STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AT EU LEVEL FOR THE 2024-2029 PERIOD

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Abstract:
The Strategic Agenda of the European Union is a document or set of priorities guiding the EU actions and policies over a given period of time, usually established by the European Commission in collaboration with the member states. It defines the major objectives and strategic directions to respond to global and internal challenges, promoting the interests and values of the Union.
The strategic agenda of the European Union for the next five years incorporates both the traditional values and founding documents of the bloc, as well as the reforms and new challenges that have emerged in recent years. The European elections have given a new configuration to the European Parliament and the other European institutions. The new cycle also means defining the Union's strategic agenda for the next five years, a document that lies under the responsibility of the European Council. This strategic orientation was prepared starting with the second half of 2023, during the Spanish presidency, and was finalized during the Belgian presidency in the first half of 2024.
Keywords: *strategic agenda, priorities, directions of action, European policies, solidarity.*

Preamble

It is well known that every five years, the European Union leaders agree on the EU political priorities for the future, a process that takes place in the context of the European Parliament elections and before the appointment of each European Commission. The establishment of these priorities stems from the very need for the member states to continue their efforts to achieve common objectives.

The need to identify these priorities arose in the context in which the European Union was marked by increasingly complex crises and challenges of an economic and geopolitical nature. This is also the reason why European leaders had the mission to establish a precise strategic plan for the coming years and, at the same time, to provide a solid framework for immediate actions. Specifically, the EU strategy includes key actions based on a detailed action plan to promote the objectives of the Union, as well as the development of a "culture of preparedness by design" in all EU policies.

At the European level, a great importance is given to *strategic planning*, a process by which the EU defines its vision, mission, objectives and strategies, as well as how it will allocate resources to achieve these objectives within a certain time interval. The EU strategy envisages a coherent set of policies and actions designed to overcome the most important challenges it faces. [1]

Adopted by the European Council, *The Strategic Agenda of the European Union* represents a comprehensive strategic framework that defines the political priorities, medium and long-term objectives and the directions of action of the European Union for a given period, usually a 5-year institutional cycle, linked to the mandate of the European Commission. The Strategic Agenda is considered a "compass for the coordination of policies and actions of the EU institutions, member states and external partners" [2], aiming to strengthen the unity, competitiveness and global influence of the Union, in the context of internal and external challenges, such as geopolitical changes, economic crises, digital transformations, climate change and security threats.

Chronologically, the first Strategic Agenda was adopted in June 2014 and was the product of a particular political context. The Prime Minister of Great Britain at that time, David Cameron, opposed the appointment of Jean-Claude Juncker as President of the European Commission and, as such, asked the European Council to draw up a document setting out the main directions of Juncker's mandate, which the British considered as being too "federalist".

The 2019 strategic agenda underwent a longer development process, involving more significant institutional elements, compared to those specific to the 2014 document. It attempted to highlight the unity of the European Union after Brexit and, at the same time, established a set of ambitious, and at the same time, vaguely formulated, political priorities that covered a wide range of areas: rule of law, security and defense, the achievement of the Banking Union and the Capital Markets Union, digital transformation, artificial intelligence, entrepreneurship, small and medium-sized enterprises, the European competition framework, climate neutrality, the energy market and others.

The process of drafting the Strategic Agenda is based on consultations between the leaders of the member states within the European Council, taking into account the analyses of the global context, the contributions from the European Commission and

resolutions of the European Parliament. The document reveals a political consensus among the member states, an aspect which sometimes makes its formulation a complex process, requiring the balance between national interests and the common objectives of the Union.

The agenda influences the allocation of financial resources (e.g. the EU multiannual budget), legislative initiatives and EU positions in international negotiations. For example, the European Green Deal was a direct consequence of the strategic priorities set in 2019.

For the period 2019-2024, the European Council defined the strategic agenda in June 2019 and pursued four priorities for the Union [3]: protecting citizens and freedoms; developing a strong and vibrant economic base; building a climate-neutral, green, fair and social Europe; promoting European interests and values on the world stage.

The EU Summit in Granada [4], Spain, in October 2023, represents the meeting in which the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 was launched. This opened the way for discussions in the following months to develop the strategic agenda [5], coordinated by former President Charles Michel, through close collaboration with the leaders of the EU countries.

It is important to note that the strategic agenda is not a binding legislative document, but a political guide that directs the work of the EU institutions (the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of the EU) and of the member states. It integrates priorities from multiple areas – economic, social, environmental, security, foreign policy – to ensure a coherent and integrated approach.

The responsibility for implementing the Agenda lies primarily with the European Commission, which translates priorities into concrete policies, and with the member states, which implement them at national level. The European Parliament plays a key role in approving and monitoring these policies. The doctrine considers [6] the Strategic Agenda to be a document that is adaptable to unforeseen changes, such as geopolitical or economic crises. For example, in 2022, the EU adjusted its priorities to respond to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, emphasizing energy security and military support.

Implications of the development of the 2024-2029 Strategic Agenda

The Strategic Agenda reflects the EU's commitment to promoting democracy, the rule of law, fundamental rights and solidarity, which is achieved both within the Union and in external relations, by supporting multilateralism and a rule-based international order [7]. This document sets out the EU priorities and its strategic orientations for a 5-year institutional cycle. More specifically, it guides the work of the EU institutions [8]. The work on the agreed priorities is taken forward by EU institutions and member states and is reflected within the Multiannual Financial Framework, the EU long-term budget.

The strategic agenda refers to the general role of the European Council, as it is enshrined in the Treaty on European Union (TEU), in Article 15, which provides that it is the one that gives the EU "the necessary impetus for its development" as well as "the general political directions and priorities" [9]. However, the development of a strategic agenda is not an attribution expressly stated in the Treaty, and the European Council has not been formalised with a fixed procedure or methodology.

The agenda is developed in the global and European context, addressing challenges such as climate change, digitalization, geopolitical tensions, migration, economic inequalities or health crises. For example, in the context of the war in Ukraine or the global economic competition, the agenda included measures for security, economic resilience and green transition.

The process of developing the 2024-2029 strategic agenda, launched at the informal meeting of the European Council in Granada on 6 October 2023, targeted the main priorities and actions necessary for a strong, dynamic, competitive and cohesive Europe in a changing world [10].

During the meeting, EU leaders noted the achievements to date and set long-term priorities for strengthening EU's strategic autonomy. The discussions culminated in the adoption of the Granada Declaration, in which they outlined the main priorities and actions aimed at transforming Europe into a strong, dynamic and competitive power. Thus, building on the work of previous meetings of the European political community, leaders also discussed ways in which Europe can become more *resilient*, more *prosperous* and more *geostrategic*.

In terms of method, it was essential to define the strategic orientations for the Union in a collective and inclusive way. The preparation of the strategic agenda required multiple efforts, both at the level of the European Council and at the level of the teams involved. The approach was based on close cooperation with the EU institutions, taking into account the work carried out to date. Particular attention was paid to factors such as: the new geopolitical context that brought enlargement back to the centre of debates; the enlargement process and the capacity of the EU to absorb new members; the implications of enlargement on various EU policies and their financing, and also on our decision-making methods.

In the months that followed (November 2023 - April 2024), EU leaders regularly discussed the direction and objectives of the EU for the years to come. Thus, consultations between the President of the European Council and the leaders of the member states took place in 2023 in Berlin (13th of November), Copenhagen (14th of November), Zagreb (16th of November) and Paris (28th of November), followed in 2024 by those in Vilnius (2nd of April), Bucharest (3rd of April), Warsaw (11th of April), Vienna (12th of April). Against this background, two meetings of the European Council were held, on 14th -15th of December 2023 and 21st - 22nd of March 2024, as well as an extraordinary meeting on 17th - 18th of April. The Strategic Agenda was subsequently adopted on the 27th of June 2024.

By referring to the documents that precede it, from 2014 and 2019, it was considered that the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 is a “typical agreement package” [11], but without an action calendar, it has a rather ambiguous expression, given the complexity of the internal and external challenges that the European Union is facing, and the objectives are more likely declarative, without being accompanied by a prioritization of actions.

Moreover, analysing the form and manner in which it is developed, it is stated that the Strategic Agenda is not, despite its name, “strategic” [12], since a strategy mentions the objectives to be achieved based on a detailed plan of actions correlated with the use of clearly defined political, institutional and financial means, necessary for implementation. However, the fact that the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 comes at a historical moment full of challenges for the EU should not be neglected.

Shaped around three pillars – *a free and democratic Europe, a strong and secure Europe, a prosperous and competitive Europe*, the 2024-2029 Strategic Agenda, sets out, in concrete terms, the priorities that the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission must put into practice in the next institutional cycle. The document mentions the objectives to be achieved. Thus, a free and democratic Europe pursues, as general objectives, among others: protecting the respect for the rule of law, strengthening democratic resilience, protecting the freedom and pluralism of the media and civil society, countering foreign interference and combating attempts at destabilization, and, at global level, promoting peace, justice, stability and democracy, universal human rights and the achievement of sustainable development goals.

A strong and secure Europe considers the importance of EU enlargement as a geostrategic investment in peace, stability and security, a stronger and more capable European Union in the field of security and defence, supporting Ukraine *"in its fight to preserve its independence and sovereignty and to regain its territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders"*, expanding capabilities and strengthening the industrial and technological base of European defence.

A prosperous and competitive Europe has as its main objectives the strengthening of the EU long-term competitiveness, by strengthening economic sovereignty overall and in strategic sectors, and transforming Europe into a technological and industrial power. This entails closing the gaps that the Union faces in terms of growth, productivity and innovation compared to its international partners and main competitors. Deepening the single market, in particular in the areas of energy, finance and telecommunications, is another major objective of the Strategic Agenda. The European Union also aims to accelerate financial integration by achieving the Capital Markets Union and completing the Banking Union, while reducing harmful dependencies and diversifying and securing its strategic supply chains.

In concrete terms, the European institutions have started to put into practice some of the objectives set out in the Strategic Agenda. Thus, at the European Council meeting of 20th -21st of March 2025 [13], the priorities for the 2025 European Semester were considered and the invitation was launched to approve the Recommendation on the

economic policy of the euro area. It was also established that rapid and decisive progress is needed in developing an Economic and Investment Union, with a particular focus on the Capital Markets Union, to mobilise economies, unlock the necessary investments and accelerate financial integration, in order to support the competitiveness of the EU. The meeting also mentioned the progress made in implementing measures on migration.

The European Council held a first exchange of views on the multiannual financial framework and its own new resources. In essence, in support of innovation, investment, convergence, growth, connectivity and economic resilience, the European Council called for increased efforts at all levels to ensure a clear, simple and smart regulatory framework and to deliver rapid results in reducing administrative, regulatory and reporting tasks. These issues [14] are also reflected in its conclusions of April 2024, in the Budapest Declaration on the New Deal for European Competitiveness as well as in the Commission Communication entitled “Compass for Competitiveness” of 29 January 2025.

In the context of the challenges facing democracies in the European space today, the Polish Presidency of the EU proposed to draw up a set of Council conclusions on strengthening the democratic resilience of the EU [15]. The conclusions aim to strengthen the EU capacity to address current challenges to democratic resilience. These emphasise the importance of a whole-of-society approach, highlight the essential role of civil society organisations and underline the need for adequate funding of measures to strengthen democratic resilience. Other aspects of the conclusions include the need to support democracy through civic education programmes, cyber and media literacy campaigns and independent media, the importance of fair elections and the need for active responses to foreign manipulation of information and foreign interference, including disinformation.

The Council of the EU has started preparations for the European Council meeting on the 26th -27th of June 2025 by discussing an annotated draft agenda, which includes the issues to be addressed by the European leaders [16]: the war of aggression of Russia against Ukraine, the latest developments in the Middle East, the European security and defence, the EU in the world, competitiveness and migration. The preparatory work will continue at the next General Affairs Council meeting on 24 June 2025.

It can be seen that, at the EU level, efforts are being made to ensure the achievement of the objectives mentioned in the Strategic Agenda, with each institution having a specific role [17] in implementing the actions intended to lead to the achievement of these objectives.

Conclusions

The Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 bears the imprint of a historic moment full of challenges for the EU, when it must ensure and strengthen economic security, develop its defence capabilities, while reducing the public debts of the member states, protect the well-being of its citizens, achieve the climate and digital transition, in an international context marked by growing instability and increased strategic competition. The Agenda includes proposals and presents ambitious objectives, being considered a genuine instrument for real long-term political choices and consistent planning.

There has also been criticism [18] of the new EU Strategic Agenda for 2024-2029, partly due to its form and the way it is drafted, and also because it does not explicitly prioritise health issues, including the European Health Union Initiative (EHU). This omission has raised concerns among health organisations and publications monitoring European policies, who argue that health should remain a central element in EU strategic planning [19]. It has been argued [20] that this focus of the Strategic Agenda on broader objectives such as economic growth and security, while important, may diminish the need for dedicated health initiatives. Health advocates have argued that, without explicit commitments to health, the EU risks failing to achieve its objectives of building a truly resilient and healthy Europe. Thus, it is requested that the new European Commission reaffirm its commitment to the European Health Union and ensure that health remains a central pillar of EU policies.

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