

INFOCUS

The President of the European Commission and the SOTEU address 2023

C4EP analysis on the subject – *The one to call if You want to talk to Europe? – the President of the European Commission*

“Being careful was understandable. The EU was just a few years after the failure of the ratification of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, and the bumps during the ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty have clearly shown that extreme care is still advised while talking about anything that makes Europe “federal” or seem to be federal or anything comparable to a continental superstate. Still, our analysis does not have to calculate with these political aspects, so we are free to say that the position of the President of the European Commission – as head of the executive branch of the European Union – is closest to the position of the President of the United States – with some clear differences.

We are going to draw an analysis on the current state of the position, partly using the current “State of the European Union” address and also make an educated guess on the future of the position with or without the current President, Ursula von der Leyen.”

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State of the Union 2023

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State of the Union 2023: Live updates on von der Leyen’s speech to the EU

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State of the Union: Was von der Leyen’s speech a precursor to EU election campaign?

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Ursula von der Leyen discreetly considers second term as European Commission president

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Von der Leyen won’t stand as MEP candidate in shot at a second term

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MEP: EPP does everything to make von der Leyen look „stupid”

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Greens slam von der Leyen over plan to not run as MEP

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Ukraine will sue Poland, Hungary and Slovakia over agricultural bans

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C4REPORT

EPC: "The State of the Ethics Union" Conference – 8 September 2023

"There are notable improvements proposed for the rules, particularly pertaining to critical areas such as lobbying meetings, declarations of interests, acceptance of gifts, assets, and affiliations. Concerns were raised regarding the blurry line between public representatives and private interest influencers. Recommendations have been put forth for political parliaments and the Commission, all with the goal of enforcing a code of conduct, with an emphasis on allowing committees to be proactive when necessary. However, as the saying goes, "the devil lies in the details".

On the Commission's side, meetings with institutions are now being held to establish an institutional ethics body described as a standard-setting committee. This initiative might appear to lack political enthusiasm, but it aligns with the implicit and explicit purposes articulated by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen some years ago. The proposal for an ethics body could, at the very least, compel institutions to reevaluate their ethical regulations and foster trust in one another, prompting them to defend their internal rules or, under pressure, revise them."

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EPC: North Macedonia and the EU: Moving towards more integration? – 13 September 2023

“The country has been a candidate for 18 years now, but no chapters have been opened so far. North Macedonia has shown commitment and determination, but the process has been slow – partly because of the naming dispute with Greece – which weakened the credibility of the EU. Osmani highlighted that, because the only driving force for his country is credibility.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs also pointed out that Western Balkan countries in general have no alternative to joining the EU – historically, economically, culturally, they’re connected to the EU. Subtly referring to the situation of Ukraine, he noted that EU enlargement is not a security policy per se, so geopolitical issues shouldn’t be projected to it.”

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EPC: Strengthening Sanctions against Russia: What More Can and Should Be Done? – 18 September 2023

“The aim of the conference organized by EPC was, above all, to provide an overview of the sanctions imposed on Russia since the start of the war, to assess their effectiveness, and to determine the criteria on which future decisions should focus to continue weakening Russia and prevent it from financing the war in Ukraine.

Over the past 18 months, Russia has faced 11 rounds of sanctions aimed at undermining its economy and, consequently, its military-industrial complex. These sanctions encompass various sectors, including energy (oil, gas, and coal), measures targeting Russian propaganda media in Europe (such as Russia Today), an arms embargo, and banking restrictions.”

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C4EPOSITION

Melchior Szczepanik, Head of Brussels Office, Polish Institute of International Affairs

Ursula von der Leyen’s State of the Union address sounded like an electoral pitch though she did not explicitly announced her bid for re-election. The Commission President attempted to highlight her achievements and project an image of a leader who is apt to build bridges between stakeholders with often diverging interests. She underscored the successes of her Commission in what has been a challenging term marked by several crises: the Commission’s role in common purchases of COVID-19 vaccines, creation of the NGEU recovery fund and the SURE facility designed to help member states prevent significant lay-offs during the pandemic, and – more recently – her contribution to mobilising support for Ukraine and adopting sanctions against Russia.

When presenting her goals for the remainder of the term she tried to come across as a moderate able to find the middle ground on the most pressing and controversial issues, and thus capable of satisfying the demands of the vast majority of member states and the leading political forces in the European Parliament. She stressed her commitment to enlargement and further integration but was cautious on institutional reform claiming that treaty change is not a precondition for enlargement. She reiterated her determination to implement the Green Deal but at the same time displayed readiness to adjust the policy to address the concerns of industry and farmers. Finally, she emphasised her determination to defend EU's economic interests while avoiding excessive protectionism or autarkic tendencies. She also adopted a restrained position on China advocating careful reduction of dependencies (derisking) rather than a far-reaching downturn in economic ties (decoupling).

Given the likelihood of EPP's victory in the upcoming European elections and von der Leyen's relatively successful tenure, her re-election will be a safe bet for the majority of member states who will be keen to avoid a protracted dispute about the top EU position in troubled times.