

# EU Elections 2024: What do party manifestos say on key policy issues?



# Introduction

The European elections taking place from 6 to 9 June come at a critical juncture for the European Union (EU). The legislature that is now drawing to a close was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the fallout of these two events, like a fragmentation of the global economy and increased power rivalries. The next term will see the EU preparing for future enlargement to new member states and attempting to reform itself, while trying to address global challenges, including the most consequential of them - climate change.

Ahead of the vote, European political parties published their manifestos, they lay out their vision and ambitions for the EU. In this compendium, EPC analysts examine the positions on thirteen issues of the main parties represented in the European Parliament – except the

parties from the Identity and Democracy group (ID), which did not publish a manifesto. Their contributions look at the differences but also the convergences between the parties. In addition, an analysis based on data examines the evolution of the parties' priorities and focus between the last elections in 2019 and this year and puts on a broader perspective the analysis of the manifestos.

This compendium will contribute to informing the EU citizens' votes and anticipating the political dynamics, and ultimately the decisions, of the next Parliament. This is particularly important as conservative, nationalist, and far-right parties are expected to gain a significant share of seats, and that the future direction of the EU will partly depend on whether mainstream parties cooperate with them or not.

## European parties and their groups in the European Parliament

**Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)**, represented by the Renew Europe group. [Manifesto](#): “Your Europe, your freedom. Delivering change for you”

**European Conservatives and Reformists Party (ECR)**, represented by the ECR Group. [Manifesto](#) for the European elections

**European Democratic Party (EDP)**, represented by Renew Europe. [Manifesto](#): “Reinventing Europe”

**European Greens**, represented by the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance. [Manifesto](#): “Courage to change”

**European Left**, represented by The Left in the European Parliament. European elections [manifesto](#) 2024

**European People's Party (EPP)**, represented by the EPP Group. [Manifesto](#): “Our Europe, a safe and good home for the people”

**Party of European Socialists (PES)**, represented by the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D). [Manifesto](#): “The Europe we want. Social, democratic, sustainable”

# Data Analysis

## Less social, more security: evolving priorities between 2019 and 2024



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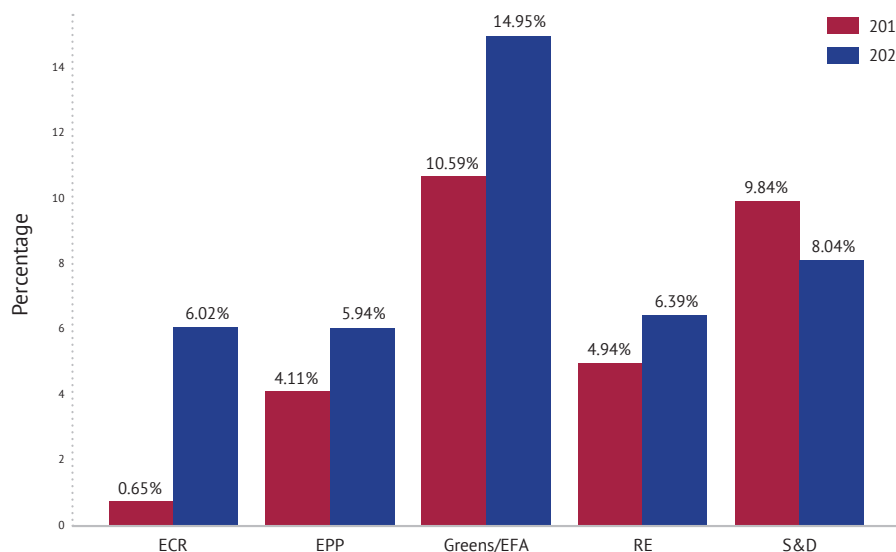


A recent [EPC-Eulytix report](#) on the June European elections concluded that the [predicted significant wins](#) for radical right-wing groups – i.e. the Independents (NI), Identity and Democracy (ID), and European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) – would have a marginal direct policy impact. The study argued that less than 5% of voting sessions would be affected, if the vote distribution of each political group in the outgoing assembly (2019-2024) is preserved and the number of MEPs adjusted to reflect current seat projections.

The most affected policy areas would be the environment, agriculture, EU institutions, social affairs, and external relations. The analysis revealed that the far-right exhibits great unity on environment and energy policies, institutional issues, and public health, and less cohesion on relations with third countries (for instance, Russia and Ukraine) and employment policy. In all these files, the moderate right-wing European People’s Party (EPP) had previously voted with the ECR and ID, while a broad coalition of liberal and left-wing

Figure 1

PERCENTAGE OF SENTENCES RELATED TO ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY



Source: Own calculations based on party manifestos

forces had decided the initial outcomes. A right-wing realignment in the next Parliament is plausible if the EPP opts to break ranks with the political centre.

This is even more so given that these policy issues also top [voters' list of priorities](#) and have been increasingly sowing divisions within the political mainstream at the national and European level. Their growing traction is also visible in this year's party manifestos, especially compared to 2019.

Content analysis<sup>1</sup> of the 2024 official party documents shows an uptake in the percentage of environmental policy-related sentences for both the ECR and EPP (see Figure 1). The ECR uses confrontational language, rejecting “unfettered green ideology” and calling for the “opposite approach on the Green Deal to that promoted by the EU in the last five years”. In contrast, the EPP is not hostile about it, and even makes an explicit mention of the Nature Restoration Law: “We cannot afford to force

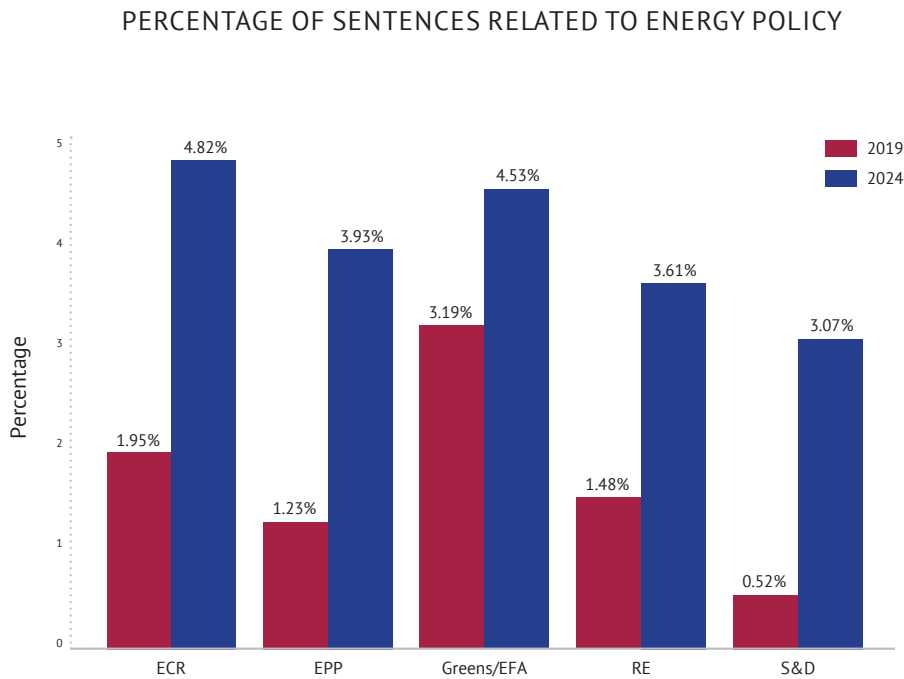
people to respect over 20 different legal acts on the same topic, such as in the case of the EU's nature restoration.”

At odds with recent research, if these claims are to be taken at face value – and that is a big if – they could suggest that the EPP will ultimately avoid cooperating with the far-right on environmental issues in the next legislature, which would help the Union's cause in this policy field.

Disturbances caused to Europe's energy security by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine are likely responsible for the higher prevalence of energy policy obvious across this year's party programmes (see Figure 2).

Moreover, in the new and volatile geopolitical context, all 2024 party platforms record a dramatic increase in the number of references to defence and security (see Figure 3).

Figure 2

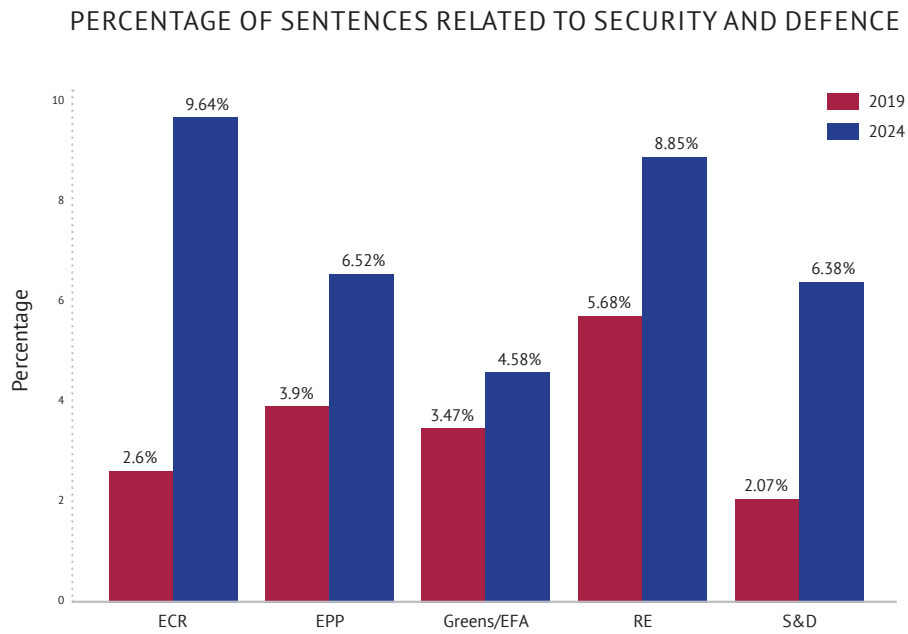


Source: Own calculations based on party manifestos

Conversely, social welfare appears less salient (see Figure 4), with its former champion – the Party of European Socialists (PES) – paying much less attention to it than in 2019. The same goes for immigration, which remains

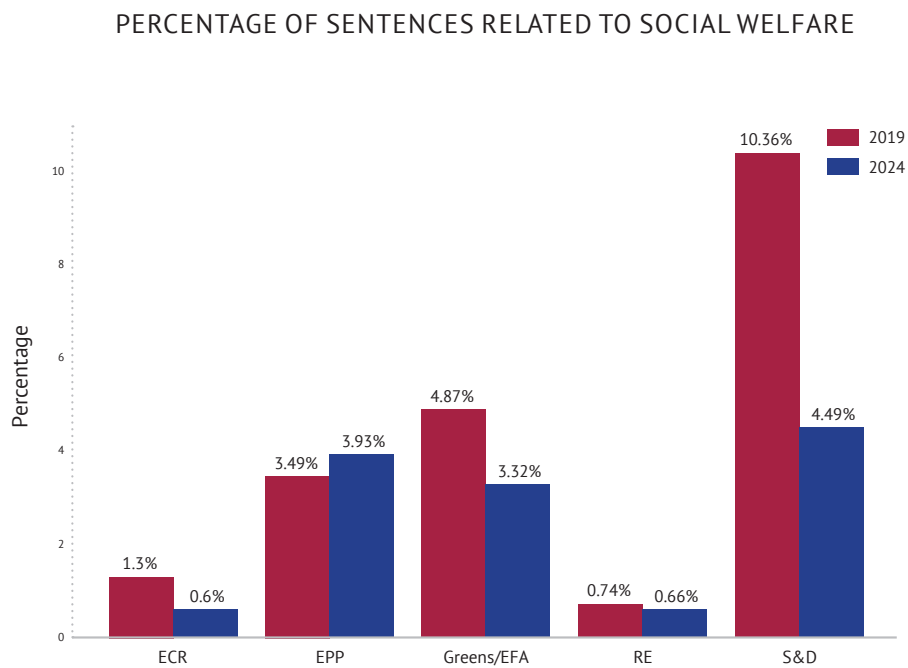
important for all parties but has lost prominence in the manifestos (see Figure 5). The notable exception is the ECR’s programme, where the topic still dominates.

Figure 3



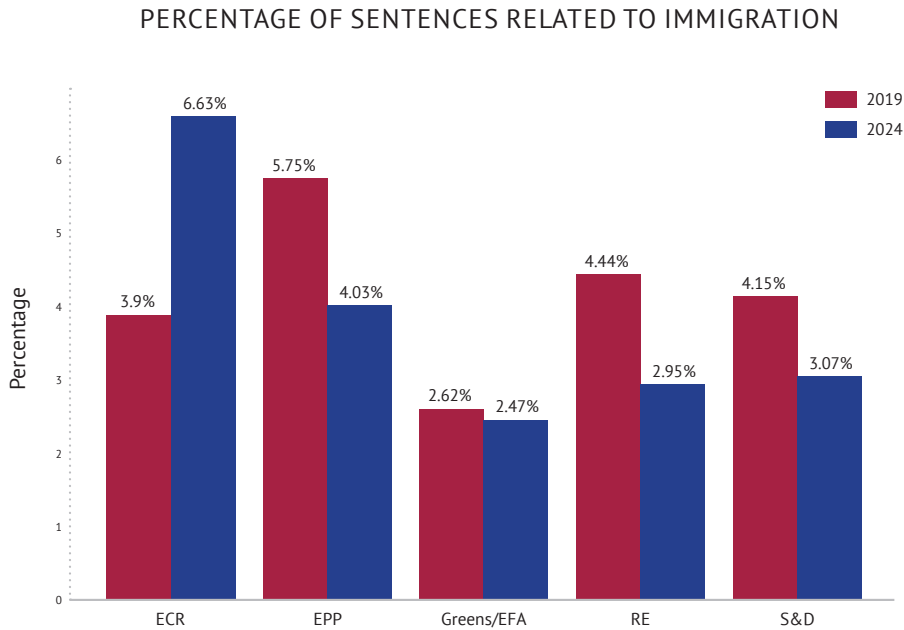
Source: Own calculations based on party manifestos

Figure 4



Source: Own calculations based on party manifestos

Figure 5



Source: Own calculations based on party manifestos

Agriculture, an issue where right-wing cooperation is plausible, has also become more extensively covered in all the manifestos. The increase is particularly pronounced in the case of the ECR. It is worth noting that sustainability concerns in relation to agriculture and fisheries are present in every party platform, which could suggest hard bargaining on this dossier in the new term.

In contrast, the topic of European institutions and democracy seems to command less attention this year, given that all party platforms attend to it much less extensively than in the past. The drop in the percentage of mentions of this policy area is highest in the case of the ECR, whose 2019 programme was focused on steering the EU away from the supranational path.

It would appear that European parties are purposely minimising the subject, which likely shows a lack of EU integration ambition at a time when, paradoxically, a strong drive/push for EU reform is most needed. As such, the manifestos could indicate that the new leadership will (at least try to) sweep under the carpet ongoing discussions and efforts to reform the EU's operating system in preparation for a potential enlargement to 30+ members and in response to current geopolitical imperatives.

To be sure, manifestos are only the 'public face' of political parties and not necessarily a reliable indication of the policy choices that the new MEPs will make in practice.

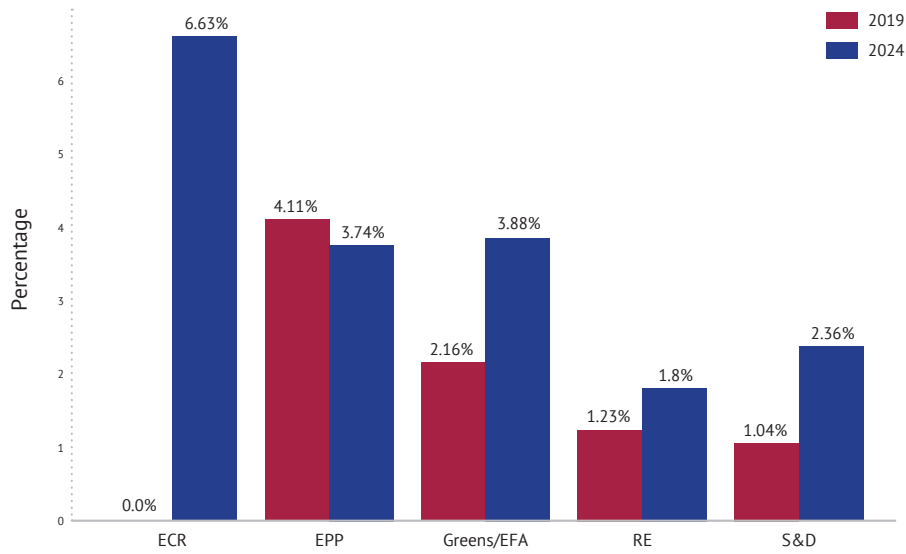
They can be deliberately tailored to electoral preferences<sup>2</sup> – though many citizens (may) vote without knowing what is in the manifesto – or reflect the willingness of political entrepreneurs to tactically adapt to their current political climate.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, because they articulate concrete policy proposals, they also constitute important guides to the policy areas that parties deem significant enough to highlight. As such, they offer clues about the kind of issues that are likely to shape political competition in the next mandate.

The 2024 party platforms reinforce the relevance of several policy fields which previous research has identified as particularly vulnerable to far-right influence, including environment, energy policy, defence and security, immigration, and agriculture. All these topics touch deep chords in society and tend to drive a wedge between the centrist parties. Their mention in the manifestos is another reminder of the areas on which the political mainstream – especially the EPP – has a huge responsibility to stand its ground on liberal democratic policy, rhetoric, and values. Doing so is not only a question of delivery – which present and future European voters expect. It is also a matter of whether the EU will be able to preserve its way of life and relevance in the new, brave world.

Figure 6

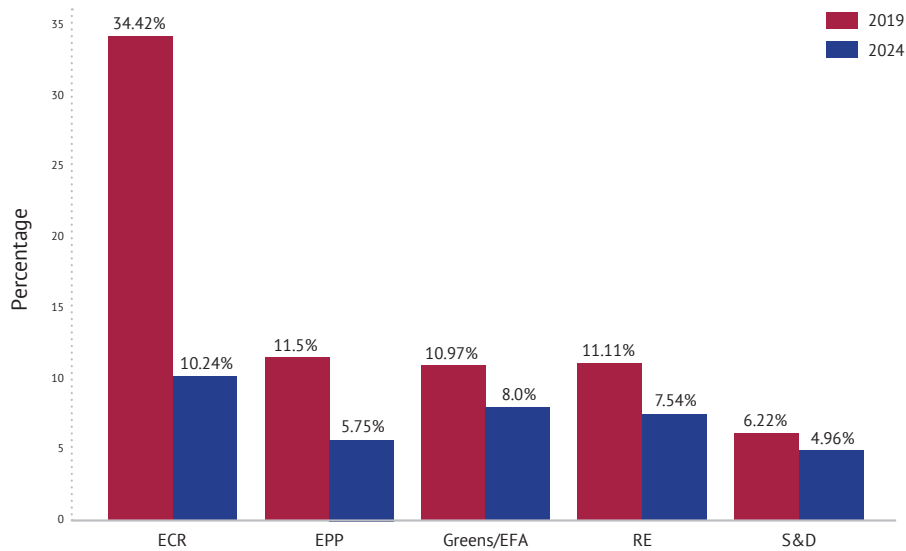
### PERCENTAGE OF SENTENCES RELATED TO AGRICULTURE



Source: Own calculations based on party manifestos

Figure 7

### COHESION: A POLICY SEEKING NEW RELEVANCE OR GUIDED BY AND ANCHORED TO ITS PAST?



Source: Own calculations based on party manifestos

<sup>1</sup> For unit of analysis, we choose the quasi-sentence level, i.e.: sentences, or parts of sentences that represent meaningful statements and are grammatically separate entities. These units are then coded into 22 categories, which we adopted from the codebook of the [Comparative Agendas Project](#). Both the text splitting and classification was done with the use of artificial intelligence, i.e.: machine learning algorithms, specifically fine-tuned for these tasks.

<sup>2</sup> Mudde, Cas (2000), *The ideology of the extreme right*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Pelizzo, Riccardo (2003), "Party positions or party direction? An analysis of party manifesto data", *West European Politics*, Volume 26, Number 2, pp.: 67–89.

# Economic security



Chiara Scalamandrè, Junior Policy Analyst, Europe's Political Economy

Against an increasingly tense geopolitical environment, the next European Parliament will be challenged to strengthen Europe's economic resilience and independence. The buzzword "*economic security*" does not appear often in the manifestos, but this is not a sign that parties are less focused on the issue. On the contrary, different wordings such as "Made in Europe", "domestic manufacturing" and "independence" translate some parties' economic security ambitions. Overall, the convergence among parties on the need to promote fair competition, economic resilience and protection of strategic sectors hints at the fact that economic security will gain more ground in the next political agenda.

The two largest groups in the European Parliament share a common vision of a "Made in Europe" industrial future. The EPP advocates for a "Made in Europe 2030" strategy, a forward-looking European industrial and competition policy to create European champions and invest in European-added-value projects. The slogan: "Made in Europe" also features in the Party of the European Socialists' manifesto, which prioritises domestic manufacturing in critical areas and strengthening Europe's sovereignty via the securitisation of energy supplies, raw materials and technologies through investments and trade policy. Differently from others, the European Democratic Party mentions its interest in reuse and recycling mechanisms to lessen Europe's dependence on supplier countries. Additionally, the word espionage appears in the text as the party intends to implement surveillance methods to protect the EU against foreign threats. ALDE interprets economic security as securing more trade and investment agreements with open and market-based economies. While the Greens prioritise independence from authoritarian countries and advocate self-sufficiency, they appear to recognise that Europe's interdependence in certain areas will be required for the just transition. The Left shares similar views on the acceptance of possible EU dependences.

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While most parties put forward their intentions to advance Europe's economic security, little is explained about the concrete measures that will be taken to achieve it. Some, like EPP and PES respectively, mention the need for funds or insist on a permanent EU investment capacity, while the European Green Party and ALDE call for institutional reforms and changes in the World Trade Organization (WTO). Without clear roadmaps or policy actions, the parties' objectives come across more as a wish list than as a solid plan. Further details are needed on the measures to achieve energy and resource independence, strategies to address economic espionage, and mechanisms to ensure fair international competition. Finally, as there will undoubtedly be trade-offs between economic security, price competitiveness and climate objectives, parties will have to be open about how they intend to address them and what they intend to prioritise, hoping that the security concerns do not come at the expense of environmental goals.



# Defence



**Mihai Sebastian Chihai**, Policy Analyst, Europe in the World

**Juraj Majcin** is a Policy Analyst in the Europe in the World Programme



Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, coupled with Moscow's threats towards the EU and NATO, has exposed the insufficient state of European defence capabilities, as well as the deficiencies and bottlenecks within the European defence industry. The EPP, ALDE and PES acknowledge these pressing issues and emphasise the imperative to bolster and scale-up European defence and scale up the industry, outlining a variety of policies, notably joint procurement, and greater public-private cooperation and coordination on defence matters. Although the ECR also considers the security situation on the European continent worrying, it regards defence as a prerogative of member states. It does not advocate for greater EU-based defence cooperation.

Except for the European Left, all parties agree that the EU's role in defence should complement NATO and strengthen its European pillar, rather than solely advancing European strategic autonomy. Close coordination and strengthened cooperation between the EU and NATO are hailed as a priority across the manifestos without further mention of areas where cooperation should be expanded and how to strengthen it in practice. Cooperation with partners such as the UK, Norway and others will also be paramount to developing EU defence capacities, yet only the EPP manifesto emphasises this.

All the parties have failed to fully address the critical issue of defence funding and investment. While the [EPP](#) aims to secure more resources from the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for European defence, [ALDE](#) advocates for the initiation of a European defence investment plan, with a budget of €100 billion, without further details on the potential sources of its funding or an implementation path. Neither party offers solutions to the constraints on private defence investments imposed by ESG regulations or the potential of EU defence bonds.

The creation of the position of Commissioner for Defence is mentioned in both the EPP and ALDE manifestos and it is likely to be a highlight of the political campaign. However, there is a lack of clarity on the responsibilities and objectives of this portfolio and on the potential structural changes it might require in practice in the European Commission.

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## **Instability and uncertainty will continue characterising the European and global security environment and necessitating long-term defence investments from the EU.**

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Instability and uncertainty will continue characterising the European and global security environment and necessitating long-term defence investments from the EU. Overall, defence receives significant attention across the manifestos and will undoubtedly be a core priority for the next EU political cycle. Nevertheless, strategic directions for a common EU defence and security plan are missing and long-term EU defence objectives and ways to achieve them receive very little attention.

# Foreign policy



**Raúl Villegas**, Junior Policy Analyst, Europe in the World

As Commission President Ursula von der Leyen kicked off her mandate in 2019 with the announcement of a “[geopolitical Commission](#),” signs of a resurgence of great power competition, such as escalating US-China rivalry, were already abundant. Five years on, the signs have given way to stark, palpable realities. Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine has permanently altered Europe’s security landscape; [the need to deter geo-economic aggression and bolster economic security](#) has overridden [a long-held belief in the virtues of economic interdependence](#); and the EU’s influence and credibility in the ‘Global South’ [have further eroded](#). The forthcoming European Parliament elections will be crucial in equipping the EU to respond to these challenges and, as importantly, to define robust, far-sighted strategies.

With the elections around the corner, party manifestos indicate some convergence around long-term priorities. Across the spectrum, they call for a unified EU foreign policy, urging the EU27 to “speak with one voice.” They stress the importance of squaring the EU’s geopolitical proactiveness with its commitments to multilateralism and human rights. However, the manifestos do not always acknowledge the key role of diversified partnerships in Europe’s economic security, with parties such as the European Socialists adopting a protectionist stance, and others like the EPP failing to supplement their strong economic security focus with a constructive approach to finding new partners. They also spark necessary debates on institutional reform (whether to enhance the EEAS role, as per the EPP’s suggestion, or [introduce a qualified majority for Council decisions on the CFSP, as recommended by ALDE and EPP](#)) and enlargement (which some see as a straightforward geopolitical necessity, and others as a long process entailing major reforms).

Significant blind spots remain. The [profound impact of Israel’s war in Gaza on the EU’s global standing](#) is underestimated and mistakenly viewed through a partisan lens. The imperative ([moral but also strategic](#)) for the EU to ground its bid for new international partnerships and its deployment of funding instruments such as Global Gateway [on a relationship of equals](#) with the ‘Global South’ is also divided across partisan lines: present in the manifests of the Greens, Socialists, and the Left but absent elsewhere.

Moreover, the European tendency to focus on what foreign policy should achieve but not on how to achieve it persists. While there is bipartisan agreement on the need for more balanced trade and political relations with China, proposals for a coherent EU approach to China are lacklustre. The Commission’s de-risking language is superficially picked up by EPP, ECR, and the Greens, and little attention is devoted (the Socialists excepting) to what *modus vivendi* for the EU and China to maintain cooperation around global issues.

Similarly, with uncertainty looming over Washington’s future involvement in Europe (particularly, but not exclusively, in the event of a second Trump term) the manifestos scarcely touch on what ‘[guardrails](#)’ can keep the Transatlantic relation on track in the future or, alternatively, on how to create a more self-reliant EU in the event of US withdrawal from Europe’s security architecture. But most concerning, and indicative of a predominantly reactive geopolitical mentality, is the glaring absence of long-term strategies for Ukraine. In sum, although they have picked up the baton for a more geopolitical Europe, European parties still fall short of the breadth of vision required to formulate long-term strategies and bring Parliament into greater prominence in the shaping of EU foreign policy.

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# Migration, asylum, and demography



**Alberto-Horst Neidhardt**, Head of European Migration and Diversity and Senior Policy Analyst

Rarely has there been a more insightful time to check the pulse of where political parties stand on migration than with the 2024 European elections.

In 2019, the manifestoes of the main European parties reflected the [shared political imperative of reforming the EU asylum system](#). Back then, migration did not top voters' concerns, but a possible repeat of the 2015-2016 "refugee crisis" caused enough anxiety to prioritise change. Five years on, with the asylum reforms in the pocket and with [security and climate the most salient issues in most EU states](#), not migration, one could have expected at least a modicum of fresh ideas and [some ambition](#). Migration continues to receive a great deal of attention. But, possibly because of [fears of a far-right breakthrough](#), the 2024 manifestos are underwhelming at best: while there is consensus on curbing irregular migration and the need to enforce the newly adopted reforms, the trade-offs are ignored; sustainable legal pathways also remain a mirage, at least for now.

Unsurprisingly, the EPP, PES and ALDE parties, [whose MEPs mostly supported the comprehensive asylum reforms](#), place their proper implementation firmly in their respective agendas. But they omit the crucial yet unanswered question of [how to pay for all this](#), including building needed infrastructures and recruiting trained personnel.

Meanwhile, the fear of out-of-control arrivals has not gone away. Alongside the [ECR](#), the liberals, centre-right and centre-left groups renovate their commitment to strengthen the EU's external borders. Special mention goes to Frontex, the EU's coastguard agency. Frontex is set to [grow further in the next cycle](#), and yet remains without detailed strategic directions on how to fulfil its mandate effectively, and navigate partly conflicting expectations of securing borders while protecting fundamental rights.

With growing emphasis on migration management and control, PES, EPP and ALDE all recognise the value of increased collaboration with third countries. This should be the magic bullet to prevent the [newly reformed asylum rules and the restored but fragile trust](#) between member states from crumbling under the weight of irregular arrivals. Relatedly, the return of denied asylum applicants features prominently in most manifestos, and will no doubt be a priority in the upcoming cycle.

The EPP even proposed to deport asylum seekers to 'safe third countries', a contentious proposal inspired by the ['UK-Rwanda deal'](#). Further explicit references to outsourcing and extra-territorial processing – for example, in the liberals' manifesto or in the agenda of some [centre-left governments](#), despite the PES manifesto standing "against any form of EU border externalisation" – are impossible to ignore, indicating that Fortress Europe is no longer just a far-right utopia or a progressive's dystopia.

What the manifestos forget to tell, however, is that asking EU neighbours to stop irregular migration diminishes Europe's [strategic autonomy](#) at a time when the EU is trying to cut dependencies on third countries. Extra-territorial processing is also old wine in new bottles: similar outsourcing proposals, dating way back to the [2000s](#), never saw the light of the day due to their [legal implications](#), and their political and [economic costs](#).

Those who were hoping for more than just the expected emphasis on reducing irregular arrivals will be disappointed: opening legal pathways and strengthening integration opportunities for non-EU nationals in general, and foreign workers in particular, are in fact mentioned by the liberals, centre-right and centre-left. Demographic change, labour shortages and social cohesion demand this. However, no manifesto refers to overarching principles that could pave the way for mutually beneficial partnerships with foreign governments, such as the [UN Global Compacts](#), or the [Sustainable Development Goals](#). And for the EPP, which is currently topping the polls, member states should remain in charge of legal migration and integration policies.

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# Health and healthcare



**Danielle Brady**, Policy Analyst, Social Europe and Well-Being

While health is not the primary focus in any of the manifestos, the majority address health priorities to some extent, albeit with variations in depth and emphasis. The EPP outlines a desire to create a “true European Health Union” and emphasises making Europe a leader in medical research and innovation including a boost to the research budget. Similar to the EPP, the PES supports the idea of a European Health Union but with an emphasis on public healthcare and fair pricing for medicines. Meanwhile, the EDP sets out the need to relocate medicine production within the EU to reduce dependency on external providers and proposes strengthening the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. The ALDE manifesto is sparse regarding health but highlights the need to attract skilled healthcare professionals. The Greens integrate health policy with environmental concerns, advocating for pollution control as a public health measure and supporting universal health coverage. The Left calls for universal and free access to healthcare, aiming to strengthen public health systems to reduce social inequalities. The ECR manifesto includes no reference to health.

Several convergences emerge among the party manifestos that could influence the European Parliament’s approach to health in the next mandate. Specifically, the EPP, PES, and the Greens all endorse the European Health Union (EHU). Sustained political momentum is required in the upcoming mandate to ensure that the EHU remains a robust framework for facilitating coordinated healthcare initiatives at the EU level. Additionally, there is a shared commitment to bolstering research and innovation, particularly in health technologies and medicines, as evidenced by the support from EPP, PES and EDP. This feeds into broader narratives also contained within several of the manifestos on economic security, industry, and competitiveness. Furthermore, multiple political

groups, including the EPP, PES, the EDP and the Greens, emphasise the need to enhance mental health strategies, reflecting a broad acknowledgement of its significance across various political spectrums. While the current mandate saw the Commission’s communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health, the inclusion of mental health in the manifestos perhaps signals political appetite for further EU action to address the ongoing societal challenges in this area.

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While the manifestos cover an array of topics under the health remit, there are some notable absences. Despite the lessons of COVID-19, global health does not feature as a priority in any of the groups’ manifestos. Additionally, while several manifestos reference the healthcare workforce, no party has highlighted it as a key priority. Given changing demographics, the ongoing challenges with the healthcare workforce are set to continue into the upcoming mandate.

While health may not be the big-ticket item of this election as it was during the COVID-19 pandemic, it must not be rescinded to a non-priority in the next mandate. The Parliament will play a very important role in calling on member states to show political will maintain health on the EU’s agenda.

# Employment and social affairs



**Xheimina Dervishi**, Programme Assistant, Social Europe and Well-Being

When it comes to employment and social policy, the main political families competing in the upcoming European elections have unsurprisingly different visions for the future social Europe:

The European People's Party (EPP) manifesto calls for a Europe that “feels like home”, supports families, promotes gender equality, and fosters intergenerational solidarity. Their main priority is the creation of a Preparedness Union, which is aimed at increasing cooperation between Member States to face future crises. Competitiveness and productivity drive the social section of their manifesto. A proposed “investment plan for European quality jobs” would see member states and the EU investing 4% of GDP, with a focus on “scientific excellence with European added value”.

The European Democracy Party (EDP) expresses the need to strengthen welfare states and social protection in response to demographic, digital and environmental challenges. Their key priorities include equal pay for men and women, equal opportunities for all, better working conditions and a minimum wage. They also recognise the importance of combating poverty, ensuring affordable housing and reducing homelessness, points that are also shared by the Party of the European Socialists (PES) and The Left. The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE) expresses more interest in guaranteeing individual freedoms and calls for a more tolerant society. Employment and workers' protection are more strongly addressed by the PES, The Left and the Greens. For these parties, the well-being of citizens and workers should be at the heart of Europe's green transition, where social and climate justice must go hand in hand. While the recognition to guarantee better and safer working conditions are better developed by PES and the Greens. The latter propose to create an EU Right to Disconnect, a Right to Remote Work and a four-day working week. The Left also endorses the aim of reducing working time for the same wage within

the context of the Working Time Directive. The PES envisions a Europe with adequate minimum incomes and minimum wages, strengthened collective bargaining and full implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, but it fails to present concrete new initiatives. Conversely, ECR does not set out a social vision for Europe, while the EPP places a greater emphasis on the achievements of the current mandate.

There is a strong difference between EPP and PES, The Left and EDP in conceiving social aspects. Welfare states are mentioned only once by EPP, with the principle of subsidiarity and private investment underlined. Gender equality and the fight against gender-based violence remain high on the agenda for both centre-right and left, which could represent a theme of convergence for a future parliamentary majority. However, the adoption of an intersectional approach that considers people with different intersecting identities and the different levels of vulnerability of multiple marginalised groups across Europe is completely absent in all manifestos. Finally, it seems that the implications of future green and technological challenges affecting workers and changes in the labour market have not been explored.

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# Democracy, rule of law and citizens



Liza Saris, Project Manager, Transnationalisation

In recent years, the European Union has faced the pressing challenge of safeguarding democracy and the Rule of Law from internal threats arising from the rise of authoritarian tendencies and the far-right in member states. In the upcoming elections, it seems likely that far-right and nationalistic factions will gain increased representation in the European Parliament. This shift emphasises the need for [mainstream political families](#) to navigate and counteract these new dynamics. This is reflected in their manifestos through concrete policy proposals and more subtly expressed goals.

In most manifestos, excluding ECR, a reinforced European (transnational) democracy is depicted as crucial to combat the authoritarian rise and uphold the Rule of Law. Above all, there is a consensus among the mainstream families on measures regarding access to EU funds by authoritarian leaders either by improving the implementation of the current treaty articles or by reforming laws within the treaty framework. The Greens mention a better infringement procedure including a timeframe, and all (excluding ECR) ask for an improvement of the annual 'values and rule of law' monitoring. Unsurprisingly, the manifesto of the ECR opens with the chapter on protecting national identities and reforming the EU. Their reforms aim at '*a new era of national sovereignty*' using existing treaty requirements and principles such as subsidiarity to limit the decision-making power of Brussels. They aim to reform the EU from within, to increase national sovereignty in Europe.

Besides these concrete proposals there is a visible tendency in the narratives used by the mainstream party families focused on the effects on society. According to the PES, the Greens, the European Left, ALDE and EDP there is a need for a new 'social contract' (ALDE) and the protection of European values such as equality, solidarity and inclusivity against the attacks of the European far-right. The EPP manifesto doesn't refer to the far-right directly but instead mentions the need to preserve Christian values, European fundamental principles and

protect all citizens in all member states, also from their own governments. These manifestos show that we need to protect European identities and values not only from the 'other' but from insiders' attacks.

The attacks of these 'insiders' often are aimed at [shrinking civic space](#) and constraining opposition by limiting funds and access to independent media. These are two specific areas where the European Parliament can make a difference by using the transnational capacities of the EU to circumvent national democratic backsliding. The Greens, EDP and ALDE manifestoes propose initiatives such as free media funds and laws for the legal entity of European civil organisations.

However, except for the Greens, most mainstream parties fail to convincingly connect strengthening transnational civil society and independent media with the fight against authoritarianism in their manifestos. This connection becomes increasingly vital, particularly with far-right and authoritarian movements like the ECR seeking EU reform from within. A robust and united civil society in Europe could turn out to be crucial in the fight against this internal threat.

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# The Green Transition and the Future of the Green Deal



**Brooke Moore**, Policy Analyst, Sustainable Prosperity for Europe

The manifestos act somewhat as a harbinger for the EU's green transition and where it will land in the EU's upcoming strategic agenda. A notable trend across manifestos is opening with an introductory focus on security and the economy. Consequently, these priorities largely shape the language and framing of the limited green transition agenda items that make it onto the table, suggesting that the Green Deal will face stiff competition for attention and resources.

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## **A notable trend across manifestos is opening with an introductory focus on security and the economy.**

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The [EPP](#), for example, advocates for an Industry Strategy that supports industrial sectors in decarbonising, while the [ECR](#) pitches an 'opposite approach' to the Green Deal, aiming to revitalise core industries and strategise alongside corporations. While the ECR's stance on protecting businesses making them central to a green transition is more extreme, most parties highlight a need to better align the green transition with businesses and the EU economy.

Predictably, many party manifestos fail to sufficiently emphasise the importance of nature and biodiversity, with the Greens and the Left being notable exceptions. This oversight is significant because, particularly with a business-minded approach, resource and nature conservation are [crucial for ensuring industrial competitiveness](#), as they provide the ecological stability and resource availability necessary for economic activities. The PES, EDP, ALDE, Greens, and EPP recognise for this very reason the importance of

transitioning to a more circular economy. Specifically, parties highlight the need to increase resource availability through recycling and reduce dependency on natural resources.

The manifestos also touched upon the looming question of how the green transition will be funded. The most popular approaches included market-oriented and private industry (including public-private partnerships) approaches, while taxes on polluters and transitional funds are also included. Additionally, the EPP and [EDP](#) signal support for financial incentives aimed at carbon-removal technologies.

While [the Greens](#) discuss the importance of green investment, they also highlight a significant concern for ramping up industrial policies: the potential for such policies to socialise costs while privatising profits. Relatedly, parties like the EDP, Left and Greens propose that the financial burden of the transition should not fall disproportionately on taxpayers but rather on major polluters through increased taxes. The Greens further advocate for the expansion of the [Social Climate Fund](#) and the establishment of a Green and Social Transition Fund, that would represent at least 1% of EU GDP per year, and would be mainly financed by EU joint borrowing.

Framing the Green Deal through economic and security terms is not necessarily a bad thing; indeed, it diversifies the need for a green transition and lends that much more weight to its justification. It is also, however, a precarious path, risking the commitment to a truly sustainable balance among people, profit, and the planet without succumbing to the historical dominance of business interests. [Political trends](#) suggest that this framing of the Green Deal is likely to continue, with the EPP still polling as the largest parliamentary group and the ECR and ID likely gaining seats at the expense of more environmentally focused groups like the Greens/EFA, S&D and Renew.

# Agriculture and food safety



**Brooke Moore**, Policy Analyst, Sustainable Prosperity for Europe

Agriculture and food security have been high on the agenda in the lead-up to the elections, , exacerbated by widespread [farmers' protests](#) across Europe. As a result, there is a unanimous effort across all party manifestos to support farmers. In the most pronounced cases, the ECR and the EPP describe farmers as the backbone of Europe, advocating for strong protection against market fluctuations and unfair competition. The [ECR](#) specifically calls for fair policies that protect local products from competition amid EU enlargement and further shield against unfair trading practices. Even [the Greens](#) and [PES](#) stress the importance of safeguarding the well-being of small and medium-sized farmers, including protecting them from detrimental third-party deals (a nod to farmers who opposed trade deals like [Mercosur](#)). Similarly, [the Left](#) highlights the importance of farmer welfare and ensuring they directly benefit from labour-intensive work.

Food security is an overarching theme across manifestos. For parties like the Greens and Left that advocate for more sustainable practices and smaller scale production, food security in production terms is equated with sustainability and nature restoration, ensuring food system longevity and resilience. In contrast, parties like the EPP and ECR view food security through the lens of efficiency and output, favouring deregulation and technocratic solutions to ensure food supply stability. Despite differing ideologies, each manifesto advocates for fair wages, farmer welfare, sustainability, food sovereignty and affordability, but these broad commitments raise concerns about their substantive nature, suggesting they may be included more to appease voters than for genuine prioritisation.

In terms of nature and sustainability, biodiversity is referenced across party manifestos, albeit in ways that do not completely express its critical role in food security. The [EPP](#) mentions biodiversity only twice throughout its manifesto, while declaring support for sustainable agriculture only insofar as it aligns with farmers' interests. Taking a harsher stance, the [ECR](#) positions itself against 'unfettered green ideology'. On the other end of the spectrum, PES, the Greens and the Left highlight the importance of biodiversity and advocate for a more extensive integration of agricultural policies with environmental sustainability.

Many parties also place greater emphasis on adaptation and resilience measures. The EDP and ALDE indicate that nature protection is a pillar of food security, while almost every manifesto mentions the need for water management practices. Additionally, ALDE, Greens, and PES highlight the need to reduce pesticide use, further underscoring their commitment to more stringent environmental safeguards.

Finally, the issue of regulatory overreach was a topical issue across manifestos. Parties such as the EPP and ALDE advocate for reducing regulatory burdens. These parties have a milder tone compared to the ECR's vigorous strong push for cutting red tape.

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As the EPP and ECR—projected to hold a strong presence in parliament—continue to promote the false dichotomy between environmental sustainability and agricultural productivity, the key question post-election is whether this stance will continue. If it does, it poses significant challenges not only to the creation of a cohesive food security strategy but also to the effectiveness of the Green Deal through continued disputes over crucial environmental legislation.



# Energy Transition



**Brooke Moore**, Policy Analyst, Sustainable Prosperity for Europe

Since 2019, energy has become an increasingly [critical topic for the EU](#). Russia's invasion of Ukraine drastically underscored the urgency of transitioning to renewable energy sources and achieving energy independence. However, the transition so far has faced [multiple challenges](#) including, grid congestion, dependence on raw materials, and social issues such as skills gaps and [rising energy poverty](#). The party manifestos collectively underscore the need to reach net-zero: however, the energy transition remains framed in terms of security, independence and economic opportunity, with less focus on ensuring a just transition.

Reducing dependency on external energy sources is a dominant theme for every party,. A significant driving factor is the renewed push for an energy single market, aimed at enhancing Europe's position as a major player, undeniably fuelled by concerns over security and competitiveness from third countries. For example, while ALDE and PES highlight the importance of cohesive energy infrastructure, the EPP and EDP explicitly endorse the concept of an Energy Union. The Left, EFA and Greens as well argue for EU energy dependency. [The Left](#) proposes establishing a funding channel to help municipalities achieve energy sovereignty, focusing on local energy consumption and production to reduce external dependencies. [The Greens](#) push for transitioning EU energy away from fossil fuels to renewable sources and small-scale production in the name of sustainability, but also resilience and security. Relatedly, the discourse around Europe's energy transition is increasingly approached from a business perspective. That overshadows its social dimensions. While most parties acknowledge the importance of reducing consumer costs and improving energy efficiency, the central role of citizens is largely lost. For [EPP](#), citizens are presented alongside entrepreneurs. The emphasis on protecting SMEs, represents the extent of some manifestos' social considerations, maintaining a strong link to business interests at the expense of a broader consideration.

In contrast, the PES, Greens, and the Left adopt a more critical stance. They advocate for taxing polluters, measures that combat energy poverty and promote an inclusive energy system, focusing more intently on ensuring a fair transition. At the far end of the spectrum, the Left pushes for public ownership of energy resources and a European basic income that guarantees all citizens a minimum income sufficient to cover essential needs, including energy.

Consequently, only a few manifestos fully raise the social concerns of a just transition, focusing instead on economic and security benefits. This trend risks perpetuating a cycle where energy transition-related policies fail to adequately identify, discuss and address the transitional costs faced by citizens.

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# Industry and competitiveness



**Philipp Lausberg**, Policy Analyst, Europe's Political Economy

With businesses around Europe ringing alarm bells over high energy prices, skills shortages, excessive red tape, financing difficulties and US and Chinese industrial subsidies, the topic of competitiveness plays a prominent role in the EP election campaign.

For ALDE and the EPP strengthening the Single Market is key to improving the EU's competitive edge. The liberals demand the removal of all existing internal barriers for products, services, and public procurement, with a particular focus on deepening Capital Markets and Banking Unions to improve access to finance for private innovators. The EPP propose a "Competitiveness Strategy for Europe" focusing on cutting red tape with a dedicated Commissioner, competitiveness checks on all EU policy initiatives and the demand to remove two existing pieces of legislation for each newly introduced one ("one-in-two-out"). The EPP also wants a competition policy conducive to the creation of European champions, which can better compete on the global level, a demand they share with the PES.

Parties in the left spectrum focus on industrial policy and EU strategic investments as drivers for competitiveness. The Greens want to introduce a "Green and Social Transition Fund" equivalent to "at the very least 1% of EU GDP per year", mainly financed by joint borrowing at the EU level. In a "Made in Europe" strategy, the PES proposes to reindustrialise the EU with an Investment Plan for the Green and Digital Transitions and joint financing of projects of common interest, but it does not indicate how significant these fundings should be. The Left plans to turn the RRF into a permanent instrument and let the ECB directly finance their "massive action plan" for jobs, public services, green industry, energy, and infrastructure. Both the Greens and the Left want to remove the Stability and Growth Pact in its current form to allow for more investment on the national level. This is traditionally opposed by the EPP, while ALDE calls for a limitation of national subsidies.

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**Both the Greens and the Left want to remove the Stability and Growth Pact in its current form to allow for more investment on the national level.**

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While the EPP does not specify where the money for their proposed "active economic and industrial policy" should be drawn from, ALDE envisages only a simplification of existing EU investment instruments and their prioritisation for strategic challenges and for projects with cross-border impact. Most parties call for the relief and support of SMEs, while nobody mentions mid-caps the EU's hidden champions which hold untapped potential for improving EU competitiveness, as [EPC research](#) has shown.

None of the manifestos sufficiently combine strengthening the Single Market and cutting red tape with an upscaling of EU-level public investment. But in an increasingly challenging global geo-economic situation, this would be needed to provide both the incentives for efficient resource allocation and the necessary financial mobilisation to revive the EU's industry and bring its competitiveness back on track.

# Digital



**Riccardo Bosticco**, Programme Assistant, Europe's Political Economy

Without the digital transformation Europe's industrial leadership will not be revived. The major aspects discussed in relation to the digital transformation include economic growth, industrial competitiveness, social fairness, as well as the security of our democratic systems. All political parties recognise the importance of AI in Europe's future, and how the digital and green transitions are interconnected. However, the framing of the discussion differs significantly across the manifestos.

With its detailed approach, the EDP's manifesto provides a thorough understanding of the risks and opportunities of digital transformation. It highlights the risks of disinformation and digital warfare, while also pointing out the potential for digitalising sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, and fishery. The emphasis on making the digital transition as inclusive as possible is a crucial aspect. Similarly, PES and the Left's focus on quality jobs and opposition to precarious work, and the Greens' efforts to eliminate hate speech and discrimination from the internet, underscore the potential benefits and risks of the digital transformation.

Regarding concrete proposals, the EPP and EDP mention the completion of the Digital Single Market, which would also benefit the digital workforce – as advocated by PES and the Left – but fall short of indicating action to be taken. Finally, ALDE demands the establishment of rules for the use of digital technologies in warfare, and like the EDP, it calls for a European Digital Watchdog and the use of existing funds to develop adults' digital literacy.

It is crucial to note that all the manifestos lack a deeper discussion on the [critical technologies](#) that are pivotal for the EU's digital future and competitiveness, beyond artificial intelligence (AI). The EPP's proposal to support '[European pilot line infrastructure for semiconductor innovations](#)' and create AI and computing centres for excellence, and the EDP's suggestion to '[increase semiconductor and chip production in the EU through a common strategy](#)', are steps in the right direction. However, a more comprehensive discussion on the

challenges and actions needed for the semiconductors, quantum, and biotech industries would be imperative to fully address the digital future.

This oversight demonstrates the parties' necessity to think more holistically about the future of European digital ecosystems. From the rights of digital staffers to containing disinformation, the intrinsic interconnectedness of the digital transformation demands an encompassing approach that varies excessively across the manifestos considered.

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**It is crucial to note that all the manifestos lack a deeper discussion on the critical technologies that are pivotal for the EU's digital future and competitiveness, beyond artificial intelligence (AI).**

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# Enlargement



**Berta López Domènech**, Junior Policy Analyst, European Politics and Institutions programme

Two years after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine brought enlargement back high on the EU's agenda, the main Europarties – the EPP, PES, ALDE, the Greens, and the Left – remain committed to it, at least on paper. All of them mention enlargement in their manifestos, but beyond the verbal commitment to it, there are almost no concrete proposals on the steps needed to make it happen. An exception is ALDE's proposal to invite candidate countries to participate in the next EU elections and to offer them observer non-voting status in EU institutions, which is in line with the idea of gradual integration. The EPP also calls for closer cooperation until full accession to make candidates ready for membership.

Parties refuse to set dates or specific timelines for the accession of candidates to the EU. Only the Liberals hope that candidates are ready to meet all accession criteria by 2029, but still refrain from suggesting an entry date. The lack of concrete innovative proposals suggests that Europarties either lack the sufficient political will to deliver on enlargement or that they are unable to figure out how to translate rhetoric into reality. Additionally, it also signals that the idea of opening the doors to new members is not appealing to EU citizens. In fact, [according to recent polls](#), 45% would support Ukraine's membership, but the levels of support for the Balkan candidates are 10 points lower.

Similarly to the European Council's draft outline of the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, EU parties with the exception of the European Left look at enlargement through geopolitical lenses, as a tool to ensure the security of the continent and to strengthen the EU's position as a global actor. The Left, instead, warns that enlargement must not be used to "increase military tensions".

PES, ALDE and the Greens highlight the link between enlargement and EU internal reforms, in line with what the European Council already stated in 2023. However, the concrete changes that would be needed are not specified, apart from the Greens' who mention the need to abandon unanimity in the Council in accession-related matters. The Socialists open the door to "targeted treaty changes" to make sure the EU remains functional, and the Greens go as far as to consider the reform of the treaties as a condition for the EU to be able to welcome new members. The EPP, despite not linking

it directly to enlargement also mentions the possibility of a convention to discuss "possible improvements to the treaties".

There is a consensus among Europarties that the geopolitical imperative to enlarge should not lead to shortcuts in the process and that candidates will only join the EU when they meet the accession criteria, particularly when it comes to democratic institutions, rule of law and respect for human rights. However, EU parties fail to require the EU to respect conditionality and deliver on its commitments when candidates have done their homework.

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**EU parties fail to require the EU to respect conditionality and deliver on its commitments when candidates have done their homework.**

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One would hope that the emphasis on the EU's fundamental values and the Copenhagen criteria – related to functioning democratic institutions and market economy, and the capacity to implement the EU acquis – will lead to a change in the EU's misguided policy towards the Balkans which long prioritised stability over democracy and overlooked authoritarian tendencies of regional political leaders.

# EU reform



**Matteo Gorgoni**, Programme Assistant, European Politics and Institutions

As the party manifestos of 2024 reflect a growing interest in EU reform, three main attitudes characterise the position of European parties.

First, ALDE and EDP, from the liberal-democratic Parliament group, as well as the European Green Party devote an entire section to treaty change. The proposals are extensive, detailed, and reflect a political determination to press for more ambitious changes. Transfers of competences are not clearly endorsed by ALDE. The Greens strongly support the transfer of new competences at EU level, in areas like health, taxation, and social protection, in line with the outcome of the Conference on the future of Europe. The EDP, for its part, calls on granting the Parliament co-decision powers over the EU budget. All three parties also commit to broaden the scope of qualified majority voting, notably on foreign policy, security and defence, taxation, or to determine breaches to EU's founding values under Article 7 TEU. They call to secure larger budgets by pulling new own resources from the Emission Trading System or the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism.

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**The proposals are extensive, detailed, and reflect a political determination to press for more ambitious changes.**

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EU reform was entirely absent from the PES and EPP 2019 manifestos. Five years later, both parties claim their openness to treaty revision but provide few details about their position and vision for a reformed Union. The socialists' manifesto does not mention new transfers of powers at the EU level, while the EPP emphasise the need to respect member states prerogatives according to current frameworks. This suggests that both parties are waiting for their leaders in the European Council to agree on a future roadmap.

Finally, the ECR and the European Left advocate for an agenda aimed at impeding federalist progress, maintaining the status-quo, disempowering the EU, or consolidating national authority. The Left aims at deconstructing the assets of the current treaties, and to replace them with a new social, ecological, and ideological architecture. For this reason, they want to inscribe "anti-fascist" and "anti-nazi" values in the treaties' preamble. They suggest granting the European Parliament the right of initiative, while however strengthening the role of national parliament, and allowing national authorities to reject EU "anti-social" and "neoliberal" measures. The radical right merely commits to prevent additional transfers of authority to the EU, by opposing federalist-leaning reforms, and by "leveraging EU Treaty requirements such as the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality".

The **European Policy Centre** is an independent, not-for-profit think tank dedicated to fostering European integration through analysis and debate, supporting and challenging European decision-makers at all levels to make informed decisions based on sound evidence and analysis, and providing a platform for engaging partners, stakeholders and citizens in EU policymaking and in the debate about the future of Europe.

The **European Politics and Institutions** programme covers the EU's institutional architecture, governance and policymaking to ensure that it can move forward and respond to the challenges of the 21st century democratically and effectively. It also monitors and analyses political developments at the EU level and in the member states, discussing the key questions of how to involve European citizens in the discussions over the Union's future and how to win their support for European integration. The programme has a special focus on enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans, questions of EU institutional reform and illiberal trends in European democracies.

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