anti-ballistic project 'Freya'.
- A **programme for common projects with Ukrainian companies** to be funded with the remaining of SAFE funds.
- Continue increasing pressure on Russia through **sanctions** and combatting sanction circumvention.



Protecting our borders:

“Vulnerable people are being exploited by callous traffickers and smugglers. (...) We will always comply with our values and fundamental rights. But we will never compromise on protecting our borders. It is we, Europeans, who decide who comes to our Union and under what circumstances. And not the smugglers and the traffickers

- Continue the implementation of the **Pact on Migration and Asylum**, which now provides a common European framework with responsibilities for all and solidarity for all.
- A **European Emergency Response Framework** to be triggered under defined criteria.
- **Strengthen Frontex**, especially to speed up returns.
- **Improve early warning systems**, also in partnership with third countries.
- A **Mediterranean Youth Skills and Jobs initiative** to offer young people meaningful prospects – so they are not compelled to gamble with their lives.



Social media – Protecting our children:

“What we are witnessing is a great capture of our children. A capture of their attention, their focus, their minds. This is depriving children of their childhood. What our children need is time to grow into themselves, to grow up with others. To be confronted with all of the emotions and choices that come with real life. They even need time to get bored. Because this is when they have to use their imagination.”

- An **EU KIDS ACT**, a legislative proposal adopted on 17 September, with a gradual approach taking into consideration the sensitivities of each age: no social media under the age of 13; no personal accounts under the age of 15. Only mini accounts set up and supervised by parents for teenagers between 13 and 15, and mandatory safe design for all under 18 accounts.

- **Reverse the burden of proof**: platforms will have to prove that they are safe for children.
- A **Digital Fairness Act** to be proposed this autumn, to address addictive design.



A stronger Union:

“Europe will always remain true to its values. Our Union started life as a peace project. So that our tragic past could give way to a common future for Europeans. Decades later, millions of people still see Europe as full of promise – sometimes from as far away as Canada. And yet, we often forget how powerful this promise still is.”

- A **Congress of Europe** to be held next year, 70 years after the Treaty of Rome, to develop a vision that inspires the new generation of Europeans.
- **Roadmaps for the most advanced candidate countries** in the EU accession process.



Conclusion

“We should never forget the origins of our Union. Nations so long at war united to forge a common destiny. A destiny of peace and prosperity, democracy and freedom.

They never wrote down where this destiny would finally lead us. But each generation has built on the foundations of its predecessors. Step by step. Brick by brick.

Of course, our imperfections, our diversity and our differences remain. But they are precisely what makes Europe our Europe. Our common home.”