

In about a hundred words on the upcoming EU State of the Union

The internal and external policy demands for EU decision-makers over the past year have been a testing experience showing no relief.

With the EU and its members operating under a variety of pressures, GLOBSEC asks experts from Greece, the Netherlands, and Bulgaria; *With von der Leyen's last State of the Union before the end of this Commission's mandate in 2024, what are the most pressing European challenges and what should the EU do next?*



Spyros Blavoukos

Senior Research Fellow, Head, European Programme, ELIAMEP; Professor, Athens University of Economics and Business

In her last (?) State of the Union speech, Von der Leyen is going to grasp the opportunity and raise the most pressing challenges not only for the coming year but also for the years ahead. In the short term, although security issues -following the Russian invasion and the continuing war- are bound to prevail amidst the prospect of a second winter accentuating existing energy- and food-supply concerns, these are not the only challenges ahead. Given the worsening of most economic indicators, the European economy needs careful attendance to avoid the trap of stagflation. In the medium term, enlargement is seemingly back on the table, raising once again concerns about the EU *modus operandi*, not least in terms of decision-making and -needless to say- funding. Finally, in the long term, evolving geopolitics question the international role of the EU in a not-any-more West-centric world order. Strategic autonomy and resilience should be further fleshed out without, however, abandoning the pursuit of a rules- and values-based international system.



Louise van Schaik

Head of Unit EU & Global Affairs, Clingendael

Von der Leyen is confronted with a plate full of challenges, but with an outgoing Commission and European Parliament, tackling them is not a given. For some, EU reform is inevitable, but the Member States seem not yet ready to confront this. Whereas the primacy of the European Green Deal, geopolitical aspirations, and a focus on digital and economic security are commendable, the EU needs to do more to boost resilience. Bold action is needed to truly de-risk, build a common European defence industry and culture, and reduce further imported fossil fuels and critical raw materials. Instead, a leading position in green tech and supply chains closer to home need not only subsidies but a market that stimulates innovation and shields incubators from unfair international competition.



Vladislava Gubalova

Senior Research Fellow,
Centre for Global Europe, GLOBSEC

Geopolitics has turned EU challenges on their heads, and there are pressing issues at stake requiring attention. Enlargement is no longer a technical process without political will but an essential tool for delivering security and defending democracy. Migration can no longer be instrumentalized as an arena for political bickering and must be addressed systematically, fairly, and with the human dimension in mind. The urgency to overcome the climate crisis and energy security represents a generational challenge that requires sustainable solutions rather than the creation of new dependencies for the environment and energy supplies. Furthermore, re-invigorating and strengthening democracy is essential by deploying various tools to counter malign foreign and domestic influence, ensuring open spaces for discourse and participatory channels, supporting civic education, and using ethical AI.