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From Ambition to Continuity The EU Council Presidency Between Denmark and Cyprus

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Summary

Denmark has handed over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union to Cyprus. This transition comes at a time when the EU agenda is focused mainly on security, support for Ukraine, strengthening competitiveness, and managing the impacts of the green transition. Cyprus has highlighted migration and the management of the EU's external borders, alongside economic and security issues, as its key priorities. Maintaining unity among member states and ensuring continuity will be essential.

Key points

- The Danish Presidency focused on security, Ukraine, competitiveness, and the green transition. It also pushed through the adoption of the so-called Chat Control. Denmark's role was reflected mainly in coordination, maintaining the pace of negotiations, and facilitating compromises.
- Cyprus is taking over the Presidency with priorities focused on migration, security, the economy, and the EU's southern neighbourhood. Its role will be primarily coordinative and implementation-oriented.
- The handover of the Presidency confirms a shift in the role of the Council of the EU towards managing the existing agenda rather than launching new political initiatives.

Why Hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union

The Presidency of the Council of the European Union is one of the core elements of how the EU functions institutionally. Together with the European Parliament, the Council is the EU’s main legislative body and takes part in discussing, amending, and adopting legislation based on proposals from the European Commission. The Presidency rotates among member states every six months, with each country responsible during its term for leading the work of the Council and coordinating its activities.

The rotating system is designed to ensure that all member states take part in leading the Council, regardless of their size or political weight. The presiding country is responsible not only for the Council’s day-to-day organisation but also for ensuring the smooth progress of the legislative process and the continuity of the EU agenda within the Union’s broader political priorities.

The main role of the presiding state is to chair the Council in all its configurations, including meetings of ministers, to prepare the work programme for the six-month term, and to seek compromises between member states on issues where political or economic differences make agreement difficult. The Presidency can influence the pace of legislative discussions, the way meetings are chaired, and the quality of dialogue between member states. How a Presidency operates has a direct impact on the EU’s ability to respond to current challenges, maintain policy continuity, and prevent institutional deadlock, especially during periods of heightened political or geopolitical uncertainty.

Denmark: Calm and Continuity

Denmark’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union took place in the second half of 2025 and was characterised mainly by a strong focus on pragmatic agenda management, coordination among member states, and continuity in the legislative process. At a time of geopolitical challenges, economic uncertainty, and growing pressure on common EU policies, the Danish Presidency prioritised stability and the smooth functioning of institutions over ambitious political initiatives.

Over the six-month period, discussions were held across a wide range of key policy areas, including security, defence, economic affairs, energy independence, and external relations. Denmark placed strong emphasis on dialogue between member states and EU institutions, with the aim of maintaining the pace of legislative work and minimising potential tensions. The ability to properly time negotiations, coordinate member state positions, and facilitate compromise is one of the practical strengths of any presidency, even if these efforts are not always visible at first glance and do not necessarily result in major political breakthroughs covered by the media. Denmark contributed to maintaining continuity in legislative cycles and ensuring a smooth handover of the agenda.

Copenhagen organised a number of formal and expert-level events, ranging from informal meetings of ministers and a European Political Community summit to thematic conferences on culture, research, and space. These events reflected Denmark’s priorities in the areas of security, competitiveness, climate policy, and European cooperation.

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| 8. | Council configurations chaired |
| 2 | summits held in Denmark |
| 15 | informal ministerial meetings |

Danish Priorities in Practice

Among the programme priorities set by the Danish Presidency in the summer of the previous year were European security in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, the competitiveness of both the member states and the EU as a whole, and the continuation of the green transition. One of the most prominent and widely discussed issues in Brussels was the controversial proposal known as the so-called Chat Control. These priorities reflected both the EU's long-term strategic agenda and the current geopolitical and economic situation.

Security and Ukraine

Security was inevitably one of the key themes of the past six months. The Council of the EU focused on support for Ukraine, strengthening the defence capacities of member states, and coordinating a common approach in foreign and security policy. These discussions also covered the defence industry, joint procurement, and the EU's long-term resilience.

One of the most visible achievements of the Danish Presidency took place in December 2025 during meetings in Strasbourg. The EU committed to providing Ukraine with a €90 billion support package for the years 2026–2027, including both financial and military assistance. “We have an agreement. The decision to provide €90 billion in support for Ukraine for 2026–27 has been approved. We made a commitment, and we delivered,” wrote Council President António Costa on the social media platform X (X.com, António Costa, 2025). The conclusions were adopted by EU leaders and clearly reaffirm the Union's ongoing commitment to supporting a country affected by war.

In mid-December, ministers for European affairs met with Ukrainian representatives at an informal meeting. This format, initiated by the Danish Presidency, aimed to visibly support Ukraine's path towards the EU and to coordinate next steps in discussions on the country's future membership. According to the official statement, member states expressed their support for Ukraine on its European path (Danish Presidency of the Council of the EU, 2025).

EU Competitiveness

Another key priority of the Danish Presidency was the competitiveness of the European economy. As a result, discussions at formal and informal meetings and conferences focused mainly on the internal market, industrial policy, innovation, and the conditions for doing business, particularly in response to growing global competition and structural changes in the global economy.

A concrete example of coordinated action by member states was the expression of support for the EU plan on more affordable housing, which focuses on financing, sustainable construction, and the social aspects of housing policy. While this did not represent a major legislative breakthrough, reaching broad political agreement demonstrated the ability of the Council and the presiding country to coordinate the positions of member states.

The Green Transition

The Council of the EU continued to focus on the implementation of already adopted measures in the areas of climate and energy, as well as discussions on their impact on the economy and the competitiveness of member states. The presiding country moderated discussions among states whose views on the pace and form of the green transition differ significantly. Less attention was given to

setting new climate targets, while greater focus was placed on implementing measures that have already been approved.

Chat Control

The Danish Presidency pushed for the adoption of the controversial proposal known as Chat Control in the Council. The regulation aims to combat the spread of online material depicting the sexual abuse of children. While mandatory scanning of communications, including encrypted messages, was removed from the original European Commission proposal, critics continue to warn about the risk of mass surveillance.

Approval of the proposal required a qualified majority. The Czech Republic opposed the measure, together with Poland, Slovakia, and the Netherlands. A shift in Germany's position, after initially opposing the proposal, proved decisive in the final vote.

Cyprus at the Helm of the Council of the EU

Cyprus has taken over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The EU is entering the next six months as a relatively stable entity, focused on addressing its long-term priorities: security, geopolitical stability, competitiveness, and economic transformation. These areas will largely shape the work of the Cypriot Presidency (Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU).

Cyprus has emphasised its intention to focus on several key areas it sees as essential for the EU in the coming years. These include migration and the management of external borders, strengthening the economy, strategic autonomy in security and defence, continued support for Ukraine, and a stronger EU role in the southern neighbourhood. These priorities reflect not only Cyprus's specific experience as a Mediterranean state, but also a broader European debate that in recent years has shifted towards greater emphasis on shared responsibility.

From an institutional perspective, Cyprus assumes the Presidency under the same rules and responsibilities as any other member state. The role of the presiding country remains primarily coordinative and facilitative, regardless of its size or geographical location. Although Cyprus is one of the smaller member states, this does not automatically limit the significance of its Presidency. Past experience has shown that smaller states can play an important role in building compromises and ensuring the smooth functioning of negotiations, especially at times when the EU agenda is particularly sensitive and fragmented.

The Ambitious Agenda of the Cypriot Presidency

Migration

Migration and the protection of the EU's external borders are likely the most prominent priorities of the Cypriot Presidency. In this area, Cyprus emphasises the need for effective implementation of already adopted measures, stronger cooperation with third countries, and fair burden-sharing among member states. Migration has long been a key issue for Cyprus, as it has for Greece, Spain, and Italy, due not only to geographic location but also to the capacity and administrative constraints faced by smaller states.

In the context of the Presidency, a strong focus on practical implementation can therefore be expected. The EU migration pact is set to enter into force in June this year. “We consider migration to be a shared European responsibility that requires cohesion, solidarity, and collective effort,” said Minister for Migration and International Protection Nicholas A. Ioannides (Kriwak, H., 2025).

Economy

Another priority of the Cypriot Presidency is the competitiveness of the European economy. In this area, Cyprus builds on a broader European debate about strengthening the internal market, supporting entrepreneurship, innovation, and investment, as well as addressing regulation and administrative burdens. Cyprus’s role in this field is expected to be mainly coordinative or facilitative. Over the coming six months, competitiveness is likely to emerge as a cross-cutting issue across several EU policy areas.

Growing global competition, particularly from the United States and Asian economies, has made this topic one of the most widely discussed. The EU is reassessing its regulatory environment, industrial policy, and investment priorities. As a result, discussions are likely to focus on simplifying regulations, supporting strategic sectors, and strengthening the internal market.

The issue of competitiveness is closely linked to the green transition. If this topic appears in headlines in the coming months, it will most likely relate to the implementation of already adopted measures, their economic and social impacts, and their connection to energy security. Discussions are therefore expected to remain largely structural, and their course will not be significantly affected by the change in the presiding country.

Security and Foreign Policy

No EU presidency in recent years has been able to avoid the issue of security. Cyprus has reaffirmed its support for war-torn Ukraine and places strong emphasis on strengthening security and defence cooperation within the European Union. Discussions will continue on financial and military assistance, as well as on efforts to negotiate ceasefire agreements or even a lasting peace, which are closely linked to the need to define credible security guarantees.

The presiding country will also focus on stability in the Eastern Mediterranean, reflecting Cyprus’s geographical location and its long-standing foreign policy interests

Conclusion

The Danish Presidency demonstrated that even without major initiatives, a presiding country can contribute to the effective functioning of the European Union through strong coordination, skilled moderation of negotiations, and maintaining momentum in key areas such as security, competitiveness, and the green transition.

One of Denmark’s most notable achievements was the approval of the Chat Control proposal. It took many weeks of negotiations to reach a compromise and, in particular, to persuade Germany—initially opposed to the proposal—to vote in favour. The controversial measure will now be defended by the Council before a critical European Parliament.

Cyprus takes over the Presidency in an environment with limited political room for manoeuvre, but with clearly defined priorities that reflect the main debates taking place at EU level. Its contribution will not be measured by the number of new initiatives, but by its ability to ensure continuity of the EU agenda, foster dialogue among member states, and advance existing policy processes. The handover of the Presidency therefore does not signal a change in direction for European policy, but rather

confirms the current model of EU governance, in which a stable institutional framework and cooperation among member states play a central role.

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