A&L Goodbody

EU, COMPETITION & PROCUREMENT

Ireland’s presidency of the Council of the European Union

Ireland now holds the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union (**Council**), taking over from Cyprus and will hand over to Lithuania on 1 January 2027.

Ireland takes the presidency at an important time for the EU. This note outlines the main features of the presidency of the Council and Ireland’s role for the next six months.

7 MIN READ

What is the Council?

The Council is one of the EU's primary decision-making institutions.

It brings together government ministers from all 27 Member States to discuss, amend and adopt laws, and coordinate policies. It also develops the EU's foreign and security policy, concludes agreements between the EU and other countries or international organisations, and adopts the annual EU budget.

While the Council is a single legal entity, its ministers meet in ten different groups (known as Council configurations) which are organised by policy area. Rather than the same 27 ministers attending each meeting, the minister responsible for the relevant policy area in each Member State participates.

One element that remains constant is the chairing of meetings, which rotates every six months between Member States. An exception is the Foreign Affairs Council, which is chaired by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

What is the presidency of the Council?

All 27 Member States take turns holding the presidency of the Council for a period of six months. The role of the presidency involves chairing most meetings of the Council and ensuring cooperation between Member States, setting the Council's agenda and strategic programme, and acting as representative of the Council. Member States work together in groups of three to ensure there is continuity over an 18-month period.

What do we know about Ireland's presidency?

Ireland will hold the presidency from 1 July to 31 December 2026, marking its eighth presidency since joining the European Economic Community in 1973. It forms part of a trio with Lithuania and Greece under an 18-month programme designed to ensure continuity of work across successive presidencies. They will take over from Cyprus which has held the presidency since 1 January 2026 and was part of a trio with Poland and Denmark. The role affords Ireland an opportunity to steer negotiations across the EU legislative agenda.

The official Presidency Programme emphasises that Ireland's term will be defined by "action and delivery" and guided by the principle of "strength with unity."

Ireland has identified three interlocking pillars of competitiveness, values, and security to guide its presidency. Across all pillars, Ireland will focus on (i) strengthening relationships with key global partners like the UK and US, (ii) advancing negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework (**MFF**), which puts forward the EU's long term budget from 2028-2034, and (iii) geo-political issues like Ukraine.

The three pillars

COMPETITIVENESS

This pillar focuses on boosting the EU's productivity productivity and economic strength through the 'One Europe, One Market' roadmap. It is built around five strategic building blocks: simplifying regulation, deepening Internal Market integration, strengthening trade relationships, advancing the energy transition, and enhancing digital and AI capabilities.

The presidency will also support investment, innovation, and resilience across key sectors such as energy, technology, agriculture, and health, while encouraging cooperation between Member States to deliver a more competitive and sustainable EU economy.

In addition, the presidency is expected to advance the EU's simplification and competitiveness agenda through progress on a number of key legislative initiatives, including the omnibus simplification packages, the Savings and Investments Union, the EU Inc. proposal, the Industrial Accelerator Act and the Digital Networks Act. It will also support measures aimed at strengthening innovation, investment, and resilience in strategic and emerging sectors such as AI, semiconductors, biotechnology, and new technologies.

VALUES

The values pillar prioritises upholding and promoting the EU's core principles of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and equality both within Europe and globally as reflected in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (**TEU**). It emphasises support for Ukraine, commitment to multilateralism and international law, and efforts to promote peace and stability in regions such as the Middle East.

The presidency will also prioritise development cooperation, enlargement, democratic resilience, effective implementation of the Digital Services Act, online safety, and the protection of younger people online. Ireland has identified the strengthening of online safety as a presidency priority and will advocate for EU-level decisions on a digital age of majority, privacy-preserving age verification measures, and legislative measures to combat abuse.

SECURITY

The security pillar concentrates on responding to rising geopolitical and hybrid threats, including the war in Ukraine and instability in the Middle East, by strengthening EU defence capabilities and resilience. It prioritises sustained political, military, and financial support for Ukraine, advancing work on the proposed new European Security Strategy, and enhancing capabilities in areas such as military mobility, maritime and infrastructure security, cybersecurity, and counterterrorism.

The presidency will also deepen cooperation with international partners (including NATO and the UN), while addressing security in a broad sense covering climate, energy, economic, health and food security and strengthening internal EU security through measures targeting organised crime, migrant smuggling and trafficking, improved cross-border cooperation, and implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum. Particular emphasis will be placed on military mobility, maritime security, protection of critical infrastructure, cybersecurity, preparedness, and resilience planning, including implementation of the Preparedness Union Strategy and measures to protect energy and telecommunications infrastructure and subsea cables.

What issues does Ireland's presidency create for the private sector?

The Programme indicates that a number of important legislative and policy initiatives will be progressed during Ireland's presidency, creating both potential opportunities and challenges for the private sector.

Competitiveness

Ireland is expected to prioritise measures aimed at strengthening the EU's economic resilience and global competitiveness.

Further deepening and integration of the Internal Market, including the reduction of regulatory barriers to cross-border trade, is an issue for the presidency. This may be accompanied by efforts to simplify regulatory frameworks and reduce administrative burdens for businesses. There is also likely to be an increased policy focus on innovation, digital markets, and access to capital and investment opportunities, with a view to reducing external dependencies. The Programme indicates that strategic sectors such as AI, semiconductors, biotechnology, energy, and digital infrastructure will remain significant areas of EU policy focus during Ireland's presidency.

Despite the emphasis on simplification, businesses may continue to face implementation and compliance challenges as multiple major legislative initiatives progress simultaneously across areas such as digital regulation, cybersecurity, sustainability, tax, energy, and industrial policy.

Values

The presidency will also emphasise the protection of EU values contained in Article 2 TEU including the rule of law, democracy, and freedom. Businesses may benefit from greater legal certainty in the digital economy through the continued implementation of EU digital regulation including the Digital Services Act.

At the same time, businesses may continue to face compliance and reputational risks arising from evolving expectations relating to digital safety, online platforms, human rights, equality, and corporate governance.

Security

The presidency will focus on strengthening EU security and defence capabilities, including resilience against hybrid threats, cyber risks, and attacks on critical infrastructure. In parallel, Ireland is expected to play a role in advancing the EU's energy security agenda, including modernising and expanding the EU's energy networks, improving cross-border interconnection, accelerating procedures for permissions, and strengthening the resilience of energy infrastructure. These measures are intended to support both the clean energy transition and the EU's broader strategic autonomy by reducing vulnerabilities and ensuring secure, affordable and sustainable energy supplies.

The presidency is likely to drive increased demand across a range of security related sectors, including cybersecurity and the protection of critical infrastructure. This may be accompanied by an expansion of EU level and national procurement activity, particularly in security and resilience - focused areas. There is also likely to be increased investment and regulatory focus directed towards energy infrastructure, grid development, and clean energy transition projects, alongside greater investment by businesses in risk mitigation and resilience across key sectors.

Enlargement

In addition to continued political and financial support, Ireland's presidency is expected to engage closely with Ukraine's attempts to join the EU, alongside broader enlargement discussions involving the Western Balkans. The Programme specifically identified advancement of negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova as a presidency priority. Enlargement is likely to be an important topic during the presidency.

Sanctions

Businesses will likely need to navigate the risks associated with a continuation (and possible expansion) of the EU sanctions regimes, alongside possibly increased enforcement activity and compliance expectations.

Geopolitical developments

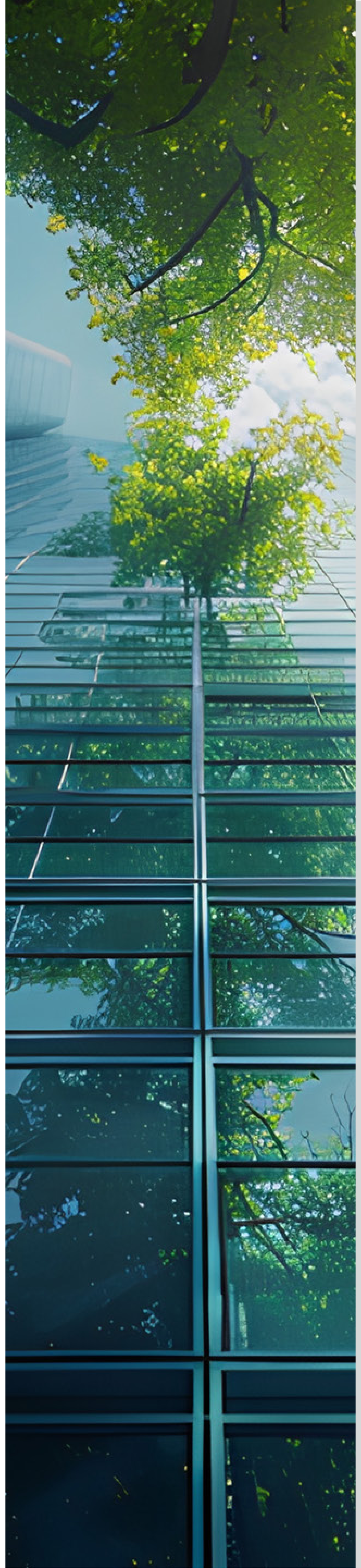
Ireland has also highlighted ongoing instability in the Middle East and broader geopolitical issues as key features of its presidency. The Programme specifically highlights matters in the Gulf region and the potential impacts on economic stability, food security and energy markets - these will be focus areas for the EU.

Businesses may see increased demand for risk management, regulatory and strategic advisory services, particularly as they reassess possible exposure to geopolitical instability and supply chain disruption.

Ongoing geopolitical issues may create volatility in energy markets and global supply chains, contributing to heightened uncertainty for businesses with cross-border operations. Businesses may also face increased restrictions or sanctions particularly in sensitive or geopolitically exposed markets.

What are some of the milestones of Ireland's presidency over the next six months?

Ireland is expected to chair over 180 Council preparatory meetings, bodies and committees in Brussels as well as hosting 270 presidency events and meetings in Ireland. A principal element of its role will be advancing negotiations on the MFF with Ireland expected to oversee an important phase of discussions as Member States seek to reach agreement on the EU's long-term budget (2028–2034). A calendar of meetings can be found here. Some milestones over this six month period include:



July	▪ **1 July 2026:** Ireland assumes the presidency. ▪ Presentation of the Programme to the European Parliament.
Autumn	▪ Intensive legislative negotiations across priority files, particularly under the competitiveness agenda. ▪ Ongoing negotiations on the European Grids Package following agreement of the Council's negotiating position in June 2026. ▪ **15 October 2026:** European Council meeting.
November	▪ **12 November 2026:** European Political Community Summit. ▪ **19 November 2026:** Final stages of negotiations on the EU Budget for 2027 by the Economic and Financial Affairs Council.
December	▪ **10 December 2026:** Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council meeting. ▪ European Council conclusions reflecting presidency outcomes. ▪ **17 December 2026:** European Council meeting expected to consider key presidency outcomes, including the MFF and enlargement. ▪ **31 December 2026:** Ireland's presidency ends and is handed over to Lithuania to take over on 1 January 2027.

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