

Dear ministerial colleagues,

Together, we decided that the Government would focus on proactively influencing EU decision-making.

With this in mind, I want to share with you my thoughts on what we should concentrate on in the coming months.

President of the Commission Ursula von der Leyen's speech on the State of the European Union on 13 September was coloured by geopolitical uncertainties—particularly Russia's invasion of Ukraine—and by the need to strengthen the EU and prepare it for reforms and enlargement. I plan to participate actively when these strategic issues are discussed among heads of state or government.

The Commission's term is coming to an end, but there are several legislative proposals that have not yet been submitted or that are still being negotiated between institutions. At the same time, both the Council and the Commission are preparing for the objectives of the upcoming 2024–2029 EU parliamentary term. Finland must actively influence these end-of-term proposals as well as the EU's upcoming objectives on every level of preparation and decision-making.

The European Union is facing major decisions that will affect our security environment and the future of the Union. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has proven the need to strengthen Europe's defence capability, resilience, and common foreign and security policy. By building up our strategic competitiveness together with reliable partner countries, we can reduce harmful dependencies on authoritarian states. Finland can bring its own experiences to the table and highlight the importance of building up security of supply, comprehensive defence, hybrid and cyber capacities, and the defence industry as elements in improving European security.

Finland is a strong advocate for continued support for Ukraine. Our support must continue for as long as needed. EU enlargement is also a part of Europe's future security architecture. As the countries seeking to join progress towards meeting the membership criteria, the EU must demonstrate that it is a credible and reliable negotiating partner. The Commission must prepare proposals on how to safeguard the decision-making capacity of a larger Union and how to organise and fund key policy areas as the number of Member States increases. Changes to policy areas and contributions must treat Member States fairly.

The new Commission, which will take office following next year's European elections, will submit a proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework in spring 2025. More resources must be allocated in the upcoming term to measures that boost competence, digitalisation, research, innovation, the energy transition and security. EU budgetary funds must be strictly tied to Member States' compliance with the rule of law, which is one of the most important cornerstones of the EU.

Finland will advocate in the EU for a sustainable growth policy. Such a policy must be built on improving the public finances and debt sustainability of Member States and on strengthening the resilience of the Economic and Monetary Union to crisis. The only way to add flexibility to deficit and debt criteria is to take credible action to improve debt sustainability and discipline in public finances.

The EU's economic prosperity is built on a well-functioning single market. The derogations adopted during the crises of the past few years—for example from state aid rules—must be discontinued. Maintaining an equal competitive environment is in the interests of an open country like Finland, which is dependent on exports. The EU's competitiveness is built on innovation, competence and developing the single market. Continuing to develop the single market and reducing the regulatory burden must be made key goals of the strategic agenda. This is also our message to Enrico Letta, who is writing the Report on the Future of the Single Market requested by the European Council. Developing the single market, continuing the twin green and digital transition, and investing in competence and R&D will continue to be key elements of the EU's competitiveness. I am very happy that the President of the Commission has invited Mario Draghi to write a report on the future of European competitiveness.

The EU must continue systematic policy measures to combat climate change and preserve biodiversity. The message from the President of the Commission was clear: the growth strategy for the green transition and incentives for clean investments will continue. Finland's message must also be clear: we support the transition to clean energy production, a low-carbon economy and a circular economy. I want Finland to be the EU's leading country in clean energy. The regulation of the energy sector must take a technology-neutral approach and must recognise that these are long-term investments, which require a predictable regulatory environment. Finland will intensify cooperation with like-minded Member States that use nuclear energy.

The bioeconomy is a significant driver of sustainable economic growth, and Finland must promote the recognition of the bioeconomy in the EU's various policy areas. Regulation of forests and land use must take into account the different circumstances in Member States and leave room for cost-effective national measures. Our Government Programme includes a commitment to promoting the operating conditions for Finnish food production as part of the European system. The Commission's pledge to launch a strategic dialogue on the future of EU agriculture provides an opportunity to highlight the objectives of food security and critical self-sufficiency.

Managing migration to Europe has become a key political issue in the EU. A well-functioning common policy can be built through the migration package that is currently being discussed, through improved control of all external borders and through partnerships with countries of origin and transit. This will lay the foundation for effective action against human smuggling and for a well-functioning return and readmission policy.

Our Government Programme includes a commitment to systematically and proactively influencing EU decision-making. I hope that every Government minister and the public officials in the ministries they lead will take this to heart. The Government's joint priorities and the ministries' own plans will add substance to these efforts. We will have the opportunity to continue discussing our EU policy initiatives in the regular meetings of the Ministerial Committee on European Union Affairs and in the government evening session on influencing EU decision-making to be held in October.

Petteri Orpo
Prime Minister