

4 - 8 November 2024

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### I. Political and Policy Developments

#### 1. Commissioners-designate face parliamentary grillings

The European Parliament's confirmation hearings for incoming EU commissioners kicked off on 4 November, with junior commissioners up first and executive vice presidents (EVPs) set to follow on 12 November.

Most junior commissioners sailed through their hearings with approval. This group includes returning commissioners **Maroš Šefčovič** (Trade and Economic Security, Interinstitutional Relations, and Transparency) and **Wopke Hoekstra** (Climate, Net-Zero, and Clean Growth), along with fresh faces like **Ekaterina Zaharieva** (Startups, Research and Innovation) and **Christophe Hansen** (Agriculture and Food). Despite initial reservations, **Jessika Roswall** (Environment, Water Resilience, and a Competitive Circular Economy) and **Hadja Lahbib** (Preparedness, Crisis Management, and Equality) were approved, following a deal among centrist parties.

**Oliver Varhelyi** (Health and Animal Welfare) was the only candidate who did not go through at the first stage. MEPs sent a second round of written questions, with MEPs scheduled to examine his answers on 11 November. He is ultimately still expected to be approved as there is little appetite in the European Parliament to destabilise the fragile political balance. There are also concerns that Hungarian PM Orbán might retaliate against Varhelyi's rejection by delaying the whole process.

Among the key policy commitments that emerged from the hearings:

### Industrial Policy

- **Clean Industrial Deal:** Focus on clean tech, heavy industry, and energy affordability, including by leveraging EU schemes like the Innovation Fund, Social Climate Fund, and Just Transition Fund.
- **Single market:** Focus on enforcing existing legislation and ensuring a level-playing field.
- **Fair Taxation:** Ensure large companies, including multinational firms, contribute appropriately.

### Tech

- **Biotech Act:** Enhance biotech innovation by leveraging AI and the European Health Data Space, speeding up clinical trials.
- **Digital Fairness Act:** Strengthen consumer protections in existing digital regulations.
- **New Consumer Agenda:** Ensure adequate consumer protection in the digital age.

## Environment

- **Circular Economy Act:** Unlock the potential of secondary raw material recycling and streamline waste management rules.
- **EU Deforestation Regulation:** Implement the EUDR by the end of 2025.
- **Bioeconomy Strategy:** Transform agricultural waste into valuable products, support circular agriculture, and create rural economic opportunities.

## Climate

- **Post-2030 Climate Policy:** Implement key climate targets, including the 90% emissions reduction target by 2040, and car industry targets for 2025, 2030, and 2035.
- **Climate Adaptation Plan:** Link the plan to the Commission's next budget.
- **Emission Trading System 2.0:** Expand scheme to maritime, aviation, and waste sectors.

## Agriculture

- **Water Resilience Initiative:** Focus on nature-based solutions and integrated river management.
- **Pesticides:** Reduce pesticide use and accelerate alternative solutions, especially biocontrol and precision farming.
- **Nature Restoration Law / Nature Credits:** Promote nature restoration efforts.

## Chemicals

- **Chemical Industry Package:** Simplify administration and speed up the substitution of hazardous chemicals.
- **REACH Revision:** Modernise the regulatory framework, addressing endocrine disruptors.
- **PFAS Restriction:** Ban PFAS in consumer products such as cosmetics, food packaging, and outdoor clothing.

## Health

- **Tobacco:** Address concerns about novel tobacco products, and review the Tobacco Products Directive, Tobacco Advertising Directive, and Tobacco Taxation Directive.
- **Obesity:** Tackle the role of ultra-processed foods (UPFs) in driving youth obesity, exploring measures within the framework of the Cardiovascular Health Plan.
- **Food Labelling:** Support fit-for-purpose labelling, but no commitment to a specific food labelling model.

## Trade

- **Reciprocity:** Implement stricter environmental and safety standards in trade policy.
- **Critical Raw Materials:** Secure a critical raw materials chapter in all trade agreements.

- **Mercosur:** Continue technical negotiations to reach a “fair agreement” that safeguards farmers' interests.

## 2. Fully-fledged Health Committee on the horizon

Centrist parties have struck an agreement to establish a fully-fledged Public Health Committee (SANT) in the European Parliament, as part of the broader package deal that confirmed Commissioners-designate Hadja Lahbib and Jessika Roswall.

SANT will now operate as a stand-alone committee, taking the lead on issues like pharmaceuticals and medical devices, health preparedness, mental health, and relations with the WHO — topics that were previously overseen by the Environment Committee (ENVI), now rebranded as Committee on Environment, Climate and Food Safety. Meanwhile, ENVI will continue to handle environment, climate, food safety and pesticide legislation, as well as chemicals, dangerous substances, and cosmetics.

## 3. EU leaders sign off competitiveness declaration in aftermath of US elections

European heads of state or government signed off on a [‘Declaration on the New European Competitiveness Deal’](#) during an informal Council meeting in Budapest on 8 November.

The Declaration, which follows the election of Donald Trump in the US, looks to boost competitiveness to enhance the EU’s sovereignty, security, resilience and global influence. It proposes measures to close gaps in growth, productivity, and innovation, with a key target of directing 3% of EU GDP to research and innovation by 2030. Additionally, the deal calls on the Commission to present proposals by June 2025 to enhance the EU’s technological capabilities.

## 4. Germany's coalition government collapses

Germany’s federal government collapsed after Chancellor Olaf Scholz fired Finance Minister Christian Lindner of the liberal Free Democrats (FDP). Scholz accused Lindner of having broken his trust by publicly calling for fundamentally different economic policies, including tax cuts for top earners. Scholz now leads a minority coalition and faces an uphill confidence vote on January 15, which is likely to result in snap elections by March 2025.

Current polls suggest that a centre-right government is highly likely to emerge.

## II. Key institutional milestones

Date	Event
4 - 12 November	European Commissioners-designate hearings
27 November (exp)	European Parliament vote on the new Commission
1 December (exp)	New European Commission takes office
1 December	New European Council President takes office