



By: TA | AP Insight

From Russia to the Middle East and AI – von der Leyen's priorities for the next year



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen will deliver a major state of the European Union speech on Wednesday setting out her priorities for the next year and her vision for tackling the challenges faced by the world's biggest trading bloc.

The content of von der Leyen's address to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France, has been kept under wraps.

Political groups in the assembly have lobbied to get their priorities and pet projects included.

But the speech is likely to touch on AI, **climate change and the fires** that have swept Europe this summer, as well as protection for children online, Russia's war on Ukraine, conflict across the Middle East and international trade tensions.

Last year, she said Europe must stake out its **independence** as the U.S. continued to impose **tariffs** on nations and the Trump administration criticized the bloc's migration policies, warning of "**civilizational erasure**."

"Europe is in a fight," von der Leyen said. "A fight for our values and our democracies."

"Battle lines for a New World order based on power are being drawn right now," she said, adding that the EU "must fight for its place in a world in which many major powers are either ambivalent or openly hostile to Europe."

A political spectacle to showcase European ambition

The event has become an annual ritual modeled on the **State of the Union addresses** to Congress by U.S. presidents, but it won't be broadcast widely and few of the European Union's 450 million citizens across 27 member countries are likely to tune in.

It's a carefully crafted communications exercise in front of often applauding lawmakers that is appreciated most by EU

insiders. Von der Leyen tends to conclude with what has become her rallying cry: "Long Live Europe."

The EU is facing the crumbling of all the premises on which it was built - Eric Maurice

Routinely, its themes are aspirational. They touch on von der Leyen's hopes and plans for the commission — the EU's increasingly powerful executive branch — over the coming year but often lack detail. Critics say the commission's work is opaque.

Eric Maurice, an analyst at the European Policy Centre think-tank, warned against her using it "to placate political groups" or "to raise the Commission President's profile and extend the Commission's political and institutional domain."

"The EU is facing the crumbling of all the premises on which it was built. The rules-based order with benevolent free-trade and U.S. friendship and support is disappearing," Maurice said.

An institution's rising power and influence

The commission proposes laws used across the 27 countries and watches to ensure that those already in place are not being broken. It negotiates trade on behalf of all its members and is Europe's top antitrust investigator.

At its helm stands the 67-year-old former German defense minister, who has become a prominent figure at summits with leaders around the world, despite being a political appointee who hasn't been elected to Europe's top post.



Ursula Von der Leyen seems to have the begrudging respect of Trump

Von der Leyen is hard to ignore. She has accumulated influence over 7 years in office by securing vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic, managing the **energy crisis** sparked by Russia's invasion and support to Ukraine through the war.

She also seems to have the begrudging respect of Trump. She, her chief of cabinet, and her trade commissioners have labored to **limit the damage** caused by Trump's tariff war to the European economy.

But the Trump administration has also been riled by the commission's crackdown on Big Tech companies, many of them in the United States, over their perceived flouting of Europe's data regulations.

Ahead of the speech, the commission has set up a website dedicated to its leader and the event and has been distributing brochures laying out their achievements over the last 12 months.

The list is considerable, and includes sealing new trade agreements, boosting economic competitiveness, cutting energy costs, spurring defense investment, providing billions of euros in support to Ukraine and slapping sanctions on hundreds of Russian officials and organizations.