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Background Note I: The Irish EU Presidency – Priorities for the Second Half of 2026

As Ireland assumes the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2026, it does so in a context marked by geopolitical uncertainty, rapid technological change, and increasing pressure on democratic systems. The current global environment is unstable and deeply challenging, with many external factors beyond the Union's control. Against this backdrop, the Irish Presidency will focus on areas where Europe can take decisive action to strengthen resilience, deliver for its citizens, and respond effectively to emerging challenges.

The Presidency will be guided by the principle “*Ní neart go cur le Chéile*” (**Strength with unity**) and will prioritise delivery across three interlocking and mutually reinforcing pillars:

- **Competitiveness,**
- **Values, and**
- **Security.**

These pillars will underpin all areas of work and will be supported by cross-cutting efforts, including continued support for Ukraine, strengthened global engagement, interaction with enlargement partners, and the development of stable relationships with key partners such as the United Kingdom and the United States.

A central overarching priority will be to ensure that the Union has the necessary financial capacity to meet future challenges. In this context, the Irish Presidency will work to facilitate timely agreement on the Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034), ensuring that it supports key policies, including the Common Agricultural Policy and Cohesion Policy, while equipping the Union to respond to new economic, technological, and geopolitical developments.

Pillar 1: Competitiveness: Fostering Prosperity and Wellbeing

Enhancing Europe's competitiveness and productivity will be a central focus of the Irish Presidency. In order to deliver a secure economic future that meets the needs and expectations of its citizens, the European Union must remain an attractive place to invest, innovate and do business in a rapidly evolving global economy.



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A key priority will be unlocking the full potential of the Single Market, including addressing fragmentation, reducing regulatory barriers, and improving the environment for businesses—particularly small and medium-sized enterprises and high-growth firms—to scale across borders. This work will be closely linked to the Presidency’s focus on *simplification*, ensuring that EU rules are clearer, more proportionate, and easier for businesses to navigate.

The Irish Presidency will treat the objectives of the “One Europe, One Market” Roadmap as core priorities, supporting progress towards a more integrated and efficient European market.

Ireland will also support ongoing discussions on new approaches to facilitate cross-border economic activity, including proposals for an optional “28th regime” or “EU Inc.” model, aimed at simplifying the regulatory environment for companies operating across the Union. These efforts will complement a strong *trade* agenda, recognising the importance of open markets and international partnerships in supporting EU competitiveness.

The Presidency will emphasise the importance of access to finance and the further development of the Capital Markets Union, recognising its role in supporting innovation, digitalisation, and long-term economic growth. Strengthening the EU’s capacity to commercialise new technologies and retain high-growth firms will be essential to maintaining global competitiveness.

In parallel, the Presidency will support the continued development of the digital economy as a key driver of productivity and innovation. This includes the effective implementation of the EU’s digital regulatory framework, such as the Digital Services Act, the Digital Markets Act and the Artificial Intelligence Act, in order to create a competitive, transparent and trusted digital environment for businesses and citizens. This aligns with the Presidency’s priorities on *AI and digital transformation*, ensuring Europe remains a global leader in trusted and innovative technologies.

Finally, competitiveness efforts will also be supported by progress on the *energy transition*, recognising that access to affordable, sustainable energy is a key enabler of industrial growth, investment, and long-term economic resilience.



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Pillar 2: Values: Upholding the Foundations of the Union

The European Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, as set out in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union. These shared values, together with those reflected in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, form the bedrock of the Union and underpin both its competitiveness and its security.

The Irish Presidency will place a strong emphasis on upholding and promoting these values, recognising their importance to the functioning of democratic societies and to the credibility of the European Union both internally and globally. This includes supporting efforts to protect democratic institutions, ensure accountability, and strengthen public trust.

In this context, the enlargement process will also be recognised as an important expression of the Union's values, supporting democratic reform, the rule of law, and stability across the European continent. The Presidency will support credible, merit-based progress with enlargement partners in line with established criteria.

Particular attention will also be given to the digital dimension of democratic life, including the protection of fundamental rights online, ensuring accountability of online platforms, and addressing challenges such as disinformation and emerging risks associated with artificial intelligence. Strengthening the resilience of democratic discourse in the digital space will remain an important element of this work.

Pillar 3: Security: Protecting Citizens and Strengthening the Union

The evolving international landscape presents significant challenges to European security. Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, conflicts in the Middle East and the Gulf, and the emergence of new threats and forms of warfare underline the need for a coordinated and robust European response.

The Irish Presidency will work to advance measures that contribute to the strengthening of European security, including enhancing resilience across economic, technological and infrastructural domains. This will involve efforts to improve preparedness, safeguard critical infrastructure, and respond effectively to hybrid and cyber threats.



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Active support for Ukraine will remain central to this effort. The Presidency will also support the European Union's broader global engagement, promoting stability, resilience and cooperation with neighbouring regions and international partners.

In this context, engagement with the EU's neighbourhood, including enlargement partners, will contribute to strengthening stability and security across Europe, reinforcing the Union's role as a geopolitical actor.

Cybersecurity will remain a key priority, reflecting the increasing interconnection between digital systems and broader security concerns. Strengthening the resilience of critical digital infrastructure and addressing threats such as cyberattacks, disinformation, and the misuse of emerging technologies will form an integral part of this work.

Conclusion

The Irish Presidency will pursue a focused and delivery-driven agenda centred on competitiveness, values and security. In a period of significant global uncertainty, the Presidency will emphasise unity, coordinated action and practical outcomes, ensuring that the European Union is equipped to meet the challenges of the present while laying the foundations for long-term stability, prosperity and resilience.