



European Commission - Speech [Check Against Delivery]



Remarks by Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič at the press conference following the General Affairs Council

Brussels, 6 February 2023

Thank you and let me begin in the same way as in the room – by expressing our condolences to everyone affected by the deadly earthquake in Türkiye and Syria.

As Türkiye participates in the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, we have been quick to respond to the needs on the ground, by deploying various urban search and rescue teams from some ten Member States so far, with three additional offers pending.

The Commission is monitoring the situation closely so that we continue to help as best we can.

Turning to the agenda of today's General Affairs Council: this year continues to be a challenging one, something which was very much reflected in our [discussion on the upcoming European Council](#).

First and foremost, the Russian war against Ukraine is about to enter its second year.

Second, we need to be more strategic about our industrial policy if Europe is to continue to be a magnet for clean tech investment and our industries are to remain globally competitive.

And third, migration remains a European challenge and we must continue to work on a European solution.

As you know, last week saw the first College-government meeting in Kyiv, followed by the EU-Ukrainian summit. And this week's European Council will be another opportunity to reiterate our rock-solid support for Ukraine, which will last for as long as it takes.

So far, the EU, our Member States and European financial institutions have made around 50 billion euros available to Ukraine.

And just this past weekend, we introduced additional price caps on Russian petroleum products to further erode the Kremlin's resources, while we continue to work on the 10th package of sanctions to be in place by 24 February, one year after the invasion started.

The Commission also trusts that the European Council will send a strong signal on the economy and specifically, on the need to step up our efforts to boost clean tech investment here, in Europe.

You are familiar with the Commission's Green Deal Industrial Plan, advocating several strands of action, including:

- A simpler regulatory environment, including fast-track permitting for strategic projects;
- Faster access to funding, including streamlined state aid;
- And attention to upskilling and reskilling that reflect our rapidly changing labour market.

Based on my first-hand experience with the EU Battery Alliance, I can testify that time is of the essence here. Our global competitors are moving full steam ahead, and we need to make sure that our strategic industries can thrive here, in Europe, while being globally competitive.

To paraphrase one Minister: it should not be a red carpet elsewhere and red tape in Europe.

The European Council will also discuss migration, with the focus on the external dimension.

President von der Leyen has proposed a number of concrete actions that could be implemented immediately, namely in the area of:

- The EU's external borders;
- border and return procedures;
- secondary movements and solidarity;
- and in the area of partnerships.

This provides solid input for the Leaders to discuss the best way forward.

Turning to our discussion on EU-UK relations, I informed Ministers about the ongoing intensive scoping for potential joint solutions related to the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland.

The Commission and the UK Government are working closely and constructively.

Progress is being made but difficulties remain.

President von der Leyen has a trusting relationship with UK Prime Minister Sunak.

The same goes for my relationship with Foreign Secretary James Cleverly as well as Northern Ireland Secretary Chris Heaton-Harris. We agree that joint solutions are needed to respond to the real-life concerns of all communities in Northern Ireland.

So, all in all, it is not an easy exercise but it is certainly a necessary one. And the Commission will spare no effort to agree a joint way forward.

Let me conclude by expressing my best wishes to the Swedish Presidency. You have the Commission's support, and I personally am looking forward to our cooperation.

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