



‘Europe as a Task: Rethink, Rebuild, Repower’

The Key Priorities of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU

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On 1 July 2022, the Czech Republic will assume the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which it will hold for six months until 31 December 2022, after which Sweden will take over. The Czech Presidency is the second of the current FCS (France, Czech Republic, Sweden) Trio presidency of France, the Czech Republic, and Sweden. This is the second time that the Czech Republic has held the Presidency of the Council of the EU, with the first being in 2009¹. The 2009 Presidency was primarily concerned with managing the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis and its impact on the European economy and placed an emphasis on energy security and EU relations with third-countries.

The Czech Republic takes on the Presidency as the European Union grapples with the ongoing implications of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, particularly in the areas of energy, defence and foreign policy. A central policy priority for the Czech Presidency will be managing the prospect of EU enlargement to incorporate Ukraine, as well as Moldova, Georgia, Albania and North Macedonia. A second linked priority is developing the EU’s energy infrastructure

and security of supply by concluding the Fit for 55 and REPowerEU legislative packages.

Presidency Motto

The Czech Presidency motto, “Europe as a Task: Rethink, Rebuild, Repower”, echoes the title of an essay published by former Czech President Václav Havel in 1996, Europe as Spiritual Task². It calls on Europe to truly reflect on how best to develop a shared conscience and to build a common European political architecture and approach towards the world.

This focus is apt given the Czech emphasis on navigating a new security and political architecture in Europe in the context of the war in Ukraine, meeting the future challenges of the green and digital transitions and charting Europe’s place in the world.

The logo of the Presidency contains 27 elements representing each of the Member States of the European Union, based on their flags, stylised into a compass needle arrangement. It is designed to evoke the original Czech logo in 2009, and to point the way towards the future³.

1. https://www.mzv.cz/representation_brussels/en/about_the_representation/czech_eu_presidency_2009/index.html<http://www.eu2008.si/en/indexd41d.html>

2. <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/europe-as-a-spiritual-task>

3. <https://czech-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/presidency/logo-and-motto/>



FCS Trio Presidency

The joint FCS Trio Presidency programme initially outlined four thematic priorities for action during their shared 18-month tenure, namely: protecting citizens and freedoms, reinforcing the EU's economic foundations: fostering a more climate-neutral, equitable and social Europe; and promoting European interests and values in the world. This policy programme was originally inspired by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures needed to overcome the health, economic and social shocks it caused.

The French Presidency (1 January 2022 – 30 June 2022), the first in the trio, was particularly concerned with strengthening the EU's economic and social resilience and with promoting European values and interests globally. It focused on implementing national Recovery Plans and pressing ahead with key green and digital policies to shore up the EU's strategic autonomy, such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism and the Fit for 55 legislative package. These have been delayed, however, due to the war in Ukraine and political divisions within the Union. The Czech Presidency is likely to devote significant attention towards protecting citizens and freedoms at home by addressing challenges to the rule of law within the Union, as well as addressing challenges facing European energy security which may tie into EU green and climate ambitions. The war in Ukraine has also added a fifth priority which will be a central focus for the Czech Presidency, namely strengthening common security and defence policy within the EU and reinforcing the EU's transatlantic links with the United States and NATO.

Czech Political Landscape

The Czech Republic emerged from the “velvet divorce” of Czechoslovakia in 1992, and joined the European Union in 2004.

The most recent Czech general election, held on 8-9 October 2021, resulted in the exit of long-time Prime Minister Babiš, and the formation of a broadly centrist coalition led by Petr Fiala's SPOLU grouping with the liberal Civic Democratic Party (ODS), Christian Democratic KDU-ČSL, and centre-right TOP 09 parties, alongside the centre-left PirSTAN (Pirate Party and Mayors & Independents).

The five-party coalition is relatively broad, but it is united by a shared commitment to liberal democratic values, consciously calling on the legacy of former President Václav Havel, and also share a common position on addressing illiberalism and corruption both domestically and within the EU.

Czech Presidency Priorities

The Czech Government has identified five priorities in its Presidency Programme which are critical for securing the EU as a strategic community which defends fundamental values and human rights, and which can ensure the Union's security and prosperity⁴. These are: managing the refugee crisis and Ukraine's post-war recovery; energy security; strengthening European defence and cyberspace security capabilities; Europe's strategic economic resilience; and, the EU's democratic resilience.

1. Managing the Refugee Crisis and Ukraine's Post-War Recovery

Reaching a consensus on agreeing EU candidate status for Ukraine is a critical priority for the Czech Presidency, which they view as essential for ensuring European security⁵. As a result, the Czech Presidency will have to manage the initial stages of Ukraine's accession process and balance concerns over the rule of law and corruption against geopolitical and strategic calculations for the Union.

4. https://czech-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/media/fk3pihaw/eng_priorities.pdf

5. [Czech foreign minister outlines EU presidency priorities amid “Russian war on international order” | Radio Prague International](#)

The Czech Government supports the strengthening of sanctions against Russia and increasing the level of political, financial, and military support to preserve Ukraine's political sovereignty, territorial integrity and to rebuild infrastructure and basic services provision. This is a significant goal, as the Kyiv School of Economics suggest that the direct and indirect damage caused by the war is at least €568bn and will continue to rise as the war continues⁶. How this money will be raised remains to be determined, although various options have been discussed in Brussels and Member State capitals, such as raising directly from individual Member States, reopening the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) budget to reallocate funds to Ukraine, or else the prospect of borrowing on behalf of the EU by the European Commission. Any such action could have significant implications for the future of the EU's fiscal and economic architecture.

Management of the considerable refugee influx of over 5 million Ukrainians into the EU as a result of Russia's invasion⁷ is also of critical importance for the Czech Presidency. As part of this, the Czech Government plans to work towards fund transfers to those Member States and entities bearing the greatest burdens in accommodating refugees. A particular emphasis will be placed on ensuring children are able to access education systems and are not disadvantaged and that women can participate in labour markets through the provision of childcare and pre-school facilities to promote long-term integration.

2. Energy Security

The Czech Presidency is especially concerned with the EU's energy security, a situation which has been exacerbated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and subsequent reduction in oil and natural gas supplies to EU countries. Given the pressing nature of the challenge, the Czech Presidency is more concerned with securing sufficient energy supply rather than pushing forward on energy transition measures. This means the Czech Government will work towards securing natural gas reserves from

alternative suppliers, promoting nuclear energy as well as supporting the accelerated agreement and implementation of the REPowerEU initiative, and supporting the development of voluntary joint purchases of natural gas⁸, building on the COVID-19 vaccine purchase model. The Czech Government also strongly supports the short-term objective to end EU dependency on Russian fossil fuels as a geopolitical imperative⁹. This will give an increased political impetus towards concluding the Fit for 55 legislative package, supporting greater energy efficiency, and developing hydrogen infrastructure and renewable energy initiatives in the EU. This will cost over €210bn to complete¹⁰, and the Czech Presidency will have to ensure a balance between investments in greener, more efficient energy production alongside immediately eliminating EU energy dependence on Russia. The cost-of-living pressures and rise in energy costs for citizens may pose a serious challenge for national governments and could affect their energy transition commitments. These measures effect and may incline energy production back towards less environmentally friendly, but more politically secure coal-fired electricity.

Improving energy efficiency in housing and transportation as well as alternative fuels is also important to the Czech Presidency to alleviate the inflationary cost of living pressures for citizens, achieve the EU's climate goals and reduce dependencies on Russia. The Czech Presidency is also open to support measures to ease the social and economic costs of this transition for European consumers. Improving transport links across the EU and for central Europe through the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) is also a policy priority.

3. Strengthening European Defence and Cyberspace Security Capabilities

The return of war to Europe has driven the issue of military security and defence, as well as cybersecurity to the fore of policy priorities, and the Czech Presidency is particularly seized by the need to deepen and reinforce transatlantic ties between the US, NATO

6. [Direct damage caused to Ukraine's infrastructure during the war has reached \\$88 billion – Kyiv School of Economics \(kse.ua\)](#)

7. [Migration management: Welcoming refugees from Ukraine \(europa.eu\)](#)

8. [LEAK: The five political priorities of the upcoming Czech Presidency – EURACTIV.com](#)

9. <https://czech-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/programme/priorities/>

10. [REPowerEU: affordable, secure and sustainable energy for Europe | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

and the EU and to ensure the implementation of the EU Strategic Compass. The Czech Government is also keen to improve European defence industrial capacities and to minimise potential supply-chain vulnerabilities for critical technologies or materials.

Addressing cyberthreats to Member States and European institutions and critical infrastructure is also a key concern of the Czech Presidency¹¹ which will push to ensure the EU is at the forefront of international discussions around regulation and protection of cyberspace.

4. Economic Resilience

In order to both promote European values and to assert European interests globally, the Czech Presidency wants to ensure a level-playing field for European consumers and firms both online and offline and to ensure equitable environmental and human rights provisions to further fair global trade. The Czech Government will support the development of global standards in digital markets based on a human-centric approach, developing artificial intelligence regulations and greater regulation of cryptocurrencies to reduce their risks and potential for abuse.

The Czech Government is also committed to reigniting previously stalled trade deals with Australia and New Zealand, as well as countries and economic blocs in South America¹², both in order to offset the economic losses of now cut-off trade links with Russia and to enhance the EU's international standing.

5. Democratic Resilience

The Czech Presidency will emphasise the importance of functioning democratic systems, institutions and the rule of law for ensuring the EU's security and prosperity. To achieve this, the Presidency Programme will advocate for policies which ensure transparency of political party finances, media independence and greater citizen dialogue through further developing and continuing the legacy of the Conference on the Future of Europe. A key challenge will be how the Czech Government oversees the potential imposition of the budget conditionality mechanism, which could potentially suspend Hungary's receipt of EU funds

and its voting rights in the EU within the 27 Member States. This may be a daunting prospect.

Addressing the question of European enlargement and continuing the democratisation journey of potential EU candidates like Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, North Macedonia and Albania will also be a challenge for the democratic resilience of both these countries. This will be further supported by implementing the European Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, which may include sanctions for human rights violations and provide support for third-countries to improve their resilience to malicious cyber or hybrid threats.

Conclusion

As was the case in 2009, the Czech Presidency assumes the mantle at a time of great challenge for the European Union. The task on this occasion is to help set the direction for a more sovereign, strategic, autonomous, and resilient EU. Since the end of the Cold War, Czech political life has been animated by the notion of a "return to Europe", which has been most concretely realised by the privileges and obligations of EU and NATO membership. This spirit of 1989 and of Václav Havel is woven into the 2022 Presidency Programme which aims to chart a course to return Europe to peace and prosperity amid several critical challenges.

The first of these is the war in Ukraine and challenges the foundational assumptions of the political and security order of the European continent, addressing the ramifications of this will be of critical importance for the future viability and effectiveness of the EU in responding to security challenges. Second is reorientating Europe's energy production and supply chains to secure electricity generation and manage the negative implications for citizens and firms while meeting the EU's climate targets. Third is the global shift towards a more fractured global trading order, and the Czech Presidency's focus on securing trade deals and setting global standards will be important in managing this transition. Fourth, challenges within the Union itself in terms of the rule of law and illiberalism will need a deft and delicate management if they are to be resolved without impeding the functioning of the EU.

11. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/czech-eu-presidency-to-prioritise-fight-against-hybrid-threats-minister-says/>

12. [Ukraine, energy and supply chains: the Czech Republic unveils priorities for EU Council presidency \(euronews.com\)](https://www.euronews.com/en/europe/2022/01/12/ukraine-energy-and-supply-chains-the-czech-republic-unveils-priorities-for-eu-council-presidency)

Key People



Prime Minister, Petr Fiala



**1st Deputy Prime Minister and
Minister of the Interior, Vít Rakušan**



**Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of
Labour and Social Affairs,
Marian Jurečka**



**Deputy Prime Minister for Digitalisation
and Minister of Regional Development,
Ivan Bartoš**



**Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of
Health, Vlastimil Válek**



Minister of Finance, Zbyněk Stanjura

Key People



Minister of Defence, Jana Černochová



Minister of Justice, Pavel Blažek



**Minister of Foreign Affairs,
Jan Lipavský**



**Minister for European Affairs,
Mikuláš Bek**



**Minister of Industry and Trade,
Jozef Síkela**

Provisional Council Meeting Agenda for the Czech Presidency 2022

11 July	Eurogroup
11-12 July	Informal JHA
12-14 July	Informal ENVI
15 July	Informal GAC
18 July	QFAC & AGRIFISH
19-20 July	Informal COMPET (Internal Market))
21-22 July	Informal COMPET (Research)
25 July	ECOFIN (Budget) – TO BE CONFIRMED
29-30 August	Informal FAC (Defence)
30-31 August	Gymnich
1-2 September	Informal GAC (Cohesion)
6-7 September	Informal EPSCO (Health)
8-9 September	Informal ECOFIN
14-16 September	Informal AGRIFISH
20 September	GAC
26 September	AGRIFISH
29-30 September	COMPET (Internal Market/Industry & Research)
3 October	Eurogroup
4 October	ECOFIN
6 October	TTE (Transport) – TO BE CONFIRMED
10 October	EPSCO (Health) – TO BE CONFIRMED
11-12 October	Informal TTE (Energy)
13-14 October	Informal JHA
17 October	FAC
17-18 October	AGRIFISH
18 October	GAC
19 October	Tripartite Social Summit
20-21 October	European Council Summit
24 October	ENVI
25-26 October	TTE (Telecommunications) – TO BE CONFIRMED
7 November	Eurogroup
8 November	ECOFIN
11 November	ECOFIN (Budget)
14-15 November	FAC (Defence)
18 November	GAC
21-22 November	GAC (Cohesion)
22 November	AGRIFISH
25 November	FAC (Trade)
28 November	FAC (Development)
28-29 November	EYCS
1-2 December	COMPET (Internal Market/Industry & Research/Space)
5 December	Eurogroup
5-6 December	TTE (Transport & Telecommunications)
6 December	ECOFIN
8-9 December	JHA & EPSCO (Employment/Social Affairs & Health)
12 December	FAC
12-13 December	AGRIFISH
13 December	GAC
15-16 December	European Council Summit
19 December	TTE (Energy)
20 December	ENVI

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