

Courtesy translation

Statement of the Committee on Foreign Affairs 2021/22:UU4 Commission Work Programme 2022

In its statement, the Committee on Foreign Affairs presents its examination of the Commission Work Programme for 2022. In connection with the examination of the Work Programme, comments have been submitted by the Committee on the Constitution, the Committee on Justice, the Committee on Civil Affairs, the Committee on Defence, the Committee on Social Insurance, the Committee on Health and Welfare and the Committee on Environment and Agriculture. A summary of the comments and the parties' dissenting opinions is contained in the appendix.

The position of the Committee

During 2022, the current Commission will be entering the second half of its five-year term of office. The Commission begins its Work Programme for this year by recapitulating the work that has been done during the previous years for a green and digital transition and on building a more just, resilient and cohesive society, while at the same time having dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects. The result is considerable, particularly in view of the circumstances, and it provides a stable foundation for continued work. The Committee welcomes the Commission's determination not to slow down the pace of work on reform and to let this view characterise the Work Programme for the coming year.

The Committee wishes to highlight the examinations the Riksdag has carried out of the strategic EU documents that the Commission has presented since the end of 2020 (see Appendix 2 of the statement). These examinations help to boost the Riksdag's readiness to assess and deal with the follow-up initiatives the Commission is predicted to present in due course. Many of these initiatives will need to be dealt with during the Swedish Presidency of the Council during the first half of 2023. However, the presidency trio of which Sweden is a part is already beginning its work now at the turn of the year and the Committee has been following the work on preparations for the Presidency, for example by gathering information from the Government on four occasions during the year.

As with other examinations of strategic EU documents, the motive to improve the Riksdag's preparedness and forward planning in its work with EU matters is also important for the examination of the Commission's annual Work Programme. Besides the information from the Government, the Commission Work Programme is the single most important background document for the Riksdag committees in their overall planning of their work with EU-related matters during the coming year, and the Committee on Foreign Affairs has regularly highlighted the value of the Work Programme in this connection. In order to obtain a clearer picture of the Work Programme's usefulness as a basis for planning, the Committee has followed up the implementation of the Work Programme for 2020 in more detail, taking into consideration the adjustment the Commission made to it as a consequence of the reprioritisations which were required when dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee has also reviewed the situation regarding the implementation of the Work Programme for 2021. In the light of the follow-up, the Committee has come to the conclusion that the rate of implementation can be described as positive and that it has been possible to keep to the indicative times that have been given for adoption of individual initiatives to a relatively high extent, but that the initiatives have remarkably often been adopted at the end of the quarter in question. In cases where it has not been possible to keep to the timetable, the actual delay has been relatively small and there are few initiatives that have been affected by more considerable delays.

In view of the fact that the Work Programme schedules the adoption of the various initiatives to one of the quarters of the year, the Committee can summarise its follow-up by saying that the Work Programme is relatively reliable as a rather general basis for overall planning. The Committee notes that the Committee on Health and Welfare in its comments also points out that the Work Programme constitutes a useful base for planning and monitoring EU issues. However, the Work Programme does not meet the wishes that have previously been put forward from the Riksdag, via a letter from the Speaker (reg.no. 2270-2017/18) and a statement from the Committee on the Constitution (Statement

2018/19:KU23), on more detailed information on various legislative initiatives which could facilitate planning of the Riksdag's subsidiarity checks. In this case, information needs to be sought in other places. In view of this, the Committee welcomes the improvements the Commission has made to its consultation portal Have Your Say, which are described in the communication on Better Regulation April 2021. However, in the light of its follow-up, the Committee notes that there are still a number of challenges for anyone seeking more detailed and updated information on preparation work. This is particularly the case with the REFIT initiatives, where the special scoreboard for these is neither complete nor always corresponding to information supplied in the consultation portal. The Committee would like to encourage the Commission to continue to develop information on its preparation process so that it can be as accessible, detailed and updated as possible. This would make EU work for the national parliaments easier and would also create better conditions for all those who can contribute valuable points of view in the preparation of initiatives.

As with earlier examinations of the Commission's Work Programme, other committees have been given the opportunity to comment on the Work Programme for 2022. The Committee believes this to be an appropriate approach in view of the great range of issues covered by the Work Programme. Five questions have also been posed this year to facilitate the committees' comments in order to obtain the committees' views on the overall direction of the Work Programme and on individual initiatives in their particular areas. The Committee does not intend to weigh up or take a position on what is put forward in the comments. Instead, the Committee wishes to see its statement as an opportunity for all the Riksdag committees to jointly convey their assessments and the political differences of opinion that arise in dissenting opinions in the comments. As a consequence of this approach, the Committee on Foreign Affairs is concentrating its own examination on the responsibility the Committee has for overall matters of importance for the functioning and development of the Union, as well as the aspects of foreign and security policy that affect the EU's role in the world.

The Committee would also like to draw attention to the fact that the examination of the Commission's Work Programme also has a forward-looking objective in the sense that the examination helps to highlight matters at an early stage of the EU's decision-making process and that the views put forward can be taken into account in the implementation of the Work Programme, that is in the preparation of individual initiatives, and also in the process leading to next year's Work Programme, an example of which could be the wish for a revision of the API Directive as described by the Committee on Justice in its comments. The examination of the Work Programme can thus be seen as a complement to the opportunities the Riksdag has to exercise influence over the current work on legislative programming through the contacts the committees and the Committee on EU Affairs has with the Government within the framework of information, deliberations and consultation in accordance with the provisions of the Riksdag Act for this.

The examination of strategic EU documents, including this examination of the Commission's Work Programme, is also one of the Riksdag's tools to promote openness and debate on EU matters. The examination procedure can thus be seen as a recurring long-term activity in the 'same spirit and with the same ambition as that which was behind the launch of the Conference on the Future of the EU. The Committee has devoted much attention to preparations for the Conference and welcomes, as does the Committee on the Constitution, the fact that the pandemic situation allowed the Conference to begin in May 2021. The Committee takes a positive view that the Commission, as it is described in the Work Programme, is exploring new innovative methods to facilitate citizen engagement in the decision-making process. This is in line with the Committee's view that the focus of the Conference on the Future of Europe should be on strengthening dialogue with citizens and increasing their commitment for EU issues. In the opinion of the Committee, a result bringing about lasting improvements in this area could be important for determining the extent to which the process of the conference can in retrospect be seen as a success. In connection with this, the Committee notes the European Parliament resolution of 7 July 2021 on Citizens' Dialogues and Citizens' Participation in EU decision-making (P9_TA(2021)0345), in which the Parliament proposes a discussion in the Conference on the Future of Europe on a mechanism to provide citizens with the opportunity to influence the Commission's annual Work Programme and the State of the Union address, for example by means of national and European citizen dialogues in order to formulate priorities as a contribution to the consultation process that leads to the establishment of the Commission's annual Work Programme. However, as regards the specific issues under discussion, the Committee wishes to repeat how important it is not to create

unrealistic expectations as to what the Conference can achieve and that it is difficult to see that the conclusions of the Conference could be regarded as representative for the citizens of the EU and thus oblige to follow-up by the institutions.

The Committee has in recent years in various contexts concentrated on the lack of respect for the rule of law and the EU's fundamental values in certain member states, most recently in committee report 2020/21:UU10. Respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law are, in the opinion of the Committee, one of the EU's greatest assets which must be guaranteed. This is the basis for effective cooperation and mutual trust between member states. This is also the basis for confidence in the EU as a global actor. It is therefore with great satisfaction the Committee notes that the Commission in its Work Programme attaches great importance to these matters, including the principle of the precedence of EU law, and the tools at the disposal of the Commission in the form of supervision, dialogue, country-specific recommendations, infringement proceedings and the possibility to suspend payments from the EU budget and the European Recovery Instrument. Like the Committee on the Constitution, the Committee considers it to be of great importance that the Commission continues to work on strengthening and defending the rule of law as well as respect for fundamental values, with all available means. In this connection, the Committee notes the report from 2021 on the situation regarding the rule of law in the EU and that the Government, in its annotated agenda for the annual dialogue on the rule of law at the meeting of the General Affairs Council on 23 November 2021, notes that the report clearly shows that there are problems in the area of the rule of law in a number of member states. Like the Government, the Committee takes a very serious view of this development. The Committee welcomes greater commitment to these issues from a growing number of member states, which was for example demonstrated in the powerful reactions against the Hungarian law that was adopted in June 2021 that discriminates against LGBTQ people under the pretext of protecting minors from sexual abuse. The Committee notes that during the summer the Commission began infringement proceedings against Hungary on the compatibility of the law with EU law and also on the demand on the part of Hungary that publishers should provide children's book with LGBTQ-related content with a warning. At the same time, the Commission began infringement proceedings against Poland in connection with the country's reluctance to assist in the Commission's legal investigation into the fact that certain Polish municipalities were proclaimed as zones free of LGBTQ ideology. The Committee welcomes this and assumes that the Commission will also consider the possibility of taking other measures, including measures via the budget, which could lead to an improvement of the situation. There must be no doubt that discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity is incompatible with the fundamental values of the EU, of which there is no scope for compromise.

Furthermore, the Committee takes a positive view of the fact that the Commission in its Work Programme emphasises the importance of the internal market as the basis for an innovative, healthy and future-oriented European economy and that initiatives in the areas of education and research are emphasised and that the proposal regarding artificial intelligence is prioritised. This is in line with what the Committee pointed out in its examination of last year's Work Programme regarding the need for efforts in these areas to ensure the EU's long-term competitiveness. In this connection, the Committee would once again like to emphasise the importance of the Commission's work on better regulation and agrees with the fact that the Committee on the Constitution appreciates the Commission's objective to avoid unnecessary regulatory burdens. The Committee notes the Commission's ambition to supplement the aspects that need to be taken into consideration in the assessment of the consequences of new proposals, and notes that this is in line with what the Committee has stated in connection with examinations of previous work programmes on how important it is that new proposals are based on well-founded impact assessments and that all work is permeated with a gender equality perspective. The Committee would also like to express its agreement with what the Committee on Environment and Agriculture has put forward on the importance of EU legislation being formulated clearly with well-motivated and defined authorisations to the Commission to adopt delegated acts and implementing acts. As the Committee put forward in committee report 2020/21:UU10, open and effective decision-making promotes democratic legitimacy.

Another important building block for the EU's long-term competitiveness, as the Committee has pointed out, is to work for free and fair global trade with full respect for the regulatory framework of the WTO. Partly with this in mind, the Committee has read with interest the Commission's Strategic

Foresight Report about the EU's Capacity and Freedom to Act. The Committee wishes to emphasise what is stated in the introduction to the report – that openness to the rest of the world and rule-based international and multilateral cooperation are strategic choices that serve to promote prosperity, justice, stability and competitiveness, both inside and outside the EU. The Committee considers that the report provides a good basis for reflections over the needs that may exist of the EU in certain areas strengthening its preparedness and collective resilience. However, like the Government, the Committee wishes to underline that this must not entail any change in the EU's basic openness to the rest of the world or considerable support to the European business sector.

The Committee notes that several of the lines of thought followed in the Foresight Report re-occur in the Work Programme, in some cases in the form of concrete measures, which may be seen as a sign of the Commission endeavouring to make its priorities on the basis of a sound analysis of long-term needs. This applies particularly in the case of the parts of the Work Programme that concern the Committee's responsibility for the EU's role in the world. The Committee can, in general terms, agree with the Commission's description of how a changing world characterised by geopolitical shifts underlines the importance of the EU strengthening its global presence and its influence to defend European values and interests. In this context, the Committee is looking forward to the joint communication on the connectivity initiative known as the Global Gateway following up Council conclusions from July 2021 on a Globally Connected Europe (Council documents 10629/21). Like the Council, the Committee sees a need for the EU to assume a more strategic view of connectivity to promote the EU's long-term foreign and development policy objectives and security interests. The Committee welcomes that the Council in its conclusions emphasises human rights and the rule-based world order as a basis for the implementation of the Connectivity Agenda.

In its comments, the Committee on Social Insurance draws attention to the situation in Belarus and particularly the situation at its borders with the EU in connection with negotiations on the Asylum and Migration Pact and the decision recently taken by the EU to repeal the simplification of the visa agreement with Belarus for representatives of the regime. Like the Committee on Social Insurance, the Committee welcomes the repeal of the simplification of the visa agreement and also that the Council following this introduced the possibility to sanction people and entities that organise or contribute to the activities of the Lukashenko regime that facilitate illegal passage through the Union's external borders. Furthermore, the Committee notes that the Commission has contacts with countries of origin and transit, in order to stop further flights of migrants into Belarus and that the EU has earmarked funds for humanitarian assistance to the people who are stuck at the Belarusian border. The Committee also notes the joint declaration by the High Representative and the Commission on the EU's reaction against state-supported exploitation of migrants at the EU's external borders and the subsequent proposal to blacklist transportation companies that facilitate smuggling and trafficking in human beings (JOIN (2021) 32 and COM (2021) 753). The Minister for Foreign Affairs informed the Committee of the situation at its meeting on 25 November 2021.

The Committee has studied the Council's conclusions on security and defence, which were approved on 10 May, in which the Council underlines the importance of an extended mutually strengthened and beneficially strategic partnership between the EU and NATO in areas of common interest (Council document 8396/21). Taking into account these Council conclusions, the Committee looks forward to working with a new joint declaration on cooperation between the EU and NATO. As the Committee on Defence points out in its comments, it is of great importance when it comes to meeting challenges in the areas of defence and security to be able to make use of common resources effectively and to be able to mobilise resources appropriately. In Committee Report 2020/21:UU10, it was noted what the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence said as regards NATO being an actor of vital importance for European security and integration and that strengthened EU cooperation should be formulated to ensure that European and transatlantic cooperation is mutually reinforcing and avoid duplication.

In connection with the Work Programme's reference to accelerating work on achieving a genuine European Defence Union, the Committee notes that the Union epithet is being used to designate more and more sector-specific collaborations in the EU and that the actual meaning in the various contexts can only be ascertained from the concrete measures covered by the collaboration in question. The Committee underlines, as the Committee on Defence has pointed out in its comments, that the European Security and Defence cooperation should not be characterised by supranational authority

and that in accordance with current treaties, unanimity is required in the Council for decisions relating to defence policy in the EU. The Committee notes that the Riksdag, by giving a mandate for Government action in the Council and the European Council and by approving treaty amendments, thus has a decisive influence over proposals for fundamental changes to security and defence policy cooperation. The Committee is following developments in this area closely and in particular the current work on the Strategic Compass, which was the object of deliberations with the Government at its meeting on 18 February 2021 and of which the Committee was most recently informed at the meeting of 11 November 2021 within the framework of a presentation ahead of the coming meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council.

In the Work Programme, a communication has also been announced for the summer of 2022 on a strategic partnership with the Gulf States. The Government informed the Committee of the matter at a meeting on 14 October 2021 ahead of discussion the Foreign Affairs Council was to hold to provide the High Representative and the Commission with guidelines for the coming communication. The Committee notes that the Committee on EU Affairs the day after expressed its support for the Government's presented approach, which includes advocating a strong commitment on the part of the EU in relation to the individual countries and the Gulf Cooperation Council, for example by strengthening trade relations, cooperation on climate action and the dialogue on human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The "Blocking Statute" (Regulation (EG) no 2271/96), to which the Commission is going to propose an amendment, contains provisions that aim to counterbalance the effects of third countries' extra-territorial sanctions. Extra-territorial application of sanctions is in violation of international law. Like the Commission, the Committee sees a need to review the possibilities of further measures to deter and counter the effects of such sanctions, and that reinforcing the blocking statute can be a part of this.

The Committee sees no reason to comment on the other initiatives given under the heading "A Stronger Europe in the World" and which may primarily fall under the responsibility of other committees. The initiatives apply to a youth action plan in EU external action, a strategy on international energy engagement and an action plan for international ocean management.

The Committee has not identified any other initiative in the Work Programme or its appendices that concerns the Committee's area of responsibility. The Committee notes that the two current proposals in the area of the Committee that the Commission stated as prioritised in the Work Programme for 2021 have now been adopted partly through Regulation (EU) 2020/2172 on amended trade measures the EU grants for countries and territories participating in or linked to the European Union's Stabilisation and Association process, and partly through Regulation (EU) 2021/821 on a recast of the PDA Regulation on the setting up of a Union regime for the control of exports, brokering, technical assistance, transit and transfer of dual-use items. The Committee has followed negotiations on the recasted PDA Regulation since they were begun in 2016 and was given information at a meeting on 4 February 2021 from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs prior to the adoption of the Regulation. In October 2021, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs began a consultative procedure on proposed amendments to Swedish statutes as a complement to the EU Regulation (Ds 2021:32). A Government bill is expected to be presented in the Riksdag in spring 2022.

The Committee further notes that two proposals falling under the responsibility of the Committee have become out of date in connection with the agreement on the multiannual financial framework and the European Recovery Instrument, and that the Commission is planning to withdraw these proposals.

In conclusion, the Committee regrets that the Commission has not been in a position in the Work Programme to advance the enlargement process further. The Committee is well aware that this cannot be attributed to the Commission, which on the contrary in its Communication on EU Enlargement Policy COM (2021) 644 has clearly pointed out that the delay in beginning negotiations for Albania and North Macedonia has a negative effect on the credibility of the EU. The Committee sees it as extremely important that Sweden, together with other like-minded member states, increases the pressure so as to break the deadlock in the Council. It is of central importance that to ensure its credibility the EU lives up to its commitments towards countries in the Western Balkans and also towards countries in the Eastern Partnership, where the Committee has the view that the three associated countries Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia can be offered the perspective of possible

membership in accordance with the “more for more principle” and in the light of the reforms these countries have implemented.

With regard to what has been stated above, the Committee proposes that the Riksdag file the statement.

Reservation from the Left Party

The representative of the Left Party has entered a reservation against the position of the Committee as regards the Conference on the Future of Europe, the Common Foreign, Security and Defence Policy and the protection of the EU’s external borders.

As far as the Conference on the Future of Europe is concerned, the party representative points out that the conclusions of the Conference cannot possibly be regarded as representative for EU citizens, and that they thus cannot be cited as supporting any reforms.

As far as the Common Foreign, Security and Defence Policy is concerned, the party representative is opposed to a general development towards increased coordination of foreign policy in the EU and in particular the deepening of defence cooperation through the Strategic Compass, the Defence Union and closer cooperation with NATO.

As far as the protection of the EU’s external borders is concerned, the party representative shares the Committee’s criticism of the regime in Belarus and its ruthless exploitation of migrants. However, the party representative considers that the right of asylum should be stressed and that all attempts to prevent asylum seekers from crossing the EU’s borders by means of “pushbacks” should be condemned.

APPENDIX

Summary of comments from other Riksdag committees

The comments of the Committee on the Constitution

In its comments, the Committee on the Constitution sets great store by the Commission's initiative on democracy. The Committee welcomes the fact that the Conference on the Future of Europe has begun and takes a positive view of the ambition to increase citizen participation and particularly the involvement of young people in debate on the future.

Furthermore, the Committee on the Constitution stresses how important it is that the Commission continue its efforts to strengthen and defend the rule of law, which, together with respect for human rights, is fundamental in a democracy. In connection with the coming initiative to create a European Freedom Media Act, the Committee on the Constitution would like to emphasise how important it is to safeguard the freedom, independence and diversity of the media. The information provided in the Work Programme on this initiative is too scant to justify any developed points of view at this stage.

In conclusion, the Committee on the Constitution welcomes the Commission's work on better regulation with the objective of avoiding unnecessary regulatory burdens.

The comments of the Committee on Justice

The Committee on Justice stresses first in its comments that the Commission should attach greater importance to analysing current legislation when new legislation is being prepared and that new penal law at EU level should only be developed if it provides significant added value.

The Committee on Justice has previously pointed out the need for an update of the API Directive, which concerns the obligation of carriers to provide advance information on passengers, and therefore take a positive view of the Commission's intention to present such a proposal. In connection with the Commission stating in the Work Programme that they are considering looking into how it is possible to achieve convergence with regard to detention and conditions for detention between member states, the Committee on Justice points out that measures aimed at detention and other forms of deprivation of liberty are complicated as the member states' regulatory frameworks regarding procedural law differ, and the Committee therefore considers it doubtful as to whether initiatives should be taken at EU level and, if so, which standards should be prioritised. The Committee on Justice stresses that it should be ensured that the intended measures do not overlap the work being carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) and the UN Committee against Torture (CAT) as regards the material conditions of detained persons.

Furthermore, the Committee takes a positive view of the fact that the Commission is prioritising negotiations on the proposal on European Production and Preservation Orders for electronic evidence in criminal matters, since the Committee has previously requested proposals to secure and improve access to information and electronic evidence for crime-fighting.

Finally, the Committee on Justice wishes to repeat the view that the Commission should add a proposal to introduce compulsory biometric controls at external borders of people who enjoy free movement, in the same way as for third-country nationals.

The comments of the Committee on Civil Affairs

The Committee on Civil Affairs has limited its comments to the Commission's intention to prioritise negotiations on proposals to improve the gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges and on companies' sustainability reporting. The Committee on Civil Affairs maintains its view that the proposal to improve the gender balance in companies listed on stock exchanges should not be prioritised, as has previously been put forward in comments on the Work Programmes for 2020 and 2021. Furthermore, the Committee considers that there is no reason to revise the directive that now regulates companies' sustainability reporting in the way proposed by the Commission. One of the implications of the proposal is that small and medium-sized enterprises

should be covered by requirements for sustainability reporting, which in the opinion of the Committee on Civil Affairs is not satisfactory with regard to the costs and the increased administration it would entail for these companies. The Committee therefore considers that this proposal should not be given priority either.

Dissenting opinion from the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party

The representatives of the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party have in a dissenting opinion expressed their support for the Commission's assessment that both proposals should be prioritised in 2022. As regards an improved gender balance in companies listed on the stock exchange, it is stated for example that the measures of individual member states are obviously insufficient to make use of the opportunities for competitiveness and growth resulting from making good use of available competence, women's competence included, on company boards. This issue can therefore, by reason of its scale, best be dealt with if all member states act together.

As regards companies' sustainability reporting, the party representatives stress that improved reporting would make it easier for investors and consumers to make well-founded decisions. This can also serve to strengthen human rights, democracy, gender equality and the principles of the rule of law, as well as being part of efforts to combat environmental and climate change and to promote justice and decent conditions in the labour market. The party representatives also consider that improved sustainability reporting can give Swedish companies a competitive advantage and help direct capital towards sustainable investments.

Dissenting opinion from the Left Party

In a dissenting opinion, the representative of the Left Party shares the Committee's view that the proposal to introduce an improved gender balance in company boards should not be prioritised. In the explanatory statement, which differs partially from that of the Committee, the importance of an improved gender balance is stressed as regards participation in financial decision-making and that it should be the task of every member state to take initiatives to achieve an improved gender balance in company boards.

As regards the proposal concerning companies' sustainability reporting, the party representative considers that this should be prioritised in 2022, mainly for the same reasons as those put forward by the Social Democrats and the Green Party.

The comments of the Committee on Defence

In its comments, the Committee on Defence stresses the importance of EU work on improved cybersecurity and the necessity of cooperation within the EU and internationally to promote information and cyber security. The Committee thus takes a positive view that the Commission intends to propose a cyber resilience act to establish common cybersecurity standards for products. The Committee also wishes to underline the importance of continued work on improving digital skills in society to counter both threats and challenges, protect citizens and foster the EU's resilience.

Furthermore, the Committee takes a positive view of an action plan to promote research and development in security and defence technology since the need for this is increasing in an ever more insecure and changing world and since research and innovation are a precondition for long-term capabilities.

In connection with the Commission's priority to accelerate work on a European Defence Union, the Committee wishes to underline that European cooperation on security and defence should not be characterised by supranational authority, and the Committee notes that military and defence-related decisions in the EU are taken unanimously in accordance with current treaties. In conclusion, the Committee on Defence takes a positive view of work on a joint declaration between the EU and NATO as it is of great importance that common resources can be made use of efficiently and resources can be mobilised in an appropriate way to meet challenges in the area of defence and security.

Special statement of opinion from the Sweden Democrats

In a special statement of opinion, the representatives of the Sweden Democrats stress that European security and defence cooperation should not be characterised by supranational authority and that no work should therefore be carried out to implement a genuine European Defence Union. The member states of the EU have chosen different solutions concerning security policy, say the representatives, who believe that an establishment of a European Defence Union would go against these national specialisations.

The comments of the Committee on Social Insurance

The Committee on Social Insurance shares the Commission's assessment that it should be a prioritised matter to agree on the remaining proposals in the Pact for Migration and Asylum and agrees that the events in Belarus and Afghanistan show how important it is to come further in negotiations. The Committee on Social Insurance wishes to stress how important it is that the EU takes a holistic approach on the internal and external dimension of migration issues. Controls of those entering via external borders must be improved while the right to apply for asylum is maintained, says the Committee on Social Insurance, and considers that the EU should have an efficient and legally secure asylum system that leads to a more even distribution of asylum seekers in the EU and minimises secondary movements.

The Committee on Social Insurance notes that a certain amount of progress has been made in negotiations on the reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which is an important part of the Asylum and Migration Pact, and stresses how important it is that the negotiations and work on the Asylum and Migration Pact and the reform of the CEAS does not lose momentum. In this context, a prioritisation of the proposal on a Union Resettlement Framework is to be welcomed and the Committee wishes to highlight that Sweden has long given priority to international work to increase the global distribution of responsibility and the receipt of quota refugees by other countries. Resettlement is, in the opinion of the Committee, a tried and tested system and the safest way for people in need of protection to enter the EU legally. The Committee further takes a positive view of the fact that the EU has temporarily repealed parts of the EU's simplification of the visa agreement with Belarus as a consequence of the Belarusian regime's hybrid attack of the EU's external border by facilitating the transit of migrants to the EU.

The Committee notes that the provisions concerning coordination of social security systems, which is also included in the Commission's list of prioritised proposals, is a precondition for ensuring the smooth functioning of free movement in the EU. It is necessary that the provisions are developed and modernised in pace with developments in society and to suit different types of social security systems, says the Committee, and recalls that the need to implement changes differ between different types of benefits. In the opinion of the Committee, an agreement between the institutions should make use of the parts of the Commission's proposal which in their entirety aim to improve coordination while at the same time respecting national self-determination. The Committee considers it positive that the Commission is endeavouring to bring the process forward, but stresses that an agreement should not imply a restriction of the national competence of the member states and neither should it imply that more benefits are covered by coordination provisions or that more benefits can be paid out in the case of settlement in another member state.

Dissenting opinion from the Sweden Democrats

In a dissenting opinion, the party representatives from the Sweden Democrats state that the Commission should not present proposals that would entail limitations of member states' self-determination, which they consider is the case with a large number of the proposals and which should therefore be countered or at least reworked.

As regards the Migration Pact, the party representatives consider that the Commission should prioritise reforms to improve security in Europe and increase the defence of the EU's external borders, while at the same time taking into account the self-determination of member states and their possibility to adapt to changing circumstances. The party representatives also consider that the proposal on a Union Resettlement Framework should be retracted, as the member states themselves should determine

whether they wish to receive migrants and if so, how many. Furthermore, they consider that the priority in question on initiatives in the Migration Pact regarding smuggling of human beings and the return of migrants should be to protect the EU's borders and stop illegal and irregular migration. The party representatives also want the Commission to prioritise initiatives that improve the opportunity to share information on the entry and exit of aliens and potential risks to the EU and Sweden. As regards the proposal for a directive for returning third-country nationals, the party representatives emphasise that all attempts to restrict the opportunities for member states to implement detention or other control measures should be counteracted while at the same time opportunities for cooperation in order to enforce expulsion should be expanded.

In conclusion, the party representatives would like to point out that while they support the basic idea of coordinating social security and the EU's social pillar, national competence must be placed at the centre of all proposals, which must respect the principle of subsidiarity and proportionality. The party representatives see a risk that the social pillar can become a springboard for the transfer of further powers to the EU and they stress that coordination of social policy must not be implemented on the basis of the "flexibility clause".

The comments of the Committee on Health and Welfare

In its comments, by means of an extract from the record, the Committee on Health and Welfare welcomes the Commission's Work Programme as a useful basis for the Committee's planning and monitoring of EU issues. The Committee would like to emphasise how important it is that the distribution of competences between the EU and member states is respected and that the proposals the Commission presents do not entail restrictions in national competence when it comes to social issues and health and medical care issues. The Committee is monitoring planned initiatives within the Committee's area of responsibilities and is also following negotiations on the four items of legislative business in the area of health and medical care to which the Commission gives priority in the Work Programme.

Dissenting opinion from the Sweden Democrats

In a dissenting opinion, representatives of the Sweden Democrats state that their assessment is that the Work Programme will lead to an expanding EU budget with an increased EU contribution for Sweden as a consequence. The party representatives would also like to stress that parts of the Work Programme lie outside of what can reasonably be dealt with or decided on at EU level and they emphasise the importance of safeguarding national self-determination on the basis of the fact that health issues and social issues should be dealt with as close to the citizens as possible.

The comments of the Committee on Environment and Agriculture

In its comments, the Committee on Environment and Agriculture welcomes the zero pollution action plan as an important part of the implementation of the Green Deal and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. The cross-sectoral approach is given particular emphasis as positive, as are the fundamental principles concerning the prevention of pollution, that the polluter has to pay and controls at source.

The Committee further welcomes the fact that the Commission is giving high priority to environmental and climate issues and the Committee emphasises that every member state should endeavour to achieve climate neutrality and that all sectors and member states need to continue to the transition primarily by reducing emissions of greenhouse gases. In this connection, the Committee stresses that forests have a central role to play in climate efforts as a carbon sink and a source of sustainably produced raw materials that will replace fossil-based products. Since the lead times in this sector are long, the Committee stresses the importance of a long-term perspective for forestry in climate efforts.

In connection with the Commission prioritising the LULUCF Regulation on land use, changes in land use and forestry, the Committee would like to stress that the formulation of new proposals must respect the fact that forestry policy is a national competence and be in line with sustainably active

forestry. The Committee, which sees substantial risks in endeavouring to achieve climate neutrality in a specific sector at EU level, such as an expanded land sector, stresses that increased uptake of carbon dioxide in forests and land is in its very nature more uncertain and less permanent than emission reductions. Bearing in mind the uncertainties and the long lead times, the Committee is critical to binding targets for increased carbon sinks and the proposed division of responsibilities, which is based on data that overestimates Sweden's carbon sinks and would therefore mean a disproportionately high commitment for Sweden.

In this connection, the Committee would like to highlight work on the EU's forestry strategy and agrees with the Commission's view of the forestry sector as a cornerstone in the transition to a green economy. Resources from the forest should be used effectively and in accordance with the principles of a circular economy, believes the Committee; however, it is opposed to the detailed regulations according to the cascade principle, since this is not the best way in which to achieve these targets. The Committee is also seeking a discussion in connection with the forestry strategy on how demand is to be created to promote the forestry value chain as a basis for competitive companies, jobs and sustainable growth. Also in this context, the Committee would like to stress that national self-determination in forestry issues should be safeguarded.

In connection with the fact that the Commission is prioritising work on the Social Climate Fund, the Committee expresses criticism towards this fund and wishes to highlight that considerable funding for similar measures is already in existence in the multiannual financial framework and the European Recovery Instrument, and the fact that the EU's Climate Law includes a commitment in the same direction.

The Commission's priorities also include the current review of the Regulation on Fisheries Control. In connection with this, the Committee points out that it is of fundamental importance that EU rules are observed in a correct and uniform manner so that they can have the intended effect, and it is high time that the EU should have modern and smoothly functioning fisheries control, which, in the opinion of the Committee, should be given much greater priority in the work of the Commission. In this context, it is pointed out that it is not proportional to have general provisions in control of recreational fishing at EU level.

As regards EU fisheries policy, the Committee also points out that it is fundamental that management of fish stocks is based in the best possible scientific evidence. In light of new knowledge on the Baltic regarding the sensitivity of ecosystems, the interaction of different species and the composition of stocks, the Committee considers that the Commission should commence a review of the current management plan for cod, herring, Baltic herring and sprats in the Baltic Sea.

The Committee further presents some important aspects to be considered in the Commission's continued work on the 'Farm to Fork' strategy, to which the Committee is generally very positive. It is a matter of ensuring that the quantified targets stated in the strategy should be formulated in such a way that countries with high consumption of antibiotics, chemical pesticides and nutrients need to reduce their consumption most, as this brings about most environmental and climate-related benefits in relation to costs. It is also a question of a lack of clarity in the impact assessment of the effects that arise as a consequence of the changes in production methods that are proposed in the strategy, where the Committee underlines how important it is that a reduced use of input goods on agricultural land such as nutrients and chemical pesticides should not lead to reduced food production.

As far as the Commission's work with better regulation is concerned, the Committee points out that the formulation of rules at EU level needs to take into consideration both member states' differing preconditions and performance in the area in question and that cost-effectiveness for specific measures can differ between member states. The Committee notes that the majority of EU acts are now adopted by the Commission as delegated acts or implementing acts by means of a procedure that can entail a very limited opportunity for insight and influence. The Committee's assessment is that many of the technical questions that are regulated in this way have substantial effects for the member states and their companies. In view of this, the Committee on Environment and Agriculture would like to underline how important it is that EU legislation is formulated clearly through well motivated and defined delegations to the Commission.