Passing the Baton:
What is the Presidency Trio?

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What is the Presidency?

In this context, the presidency refers to the rotating six-month presidency of the Council of the European Union, also known as the Council of Ministers or simply the Council, which is one of the EU's central legislative institutions.

This is not to be confused with the European Council, which does not negotiate or adopt EU laws, but instead defines the EU's overall political direction and priorities; traditionally by adopting conclusions. Put simply, the Council of the EU is made up of Member State ministers and has a rotating presidency, whereas the European Council is composed of heads of state or government of those same 27 Member States in addition to the permanent European Council President and the European Commission President.

The Member State holding the presidency of the Council of the EU is responsible for coordinating the everyday work, including its respective government ministers chairing nine of out ten of the Council configurations, which are divided thematically by policy area. For example, the agriculture minister chairs the Agriculture and Fisheries Council (AGRIFISH). The Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) is chaired by the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs.

The country responsible for the presidency should function as an 'honest broker' however while it cannot determine the EU's political agenda by itself, the Member State publishes its own priority areas for its presidency. This role also carries diplomatic and symbolic significance as it allows the country a larger platform to showcase its achievements and culture.

Ireland's 2026 Council of the EU Presidency Priorities:

Competitiveness

Values

Security



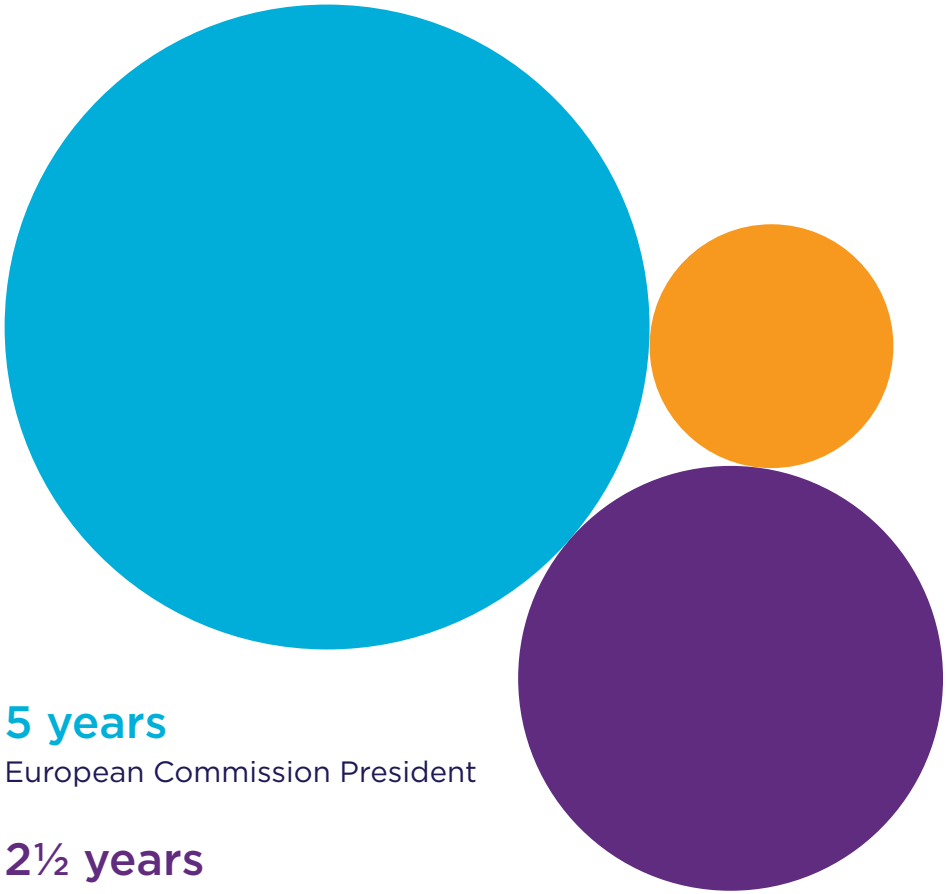
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Why does continuity between Council presidencies matter?

Each of the 27 Member States take their turn holding the presidency and due to enlargement, the average time period between holding presidencies is now 13.5 years.

By contrast, other EU institutions have individuals as their presidents, for example, the European Commission President serves a term of five years (renewable), and the European Parliament President holds the role for two and a half years (renewable). Therefore, the six months of the rotating presidency of the Council is quite short in comparison, especially when factoring in the diversity of priorities Member States may have.

In summary, the Union needed to create a way for more countries to collaborate and strengthen continuity across successive presidencies as well as respecting the overall long-term strategy of the EU institutions.



5 years
European Commission President

2½ years
European Parliament President

6 months
Council of the EU President

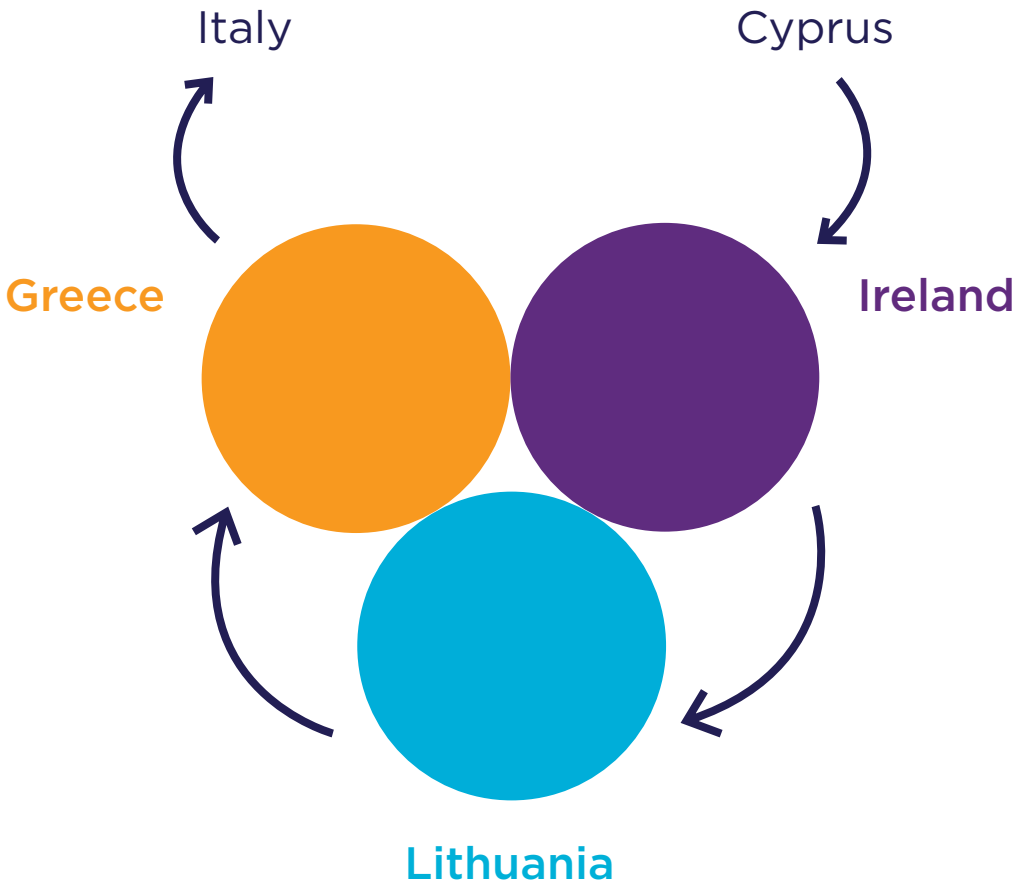
The Solution: The Presidency Trio

The Lisbon Treaty (2009) strongly impacted the role of the presidency.

Firstly, the Treaty reduced various strategic functions of the role due to the introduction of a permanent President of the European Council who serves a two and a half year (renewable) term. Previously, the European Council was an informal body and the national leader of the Member State holding the presidency took on this role.

Secondly, the Treaty introduced the trio system to encourage longer-term coordination across the Council's legislative agenda. In practice, while each Member State creates its own six-month programme, the trio prepares a shared 18-month programme with broader themes and priorities tied to a multiannual agenda.

The groups are formed on the basis of equal rotation amongst Member States, factoring in their diversity and geographical balance. For example, on 1 July 2026, Ireland began the first part of the Ireland, Lithuania, and Greece presidency trio, which will last until 31 December 2027, when Greece completes its presidency.



The Strategic Agenda

As referenced previously, the Trio draws on the EU's agenda, currently Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, to steer the work of the Council through various unprecedented challenges and growing geopolitical pressure.

The current agenda reflects three thematic pillars:

Democracy
A free and democratic Europe

Security
A strong and secure Europe

Competitiveness
A prosperous and competitive Europe

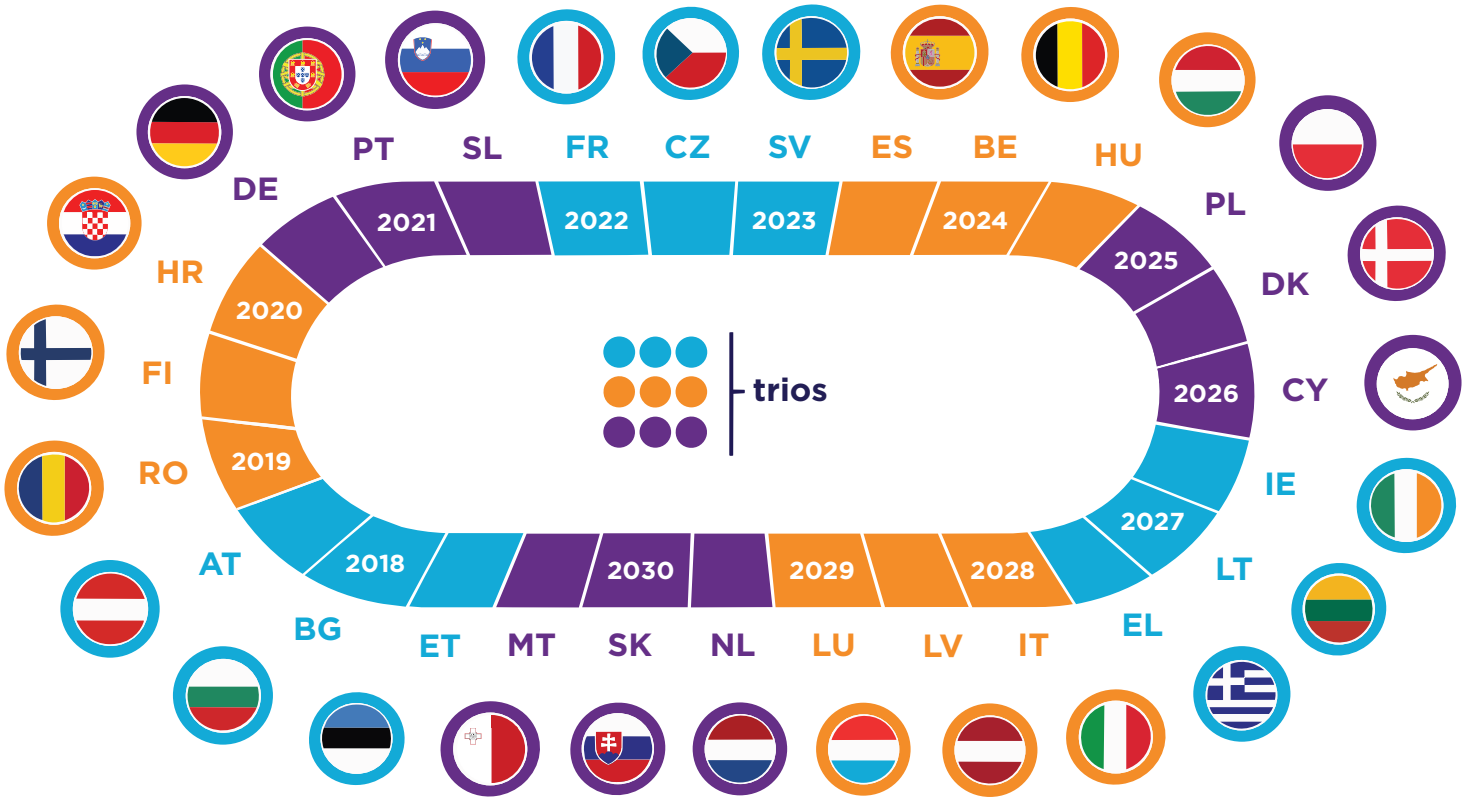


Trio Priorities vs Country Priorities

The Strategic Agenda, as well as the legislative programme proposed by the European Commission, are taken into account for each Trio programme proposal. This can be seen in the previous 18-month programme from the Poland, Denmark, and Cyprus Trio, as well as the current Trio programme for Ireland, Lithuania, and Greece, which was approved on 16 June 2026.

A country's individual EU Presidency Programme is a longer document, which details key objectives and priorities for its six-month presidency. Ireland officially launched its EU Presidency Policy Programme in Dublin Castle on Wednesday, 10 June 2026. Competitiveness, Security, and Values were the key words chosen to represent Ireland's priorities, alongside the motto *Ní neart go cur le chéile (Strength with unity)*.

It is important to acknowledge the impact of the evolution of the Council's legislative agenda through the previous Trio Presidencies. For example, Ireland followed on from the work that was carried out by Denmark and Cyprus despite belonging to a different grouping. This is not only to ensure a successful passing of the baton from one presidency to the next, but also from one trio to another.



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