



POLITICAL  
INTELLIGENCE

# The French Presidency of the Council of the European Union

By Vincent Tournebize and Oona Bienvenu

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# Contents

- 4 Introduction
- 5 French presidency of the EU priorities and plans
- 11 Key figures of the French presidency of the EU
- 13 Events held in France between 14 January and June 2022

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# Introduction

France's presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first six months of 2022 should be an exciting and invigorating period for the 27-nation bloc. It is the first time in 14 years that France, the continent's second largest economy, leading military power and a founding member of the EU, has held this position. France is also led by a staunchly pro-EU president, Emmanuel Macron, who is well known for his energetic approach to policy.

However, the EU faces a range of significant policy challenges. Soaring energy prices have raised questions about the cost of living, the EU's energy policies and dependencies, and its net zero ambitions; the Covid-19 pandemic continues to weigh on European health systems and economies; the European Commission is at odds with Hungary and Poland over rule of law issues; the relationship with the UK since Brexit remains tricky; and a Russian troop build-up on the border with Ukraine has put NATO and the EU's eastern member states on edge. France's EU presidency also comes at a crucial and uncertain juncture in its domestic politics, with the country due to hold presidential elections in April that are being contested by several Eurosceptic candidates. The country may have a new president—with different views on the EU—by the time it wraps up its EU presidency.

Although Paris has drawn up the EU's agenda for the next 18 months in concert with the Czech Republic and Sweden, Macron has said the French priorities are climate change, digital transformation, and security. Speaking in the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 19 January, the French president evoked the spirit of former French foreign minister Robert Schuman, whose 1950 declaration paved the way for a European supranational institution that would eventually develop into the EU: *"Today, it is up to our generations to renew our Europe to fulfil its promises of democracy, progress and peace. Collectively, we have provided the tools to make our Europe a democratic, cultural, and educational power and a power of the future, and a balancing power... we need to rediscover the sense of unity and the taste for the long-term, ultimately daring, and the sense of what Robert Schuman called creative efforts, without invective, divisions, prohibitions or tricks."*

This Dods Political Intelligence report outlines the French agenda for the EU and provides stakeholder reaction and recommendations. It also sets out the views on the EU of the leading candidates in the French presidential elections and concludes with a list of French political figures who will play a key role during the EU presidency and events scheduled to take place in France over the period.

# French presidency of EU – priorities and plans

France agreed its overarching priorities for the EU with the Czech Republic and Sweden—who will hold the rotating presidency for the following two six-month periods, in keeping with the system of member states operating in groups of three. The trio **set out** the following four themes to guide their work over the next 18 months, which were approved by the EU's General Affairs Council 14 December, 2021:

- **To protect the citizens and freedoms** by focusing on respecting and protecting European values such as democracy, rule of law, gender equality, and on strengthening the Schengen area and the EU's common asylum and migration policy
- **To promote a new growth and investment model for Europe**, based on sustainable green growth and strengthening the EU's industrial and digital sovereignty
- **To build a greener and more socially equitable Europe** that better protects the health of Europeans

- **A global Europe** that promotes multilateralism and renewed international partnerships and adopts a shared vision among the 27 member states on strategic threats

The trio also reiterated their determination to continue the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and its “economic and social consequences.”

**Macron presented** the specific programme of the French Presidency of the Council on 9 December, 2021. Under the slogan “*Recovery, power, belonging*”, he **announced** three major ambitions: “*A more sovereign Europe, a new European model of growth, and a human Europe*”, and **plans** to focus on three specific areas of European legislation:

- The Digital Service Act and Digital Markets Act
- Carbon pricing at EU borders for imported products
- EU minimum wage



The **Conference on the Future of Europe, a forum for EU citizens to debate and put forward ideas on the future direction of the bloc**, will also play an important role in the French presidency. The initiative is due to close in spring, and conclusions are due to be presented later in 2022.

On 19 January the French president delivered a speech in the European Parliament **setting out** further detail on France's aims in the following five priority areas:

## Developing EU health policy in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

The French presidency aims to conclude negotiations on the legislative package on *"Building a European Health Union"*. France plans to support the establishment of the European Health Emergency preparedness and Response Authority (HERA), as well as an Important Project of Common European Interest (IPCEI) to reinforce the EU's industrial policy in the health sector.

The French presidency has also reaffirmed its commitment to drive forward European coordinated efforts to combat the COVID-19 epidemic and strengthen the EU's vaccine production capacities and continue work on setting up an international treaty to combat pandemics.

The French government also aims to initiate negotiations on topics such as the development of digital health, the revision of the EU's pharmaceutical legislation and the revision of the directives on the safety and quality of human blood, tissues, and cells.

It has also said it aims to step-up efforts in the prevention and fight against cancer, antimicrobial resistance, and the mental health of vulnerable young people.

## Improving sovereignty and food self-sufficiency in the agribusiness sector

On agribusiness, France aims to *"encourage discussions on reciprocal environmental and health production standards for European products and products imported from third countries"*. The French presidency intends to work on the introduction of *"recognised low-carbon labels Europe-wide"* and to start debate on the revision of the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive (SUD).

In addition, the presidency aims to *"take forward work on the proposal for a regulation on statistics on agricultural input and output; work on revising European legislation on geographical indications; and work on revising the EU's agricultural product promotion policy"*.

Furthermore, the French government has said it wants to pay particular attention to the prevention and control of highly pathogenic avian influenza, the experience sharing regarding farm animal welfare and the developments of the Plant Health Law.

## Finding a balance between renewable and nuclear energy

The French presidency of the EU aims to *“speed up the development of renewable energy, encourage energy saving and increase energy efficiency in the EU, in particular by accelerating the pace of building renovation and promoting the use of decarbonised energy sources”*. To that end France will look to accelerate discussions on the renewable energy and energy efficiency directives and begin the revision of the Directive on the energy performance of buildings.

The Presidency also said it would ensure that *“EU regulations remain consistent with the development of nuclear energy”*.

In relation to the *“gas package”*, the French presidency plans to revise the regulation on conditions for access to decarbonised gas transmission networks, as well as the directive regulating decarbonised gas markets. Discussions on the proposal for a regulation on methane emissions in the energy sector are also scheduled.

## Developing efficient and greener mobility

In the transport sector, the French presidency plans to advance the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy.

The negotiations of the proposal for the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation (AFIR), the proposal for the *“FuelEU Maritime”* regulation and the proposal for the *“ReFuelEU Aviation”* regulation will also be prioritized.

The French presidency also wants to pursue the reform of the single European sky regulations, and to monitor the negotiation of air agreements with non-EU countries.

Moreover, the Presidency wants to begin the review of the Regulation on Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network (TEN-T) and the revision of the Intelligent Transport Systems Directive.

## Expanding the EU circular economy

To advance the circular economy, the French presidency aims to make progress on negotiations on the Batteries Regulation and promote the reuse and recycling of waste within the internal market as well as the revision of the Regulation on transboundary waste shipments. It also wants to begin negotiations on the *“Sustainable Products Initiative”*.

## Stakeholder reactions and recommendations

**Réseau Action Climat France affirmed** (6/1/22):

*"President of the EU Council, France has the capacity to push for strong proposals and ambitious compromises on the Green Deal, to meet or exceed the EU's climate target of reducing emissions by at least 55% by 2030."*

In a joint open letter (28/7/21), several big-name French companies, including EDF, Airbus and Group ADP, **proposed** multiple priorities for the energy transition and green growth in Europe. They highlighted the importance of reducing greenhouse gas emissions (rather than energy efficiency) to move towards decarbonization. They also said the decarbonization of buildings and the deployment of clean and connected mobility were a priority, as well as the development of hydrogen, the carbon tax, and the improvement of energy efficiency.

The French Union **Fédération Nationale des Travaux Publics (FNTP) highlighted** (14/1/22) two main directives to push forward in the field of public works: *"The review of the Regulation on Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network (TEN-T) and the revision of the Construction Products Regulations"*.

Commenting on the energy transition proposals, **UFC Que Choisir recommended** (6/1/22) that *"France must work towards the introduction of an obligation of result for professionals in terms of the performance of energy renovation work in housing, as well as fairer taxation of energy to promote the energy transition."* The NGO also **stated**: *"The French Presidency must defend an ambitious European reparability index and enable the fastest possible European implementation of the sustainability index for household appliances and the environmental score for food."*

Its European counterpart, **The European Consumer Organization (BEUC) published** (16/12/21) a series of recommendations to the Presidency calling for a strong focus on consumers. In this respect, **BEUC** highlighted several key legislative files for them, including the General Product Safety Regulation, the Consumer Credit directive and the digital markets / digital services acts.

**BusinessEurope**, the largest Brussels-based business group, has **called** (26/11/21) for a focus on restoring Europe's economy and *"combating the complexity of EU proposals that is hampering the development of the millions of small, medium-sized and large European enterprises"*. In this respect, the organisation called upon the Presidency to ensure that European companies can compete equally at the global level.

**Corporate Europe Observatory**, the non-profit research and campaign group, released a highly critical **report** (20/12/21) on the priorities of the French presidency of the EU, arguing that it *"has been prepared in close collaboration with the French corporate sector, and is setting a policy agenda that strongly reflects business demands"*.

The **Confédération Générale de l'Encadrement – GCG (CFE-CGC) said** (22/12/2021) that the French EU presidency was eagerly awaited, but added *"the exercise will be complicated by the [domestic] political context, but everything is not a foregone conclusion"* and noted there may be a *"favourable alignment of the planets"* as France was also leading various other pan-European organisations at the same time, such as the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC).

The **Confédération Générale de l'Encadrement – GCG (CFE-CGC) concluded** (22/12/2021): *«Ambitions displayed... but limited to the first half of the semester»*



## How French presidential candidates view the EU

The French presidency of the Council of the EU coincides with a particularly busy period on the French domestic political calendar with the country due to hold the first and second rounds of the presidential election on 10 April and 24 April followed by legislative elections on the 12 June and 19 June. Depending on how the votes pan out, the country's presidency of the EU could be wrapped up by a different president than the one who launched it. Macron's strong pro-EU views have already become a feature in the electoral campaigns, given the challenge from Eurosceptic parties such as Rassemblement National. A recent survey by polling firm **Odoxa shows** 63% of respondents said that candidates' proposals on Europe would count in their voting choice, while 32% said they considered the presidency of the EU would be an asset for Macron.

Some presidential candidates have accused Macron of trying to use the French presidency of the EU to further his own campaign for re-election and questioned the timing of the French EU presidency at a time when the country is going to the polls. Although, at the time of writing, Macron has yet to officially declare his intention to run for a second term, he is widely expected to throw his hat in the ring.

This section provides details of the key EU priorities of the presidential candidates:

**Emmanuel Macron**, the incumbent and expected candidate of La République En Marche party, has been at the forefront of the French agenda for the rotating EU presidency. His strong support for the EU is well known and he has championed the idea of *"European sovereignty"*, as **shown** by his statement: *"Europe alone can ensure real sovereignty, our capacity to exist in the world today to defend our*

*values and interests. There is a European sovereignty to be built and there is a need to build it."* In this logic, the current President of France wishes to: develop *"a common strategic culture"* within the framework of *"Europe of Defence"*; reform the Schengen area to build *"a common area of borders, asylum and immigration"*; achieve carbon neutrality by 2050; create European industrial alliances to develop projects such as hydrogen, nano-electronics, or the cloud; and define a European minimum wage.

**Valérie Pécresse**, the candidate of the Les Républicains (LR) party, has said she **intends** to defend the principle of the EU in the face of *"populism"*, while also stressing the importance of national sovereignty. She has argued that French constitutional law has primacy over European legislation, following the example of Poland. She has also said she wants better management of immigration through a *"Schengen overhaul"*, has called for an end to enlargement, particularly with regards to Turkey, and has also spoken of the need for an EU-funded *"Marshall Plan"* for Africa, and support for European public procurement.

**Eric Zemmour**, the candidate of the far-right La Reconquête party, has said he wants France to remain in the EU but come *"before Europe"*, following the example of member states like Hungary or Poland. Zemmour has said he would like to take back control of French borders and reform Schengen, stop any further enlargement of the bloc to the east, and block EU free trade agreements. He has also said he would be ready to leave the European Convention on Human Rights.

**Marine Le Pen**, the Rassemblement National (RN) candidate, has said she now wants France to remain in the EU, but sees the bloc as a *"free association of nations"* with a less powerful European Commission. This represents a significantly **shift** in her position in the 2017 presidential elections when she lost to Macron after campaigning to leave the EU.

Le Pen, who is running for president for the third time, has argued in favour of the primacy of French law over European legislation, and called for a renegotiation of the Schengen agreements and reform of the EU's Frontex border force. The daughter of far-right firebrand and National Front founder Jean-Marie Le Pen, has also said Europe should reindustrialise by associating the major European industries.

**Yannick Jadot**, the candidate for Europe Ecologie Les Verts (EELV), **is in favour** of an inclusive and federal Europe centred on the European Green Deal and investments for innovation, ecology and employment. He **sees** the French presidency of the EU as an *"opportunity for France to advance its political priorities for Europe and ecology"*, while his party has said it is an opportunity to support the EU's "Fit for 55" package and advance proposals to boost renewable energy, end the production of fossil-fuel-powered cars, and develop alternative fuels and the carbon adjustment mechanism at the bloc's borders. Jadot has argued that economics should be viewed through the prism of climate change, and proposed reform of the EU's Stability and Growth Pact and budget to promote environmental and social transformation. He has also voiced **concern** about the role lobby

groups have played in the priorities of the French presidency, in particular partnerships with French car manufacturers.

**Jean-Luc Mélenchon**, the candidate of the radical left La France Insoumise (LFI) party, has said he wants to remove France from certain European treaty obligations, including the Stability and Growth Pact and Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance (TSCG). The left-winger has also said he would stop applying the Workers Directive in France, reject free trade agreements, and block any further EU enlargement *"without prior social, fiscal and environmental harmonisation"*. He has also said capital movements should be regulated to prevent tax evasion. Mélenchon, who ran in 2017, has again put forward the idea of a "plan A" and "plan B" for France's approach to the EU, but softened his previous approach that France should hold a national referendum on EU membership if the bloc does not accept his proposals for reform. This time his plan A would involve a temporary break with the European Commission pending discussions on reform, and a less aggressive plan B involving a concerted break from certain treaty obligations if his ideas fall on deaf ears in Brussels and among other member states.



# Key figures of the French presidency of the EU

The following officials are expected to play a key role in the French presidency of the Council of the EU:

## French Government

- **Emmanuel Macron**, the President of the French Republic
- **Jean-Yves Le Drian**, the Minister for Europe, and Foreign Affairs
- **Clément Beaune**, General Secretariat for European Affairs
- **Philippe L glise-Costa**, Head of the Permanent Representation of France to the European Union

## French Parliament

- **Sabine Thillaye**, Member of Parliament (MoDem), Chair of the European Affairs Committee
- **Maud Gatel**, MoDem MP, and **Didier Quentin**, LR MP, co-rapporteurs of the information mission on building strategic independence for the European Union

- **Jean-Fran ois Rapin**, Senator (LR), Chairman of the European Affairs Committee
- **Pascal Allizard** (LR) and **Gis le Jourda** (SER) senators, authors of a report *"Can France contribute to the European awakening in a Chinese 21st century?"*
- **Yves D traigne**, UC Senator
- **Claude Kern** (UC) and **Pierre Laurent** (CRCE), senators, authors of a report *"The inclusion of nuclear energy in the European taxonomy of sustainable activities"*.

## European Parliament

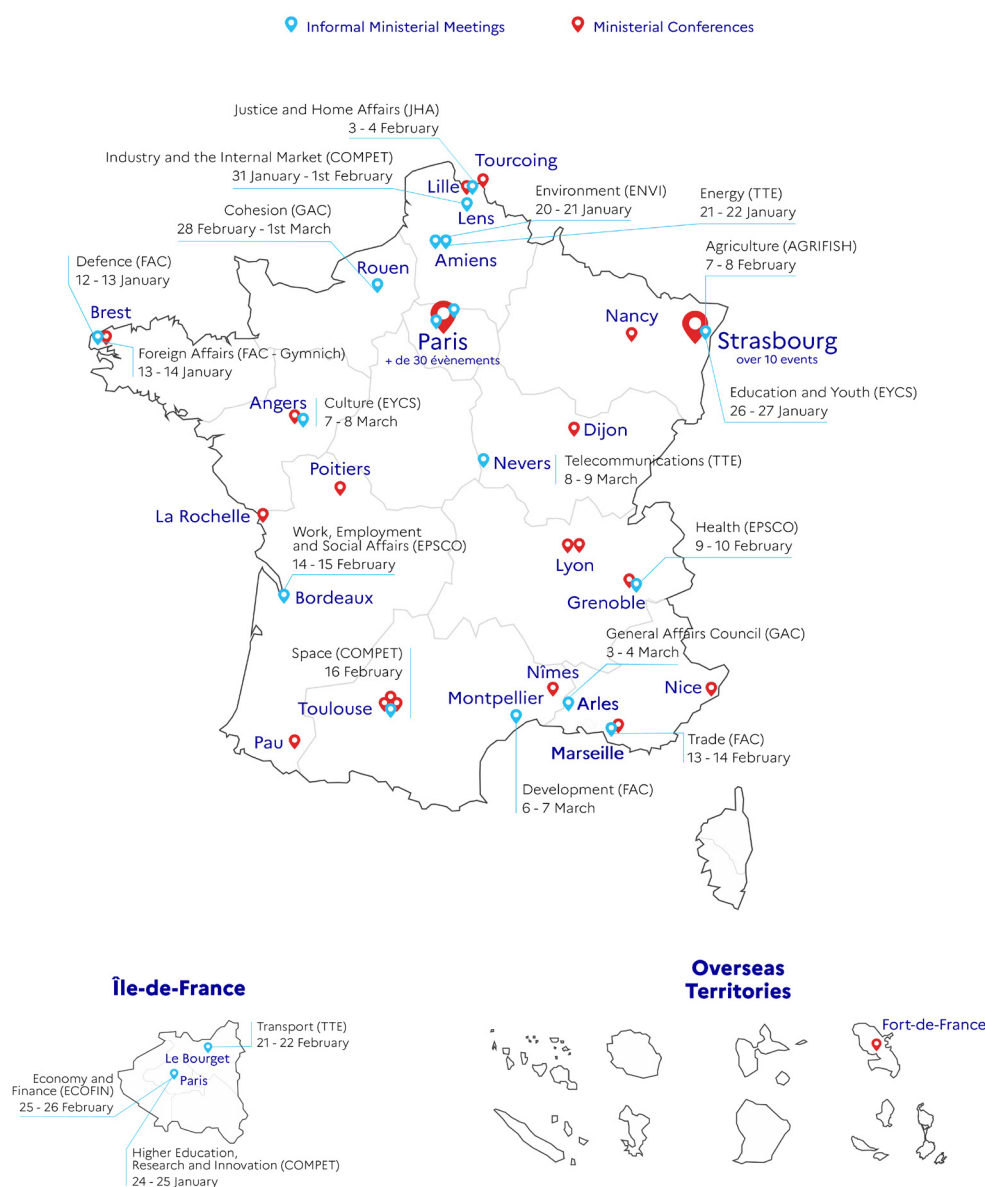
- **St phane S journ **, President of Renew Europe
- **Mich le Rivasi**, co-chair of the French delegation of the Greens/EFA group
- **Fran ois-Xavier Bellamy**, Chairman of the French delegation of the EPP Group

# Planned events in France for EU presidency

400 events will be held in France during the French Presidency of the Council of the EU (in addition to the meetings scheduled in Brussels and Luxembourg). Furthermore, ministerial meetings and conferences will be held at the locations indicated on the following [map](#):



## French Presidency of the Council of the European Union



**Picture:** Map of events in France ©SGPFUEMap of events in France



# Key Dates

## General Affairs

January 25: **General Affairs Council**  
February 9-10: **Conference of EU ministers for public sector transformation and the civil service**  
February 22: **General Affairs Council**  
March 3-4: **Informal meeting of the General Affairs Council (GAC)**  
March 10-11: **Summit of the 27 Heads of State or Government on the “new European model”**  
March 22: **General Affairs Council**  
March 24-25: **European Council**  
April 12: **General Affairs Council**  
May 30: **General Affairs Council**  
June 21: **General Affairs Council**

## Foreign Affairs, Security & Trade

January 12-13: <b>Informal meeting of Defence ministers</b>	March 2: <b>Ministerial Conference on the Coalition for the Sahel</b>
January 12-13: <b>Ministerial Conference of European Outermost Regions in Martinique</b>	March 6-7: <b>Informal Meeting of Development Ministers</b>
January 13-14: <b>Informal Meeting of Foreign Ministers (Gymnich)</b>	March 21: <b>Foreign Affairs Council</b>
January 24: <b>Foreign Affairs Council</b>	March 21: <b>Foreign Affairs Council (Defence)</b>
January 24-26: <b>European Humanitarian Forum</b>	April 11: <b>Foreign Affairs Council</b>
February 13-14: <b>Informal meeting of trade ministers</b>	May 16: <b>Foreign Affairs Council</b>
February 17-18: <b>EU-African Union Summit</b>	May 17: <b>Foreign Affairs Council (Defence)</b>
February 21: <b>Foreign Affairs Council</b>	May 20: <b>Foreign Affairs Council (Development)</b>
February 22: <b>Ministerial Forum for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific</b>	June 3: <b>Foreign Affairs Council (Trade)</b>
	June 20: <b>Foreign Affairs Council</b>
	June 23-24: <b>European Council</b>

## Economic and Financial Affairs

January 17: <b>Eurogroup</b>	March 14: <b>Eurogroup</b>
January 18: <b>ECOFIN Council</b>	March 15: <b>ECOFIN Council</b>
January 21: <b>Conference - Protecting Europeans Against Financial Crime and the Financing of Terrorism</b>	April 4: <b>Eurogroup</b>
February 25-26: <b>Informal Meeting of Ministers for the Economy and Finance</b>	April 5: <b>ECOFIN Council</b>
February 28-March 1: <b>Informal Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Cohesion Policy</b>	May 23: <b>Eurogroup</b>
	May 24: <b>ECOFIN Council</b>
	June 16: <b>Eurogroup</b>
	June 17: <b>ECOFIN Council</b>

## Justice & Home Affairs

February 3-4: **Informal Meeting of JHA Ministers**

February 21: **Conference of Heads of the Supreme Courts of the European Union Member States**

March 3-4: **JHA Council**

June 9-10: **JHA Council**

June 23: **EU-US JHA Ministerial Conference**

## Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs

January 11: **Conference on the Protection of Posted Workers and the Fight Against Fraud**

January 18: **Ministerial Conference on the Resilience of Health Systems to Support Cooperation on a European Scale**

January 31: **Ministerial Conference on Women's Economic Empowerment, a Key to Equal Rights**

February 2: **Ministerial Conference: "Citizenship, ethics and health data"**

February 9-10: **Informal Meeting of Health Ministers**

February 10-11: **Joint Ministerial Conference of Foreign and Health Ministers**

February 14-15: **Informal Meeting of Ministers for Work, Employment and Social Affairs**

February 17-18: **Conference on the Social Economy, the Future of Europe**

February 28: **Ministerial Conference on Combatting Homelessness in the EU**

February 28: **Ministerial Conference on Research and Care Pathways: For a European policy on rare diseases**

March 1: **Ministerial Conference – Employability measures to meet the challenges for economic recovery**

March 7: **"One Health" Ministerial Conference on Antimicrobial Resistance**

March 7-8: **Ministerial Conference on Housing and Construction**

March 9: **Ministerial Conference on Disability**

March 14: **Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council**

March 23: **Tripartite Social Summit**

March 29: **Health Council**

June 16-17: **Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council**

## Competitiveness & Internal Market

January 13: **Conference - Stronger industry for a more independent Europe**

January 31-February 1: **Informal Meeting of Ministers for Industry and for the Internal Market**

February 24: **Competitiveness Council**

June 9-10: **Competitiveness Council**

## Transport, Telecommunications & Energy

January 13-14: **Conference - 20 Years of the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme**

January 20-22: **Informal Meetings of Environment and Energy Ministers**

January 26-27: **Informal Ministerial Conference of Tourism Ministers**

February 1: **Ministerial Conference on Sustainable Urban Development**

February 3-4: **Aviation Summit**

February 16: **Informal Meeting of European Ministers Responsible for Space**

February 21-22: **Informal Meeting of Transport Ministers**

March 8-9: **Informal Meeting of Ministers in charge of Telecommunications**

June 2: **Transport Council**

June 3: **Telecommunications Council**

June 27: **Energy Council**

## Agriculture, Food & Fisheries

January 17: **Agriculture and Fisheries Council**

February 7-8: **Informal Meeting of Agriculture Ministers**

February 11: **One Ocean Summit**

February 21: **Agriculture and Fisheries Council**

March 21: **Agriculture and Fisheries Council**

April 7: **Agriculture and Fisheries Council**

June 13: **Agriculture and Fisheries Council**

## Environment

January 20-22: **Informal Meetings of Environment and Energy Ministers**

February 24-25: **Ministerial Conference: 30 years of the Natura 2000 network**

March 7-8: **European Climate Conference**

March 17: **Environment Council**

June 28: **Environment Council**

## Education, Youth, Culture & Sports

January 20: **Conference - 35 Years of Erasmus**

January 24-25: **Informal Meeting of Ministers  
for Higher Education, Research and Innovation**

January 24-26: **European Youth Conference**

January 26-27: **Informal Meeting of Ministers  
for Education and Youth**

February 7-8: **Ministerial Conference on  
"Sports and Sustainable Development Goals  
in Childhood: Societal issues regarding  
appropriate physical activities"**

March 3-4: **Ministerial Conference on  
the Implementation of the European  
Child Guarantee**

March 3-4: **Ministerial Conference: "Towards  
a Green and Sustainable Deal for Sport"**

March 7-8: **Informal Meeting of Ministers  
for Culture**

March 14-15: **Ministerial Conference on the  
Mental Health of Vulnerable Young People**

April 4-5: **Education, Youth, Culture and  
Sport Council**



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