



Council of the
European Union

077084/EU XXVII. GP
Eingelangt am 19/10/21

Brussels, 19 October 2021
(OR. en)

13003/21

INST 354
POLGEN 175
AG 97

COVER NOTE

From:	Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Ms Martine DEPREZ, Director
date of receipt:	19 October 2021
To:	Mr Jeppe TRANHOLM-MIKKELSEN, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union

No. Cion doc.:	COM(2021) 645 final
Subject:	COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS Commission work programme 2022 Making Europe stronger together

Delegations will find attached document COM(2021) 645 final.

Encl.: COM(2021) 645 final



EUROPEAN
COMMISSION

Strasbourg, 19.10.2021
COM(2021) 645 final

**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

Commission work programme 2022

Making Europe stronger together

1. Making Europe stronger together

“I believe that it is when you are tested that your spirit – your soul - truly shines through” – European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, State of the Union speech, 15 September 2021

Our Union is emerging from a time of unprecedented crisis. Faced with a series of disruptive global events, we have shown that by acting together, united and with great ambition, we can tackle the toughest of challenges and deliver for European citizens.

The European Commission has reacted swiftly to challenges, from confronting the COVID-19 pandemic to addressing the effects of climate change and the nature crisis, and from ensuring an increasingly digital world works for people to facing a new global geopolitical reality. In doing so, we have put in place the necessary building blocks for a better future. All this was done in line with our bold and transformative agenda across the six headline ambitions.

This year’s work programme will enable us to maintain our momentum and take the next steps in this process, with particular attention on the young generation thanks to the proposed **European Year of Youth 2022¹**.

In the past year, the Commission presented its pioneering ‘Fit for 55 package’ to deliver on the targets agreed in the trailblazing Climate Law in an economically sustainable and socially fair manner. The recent report on global warming from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change provides further evidence that we have no time to lose – the upcoming COP 26 in Glasgow and COP 15 in Kunming will be crucial moments in this effort, reflecting the intrinsic link between the climate and biodiversity crises. The recent high energy prices also confirm the need for the clean transition and to decrease EU dependence on fossil fuels.

We also laid out our bold vision towards a human-centred, digitally-empowered Europe by 2030, with a Digital Compass to turn this ambition into reality. This includes the proposal on rules for a safe and secure internet and a common digital identity in Europe. We adopted the European Pillar of Social Rights action plan and proposed a set of social targets for 2030, endorsed by EU leaders at the Porto Social Summit. To further strengthen equality within the European Union, we proposed measures to step up the fight against racism and discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation, whilst intensifying our efforts to enable citizens with disabilities to fully participate in society. We also took firm action to uphold and strengthen the rule of law and to protect the core values of our Union and strengthen democratic resilience as set out in the European democracy action plan.

All this was done in the shadow of the pandemic, which required action on an unprecedented scale both to protect citizens’ health and to minimise the wider socio-economic impacts. In total, the Commission adopted more than 2 326 measures by way of an immediate response. Our successful vaccine strategy helped the Union to secure 4.6 billion doses of COVID-19

¹ We will also present a Youth Action Plan in EU External Action.

vaccines and reach the target of having 70% of the EU's adult population fully vaccinated by the end of the summer. The EU has also been the driving force behind the global response to COVID-19 and a lead contributor to the COVAX facility.

To ensure we are better prepared for any future pandemics, we have accelerated efforts to build a genuine European Health Union. We took measures to support the safe reopening of Europe, including the EU Digital COVID Certificate, agreed in record time and now used by millions of people.

We tackled the social and economic impact of the pandemic, together with Member States, through a series of ambitious, far-reaching programmes and instruments. The combined firepower of the Union's long-term budget and NextGenerationEU will deliver EUR 2.018 trillion to boost our economy and rebuild a post COVID-19 Europe that is greener, fairer, more digital and more resilient. The activation of the general escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact and the temporary state aid framework allowed Member States to provide support to the economy in the order of 6.6% of GDP in 2020 and 7.1% of GDP in 2021. This contributed to safeguarding stability and the strong economic recovery. We will ensure the EU budget has to be spent in line with sound financial management principles and in full protection of the EU's financial interest. In addition, we have so far mobilised EUR 21 billion in cohesion policy funds to provide emergency support for the health sector and to protect jobs, while the EUR 50 billion under REACT-EU has acted as a bridge to the recovery instruments.

Our work on Europe's recovery is already paying off. At the heart of the NextGenerationEU instrument worth more than €800 billion, the Recovery and Resilience Facility now provides us with an opportunity to pave the way to a sustained and inclusive recovery. The transformative impact of the Facility will continue to unfold and increase in the years to come, as reforms and investments are implemented, in full respect of the EU's fundamental rights and values.

The past year and a half has taught us a lot, including that it is not enough just to recover from a crisis of this magnitude. Rather, we need to emerge stronger and more resilient, setting our economies on a path of sustained growth. We need to implement the measures we have agreed over the last year. And we need to foster additional public and private investments across the Union and reforms in the years to come to succeed in the twin green and digital transitions.

The Commission has lived up to its commitment to strengthen the Union's global leadership role, in areas including the response to the pandemic, climate action and biodiversity, promoting a strong, open and fair trade agenda, and upholding the rules-based global order. We have enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans, and strengthened partnerships with our neighbours to the East and South through ambitious Economic and Investment Plans, as well as with Africa.

In addition, we have set out a new EU-US agenda for global change, continued to implement a nuanced, robust policy towards China, consolidated our approach towards Russia, developed a constructive and realistic agenda with Turkey and put forward strategies to render multilateral cooperation and humanitarian action even more effective.

In that spirit, we today put forward our work programme for 2022. It demonstrates our determination to bounce forward from the pandemic stronger than before, accelerate the twin green and digital transitions and build a fairer, more resilient and more cohesive society, in line with the UN's Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement. We call on the European Parliament and the Council to reach swift agreement on key legislative proposals. Together, we can ensure that citizens, businesses and stakeholders can reap the benefits of our combined efforts. In parallel, we will put forward proposals in line with our commitments, as set out in the following paragraphs and annexes² to this work programme.

2. Delivery on the six headline ambitions

2.1. The European Green Deal

The Commission will continue on its path towards making Europe the world's first climate neutral continent by 2050. We will propose a regulatory framework for the **certification of carbon removals**, to scale up the deployment of sustainable carbon removals and to create a new business model rewarding land managers for such practices. We will review the CO₂ emissions standards for heavy-duty vehicles and set up a legislative framework for the harmonised measurement of transport and logistics emissions to support the transition towards zero-emission mobility. And we will review EU rules on fluorinated greenhouse gases to further reduce their emissions and ensure compliance with international commitments.

Green bonds will play an increasingly important role in the financing needed for the decarbonisation of our society, as part of the **Sustainable Europe Investment Plan**.

We will **follow-up on the zero pollution action plan** including in the areas of integrated water management to tackle surface and groundwater pollutants and ambient air quality to align standards with World Health Organisation recommendations. In addition, we will propose measures to restrict the addition of microplastics to products and reduce their release into the environment. We will address the sustainability challenges of biodegradable and compostable plastics and identify where they could be beneficial to the environment. We will also revise legislation on classification, labelling and packaging and work further towards a targeted revision of the REACH regulation to better protect human health and nature.

In addition to our Sustainable Product Policy initiatives, we will strengthen the rights of consumers to repair products at fair prices. This will extend the useful life of goods, and will therefore **further the objectives of the circular economy**.

² The position of an initiative in the annexes to this programme does not change the responsibilities set out in the Mission Letters sent to every Member of the College by President von der Leyen.

The clean energy transition is the best insurance against price shocks like the one the Union is facing today. The high energy prices have only underlined the need to accelerate the deployment of renewables. In support of the renewable energy target set in July 2021, the Commission will work on good practices for permitting on renewables and publish a Communication on **solar energy**, which will focus on specific applications and address existing barriers.

We will **mobilise resources** to ensure a green transition that is socially and internationally fair and just: next to the Just Transition Fund and the proposed Social Climate Fund linked to the extension of carbon trading to transport and housing, we will double external funding for biodiversity, and contribute significantly to climate finance for less developed countries and those that are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

We will continue working towards **greener and more sustainable agriculture** and delivering on the actions set out in the farm to fork strategy. In 2022, the Commission will be working with Member States to agree ambitious national strategic plans that deliver on the objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy and the Green Deal and will propose, amongst other initiatives, new rules on sustainable use of pesticides to deliver on the 50% reduction target in the biodiversity and farm to fork strategies and a revision of marketing standards. In parallel, the Commission will aim to scale up sustainable farming practices by promoting carbon farming, redefining sustainable ways of using farmland as well as farming fish and seafood, and by improved farm-level monitoring of sustainability indicators.

2.2. A Europe fit for the digital age

The pandemic has served as a catalyst for the accelerating digitalisation of Europe and the world. The Commission will follow up on its **path to the digital decade** to deliver on the EU's digital transformation by 2030. We are determined to lead the way in the global race for trustworthy, secure and human-centric technology. And we will work to reach agreement on and implement our proposals for a safe and secure internet, a European digital identity and on trustworthy Artificial Intelligence.

The single market remains at the core of an innovative, prosperous and future-oriented European economy. Strong and effective competition policy and enforcement are needed to contribute to a resilient recovery and the twin transitions. Against this background, the Commission has launched a review of competition policy to ensure that the various instruments are fit for purpose. We will also come forward with a **single market emergency instrument** to help prevent future disruptions.

Despite many challenges and disruptions, Europe came through the crisis in large part due to its innovative skills, its strong industrial base and its diversified and competitive supply chains. However, in a few strategic sectors, it has been vulnerable due to high dependency on a very limited number of non-EU suppliers, especially in relation to raw materials. This is particularly apparent when it comes to semi-conductors. Supplies of these chips which power

Europe's digital solutions have become a real concern for EU industry, with cases of production being slowed down. Against this background, we will adopt a **European chips act** to promote a state-of-the-art European chip ecosystem to boost our innovative capacity, security of supply and develop new markets for ground-breaking European tech.

With the economy and society relying more and more on digital solutions, we need to ensure that we can defend ourselves in a world increasingly prone to hacking of connected products and associated services. To this end, we will propose a **European cyber resilience act** to establish common cybersecurity standards for products. We will also begin **building an EU space-based global secure communications system**, offering EU-wide broadband connectivity where it currently does not exist and secure and independent communications to Member States.

As the energy sector will be the biggest contributor in meeting the EU's climate target of reducing emissions by at least 55 percent by 2030, the Commission will propose an **action plan for an accelerated digital transformation of the sector**, which is needed to ensure the shift towards renewables, connected mobility, smart buildings, and a more integrated energy system with consumers at its core. The wide-scale energy disruptions in the US and the EU over the past year show the need for **resilient and cyber-secure energy**.

For European citizens to benefit to the full from digital technology, the provision of strong digital skills and education is key. This was highlighted as distance learning became the norm during the COVID-19 pandemic. And it is highlighted as a key target in the Digital Compass. To address the skills and knowledge gaps, we will propose measures to facilitate and promote **digital skills in schools and higher education**.

Research and innovation will play a key role in responding to the challenges facing us today. It will help deliver on Europe's recovery, based on economic growth that can drive the green and digital transitions. This will be essential for fair economic growth benefiting all regions and citizens, including rural areas. It is important to ensure that Europe remains at the frontier of science and at the forefront of new waves of innovation.

Digital solutions can also help support more integrated and sustainable mobility. We will propose an initiative on **multimodal digital mobility services** to address market gaps in the combined use of transport modes, including rail.

2.3. An economy that works for people

With economic activity on its way back to pre-pandemic levels, we now need to reflect on how the crisis has affected our economy. This is why the Commission is relaunching the public debate on fiscal rules and on the economic governance framework. The Commission will consider all views expressed during the public debate. It will in the first quarter of 2022 provide guidance for fiscal policy for the period ahead, with the purpose of facilitating the coordination of fiscal policies and the preparation of Member States' Stability and Convergence Programmes. The guidance will reflect the global economic situation, the

specific situation of each Member State and the discussion on the economic governance framework. The Commission will provide orientations on possible changes to the economic governance framework with the objective of achieving a broad-based consensus on the way forward well in time for 2023. **SURE**, the European instrument for temporary support to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency, turned out to be **an extremely successful tool** and the Commission will carefully examine the lessons learnt.

To ensure that Europeans have access to quality jobs, fair working conditions and broad social protection and can enjoy better balance in their lives, the Commission will follow up on the implementation of the **European Pillar of Social Rights** action plan.

The shock of the pandemic highlighted the importance of strong social safety nets. We will propose a Recommendation on **minimum income** to support the policies of Member States.

The Commission will also put forward a Communication to strengthen the social dialogue at EU and national level to support the key role of social partners in fostering a fair economic, social and cohesive recovery and the green, digital and labour market transitions.

We will also present a proposal to improve the protection of workers from the **risks related to exposure to asbestos at work**, taking into account the results of the consultation with social partners. We agree with the European Parliament and its recently-adopted Article 225 TFEU report that the issue of asbestos is of grave concern.

The financial sector is playing a key role in the economic recovery. During the pandemic, digital transactions increased, and the Commission will deliver an initiative on **instant payments** to foster the full take up of such payments in the EU.

Moreover, the health crisis has reconfirmed the need for fully developed European capital markets. The recovery requires massive investment that public money and traditional bank lending alone cannot deliver. The Commission will take action regarding **insolvency proceedings** by enhancing convergence and removing discrepancies, aiming to increase efficiency, facilitate cross-border investments and reduce burden. Listing requirements will be simplified to make public capital markets more attractive for EU companies and **facilitate access to capital for small- and medium-sized enterprises**.

On 8 October, 136 jurisdictions worldwide, including all EU Member States, G20 members and OECD members, reached an **historic agreement on global tax reform**, establishing a global minimum level of effective taxation (Pillar 2) and a re-allocation of taxing rights (Pillar 1). Since the start of the process in 2016, the Commission has strongly supported this international effort. Equally, the Commission will now strive to show the EU's leadership in global tax fairness, by ensuring a swift and consistent implementation across the EU.

2.4. A stronger Europe in the world

Ongoing geopolitical shifts have underlined the necessity to strengthen Europe's influence in a fast-changing world, and to defend its values and interests.

Through our new **Global Gateway strategy**, which will be closely coordinated with the Build Back Better World (B3W), we will strengthen the European Union's efforts to build connectivity partnerships that promote digital and green trusted connectivity with partners across the globe.

The world's different humanitarian crises have highlighted the gap between needs and available resources. The different global crises have confirmed that we need to strengthen partnerships with allies, and we will present **a new EU-NATO Joint Declaration** and will seek to accelerate work on a genuine **European Defence Union**.

The Commission will prepare a defence package which will include a **roadmap on security and defence technologies** for boosting research, technology development and innovation and reducing the EU's strategic dependencies in critical technologies and value chains in the security and defence sectors.

Next year, we will put forward a number of new initiatives while also focusing on the implementation of earlier actions. We will propose **a reinforced blocking statute Regulation** to better protect EU operators, whether individuals or companies, by further deterring and counteracting the extra-territorial application of sanctions by third countries. This will further strengthen the EU's resilience and open strategic autonomy.

We will pursue the global energy transition, as well as promoting security of supply, clean technologies and open markets. This will be part of the **new strategy on international energy engagement**, which will consider new opportunities in deploying a clean energy system, and promoting energy efficiency and safe and sustainable technologies while gradually moving away from fossil fuel use towards green energy solutions and promoting a just transition.

We will revamp the 2016 International Ocean Governance Agenda by tabling a Joint Communication setting out an **action plan on international ocean governance**, addressing key threats such as pollution, climate change impacts and biodiversity loss. It will send a strong message that the EU is leading on the implementation of global commitments, as set out in the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development Goals.

The Gulf region is a key partner for the EU. To consolidate cooperation and create a framework for our political dialogue, we will present a Joint Communication setting out **a strategic partnership with the Gulf**.

2.5. Promoting our European way of life

Young people must be able to shape the future, they are leading the debate in the framework of the **Conference on the Future of Europe**. Our Union needs a soul and a vision they can connect to. We will deploy ALMA (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve), a new initiative helping disadvantaged young Europeans who are not in any kind of employment, education or training. It will help these young people gain professional experience abroad with the necessary social support. The ultimate objective is to integrate them into education, vocational training or quality employment.

To respond to challenges new and old, address demographic and labour market shortages as well as to live up to our global responsibilities, it is of critical importance to find European common ground on how to manage migration and asylum. Recent events, including those in Belarus and Afghanistan, show the urgent need to **reach swift agreement on the remaining legislative proposals under the New Pact for Migration and Asylum**. The Pact, presented by the Commission one year ago, contains all the necessary elements for a balanced and humane system that works for all Member States. We will continue working with the European Parliament and the Member States to further build trust and put in place a sustainable European migration management policy.

The Commission will continue to deliver on building a genuine Security Union and will **report regularly on progress in the area of security**, including on ongoing negotiations on key legislative files, in particular in relation to the four strategic priorities: a future-proof security environment, tackling evolving threats, protecting Europeans from terrorism and **organised crime**, and a strong European security ecosystem. The continued work on cyber-security remains a crucial building block of the Security Union. At the same time, the work on **anti-trafficking** continues while we will take new steps to improve the **secure exchange of key information** with third countries to those providing security on the front line, alongside an **update to the rules for advance passenger information**.

The response to the pandemic has once again proven that science and education are not only invaluable for promoting our way of life, but also for preserving our health. Whilst our schools and universities adapt to the digital revolution, the crisis has exposed the challenge of equity in education, hitting some students harder than others. We want to secure the future of the next generation of European scientists and scholars, and maintain the leading global status of European universities while boosting their cooperative work. To that end, we will present the **EU strategy for universities** and propose ways for **deeper and sustainable transnational cooperation in higher education**, which will be prepared together with the initiatives to improve digital in school and higher education to ensure coherence.

Having learnt the lessons of the COVID-19 crisis, we will present a new **European care strategy** to address both carers and care receivers, from childcare to long-term care. The strategy will set a framework for policy reforms to guide the development of sustainable **long-term care** that ensures better and more affordable access to quality services for all. It will also address childhood education and care with particular attention being paid to children with

disabilities and those from disadvantaged groups. In addition, it will help close the gender employment gap, increase women's empowerment and contribute towards gender equality, including by **revising the Barcelona targets**.

We continue work on a strong European Health Union and will propose a **new framework for a dynamic EU pharmaceutical sector**, to ensure access to affordable high-quality medicines for all EU citizens, foster innovation and enhance security of supply. This will provide a simplified and efficient regulatory environment through innovative digitalisation and therefore become a flagship for burden reduction. We will also put forward a **revision of legislation on medicines for children and rare diseases** to tackle shortcomings and ensure that innovative medicines and treatments are readily available. Both initiatives follow up the pharmaceutical strategy for Europe, and will contribute to open strategic autonomy in the medical sector and draw on experiences gathered during the pandemic to support a future-proof and crisis-resistant pharmaceuticals system. These initiatives will be bolstered by the proposal to create a genuine European Health Data Space, with trustworthy governance to ensure data security and data protection. This will kick-start research into game-changing medicines and enable citizens to exercise more control over their health data.

There will be a further boost to life-saving cancer screening and early diagnosis through a **Recommendation on cancer screening** reflecting the latest available scientific evidence, as part of Europe's beating cancer plan.

2.6. A new push for European democracy

With the **Conference on the Future of Europe** in full swing, all Europeans are invited to have their say on how to shape our shared future. The Conference is an unprecedented, open and inclusive democratic exercise, with a multilingual digital platform. We will carefully listen to the ideas and input produced, and will be ready to follow up on what is agreed by the Conference. To ensure we make the most of this opportunity, we are implementing new and innovative tools to transform the manner in which we engage with our citizens. This will help ensure that young people can lead the debate.

The **European citizens' initiative** already allows citizens to help shape our Union by calling on the Commission to propose new laws. Currently, there are eleven such initiatives collecting support, with three more set to start the process soon.

The preservation of media freedom and pluralism is a foundation of our democratic systems. We will take further steps to improve transparency, accountability and independence around actions affecting media freedom and pluralism by tabling a **European media freedom act**.

The **rule of law** is central to our identity and values as Europeans. It is also a prerequisite for the effective functioning of the EU based on mutual trust. The 2021 rule of law report showed positive developments in Member States, but also cases of backsliding and the emergence of new concerns. The Commission will continue its work as the Guardian of the Treaties in ensuring that challenges to the rule of law are identified and addressed, including making

specific recommendations to Member States in the 2022 rule of law report. It will also take the necessary actions to uphold the primacy of EU law. And it will draw on the full range of tools to ensure a consistent and effective approach, including with a view to protecting EU taxpayers' money.

The Commission will continue working on a common legal framework for the efficient transfer of **criminal proceedings** between Member States, to step up the fight against cross-border crime. We will also assess how to achieve convergence on pre-trial detention and detention conditions between Member States as part of improving cross-border cooperation in criminal matters.

The Commission will continue its work to ensure that the Union of equality becomes a reality for all. All citizens should feel safe and without fear of discrimination or violence on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, or age. **Equality bodies** play a key role in ensuring these rights and we will propose measures to strengthen their role and independence. We will propose measures to improve the **recognition of parenthood** between Member States and to strengthen judicial cooperation on the **protection of vulnerable adults** in cross-border situations. The measures we will propose to prevent and combat **violence against women** will be complemented with an initiative next year to support Member States in improving prevention and taking support measures to tackle **harmful practices against women and girls**.

We will look to make progress on the design of the new interinstitutional **EU Ethics Body**, including by continuing to work closely with the other institutions to find the necessary common ground on the scope, role and competences of the future Body. These must respect the particularities of every institution as well as their different institutional and democratic responsibilities and obligations under the Treaties. The European Parliament's own initiative report is an important contribution to the ongoing discussion.

The Commission will also table an initiative on **brain drain and mitigating the challenges associated with population decline** that will look into the different drivers, the long-term consequences and potential solutions to stop or even reverse brain drain.

3. Better Regulation, implementation and enforcement of EU law

3.1. Better regulation

Our better regulation agenda ensures that political decisions are taken based on the best available evidence, taking into account the impact they will have on the ground and the views of people and businesses likely to be affected. This approach helps ensure that regulation is targeted, easy to comply with and does not add unnecessary regulatory burdens. The 2021 better regulation Communication **Joining forces to make better laws** set out key ways to improve the quality of legislation and maximise its benefits.

To minimise the burden linked to the achievement of EU policy objectives, the Commission will fully deploy the **‘one in, one out’ approach** with this Commission work programme. This will ensure that when introducing new burdens, we systematically and proactively seek to reduce burdens imposed by existing legislation. Expected costs of complying with EU legislation will be quantified more transparently, where this is feasible and proportionate, and systematically presented in impact assessments. Administrative costs will be offset. To the greatest extent possible, other measures will be taken with a view to compensating adjustment costs. The ‘one in, one out’ approach will complement the **regulatory fitness and performance (REFIT) programme**, which systematically identifies and removes red tape and unnecessary costs.

Better regulation is also fundamental in supporting sustainability and digital transformation. The green and digital ambitions of the Commission and their social and fair dimensions, together with its **focus on the Sustainable Development Goals and the ‘do no significant harm’ and ‘digital-by-default’ principles**, will be more prominent in our evaluations, impact assessments and consultations. Equality for all, including gender equality, as well as the external implications of internal policies will be considered at all stages of policymaking. **Territorial impact assessments and rural proofing will be strengthened**, so that the needs and specificities of different EU territories are better taken into account. Special attention will be paid to the impact on the young generation. The integration of foresight in policymaking will also reinforce the future proofing of our regulations.

3.2. Implementation and enforcement of EU law

Adopting ambitious and innovative legislation is not the end of the story: proper implementation is essential to protect the rights of citizens and companies in the Union. **The Commission will continue to work with and support Member States to ensure the swift and full implementation of new and existing EU rules** and will not hesitate to uphold EU law through infringement proceedings where needed. Achieving this is a prerequisite for meeting our policy goals in areas such as the proper functioning of the single market, driving Europe into the Digital Age, delivering the European Green Deal and implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights. Infringement cases are also an essential part of the toolbox available to the Commission to defend the fundamental rights and values on which the Union is founded.

4. Conclusion

Over the past year and a half, our Union and its citizens have proven their fortitude, tenacity and unity in the face of an unparalleled array of challenges. The world of today is still characterised by uncertainty, disruptive events and increasing geopolitical tensions, combined with climate change and the nature crisis. But it is by seizing the opportunities offered by these challenges and building on the foundations we have laid that we can deliver the societal transformation Europe needs and citizens deserve.

This work programme sets out targeted action to continue delivery on the ambitions the Commission set at the start of the mandate and further steer the Union towards sustainable recovery. It also lists the key legislative proposals that should get priority in the legislative process to ensure swift implementation on the ground. The list will form the basis of our dialogue with the European Parliament and the Council with the aim to agree on a Joint Declaration on legislative priorities by the end of the year, in line with the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making³.

We have shown that by acting together, we are better able to tackle our generational challenges and protect lives and livelihoods.

This unity is needed now more than ever – but it should not come at the cost of our ambition. We will need both if we are to remain on track to build a resilient Union for a thriving future.

³ OJ L 123, 12.5.2016 p.1.