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An Ghné Pharlaiminteach
Parliamentary Dimension

Background Note I: Priorities of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union

As the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union draws to a close, the European Union continues to face significant geopolitical, economic, technological and security challenges. During the second half of 2026, attention has focused on issues including competitiveness, enlargement, support for Ukraine, digital transformation, climate adaptation and preparations for the next Multiannual Financial Framework. These developments have underlined the importance of coordinated action and cooperation among Member States.

The Irish Presidency has been guided by the principle *"**Ní neart go cur le chéile**"* (Strength with Unity) and by a programme built around the three interconnected pillars of Competitiveness, Values and Security. These priorities reflected the view that economic prosperity, democratic resilience and security are mutually reinforcing and must be advanced in parallel.

Competitiveness remained a central theme throughout the Presidency. Discussions focused on strengthening the Single Market, reducing fragmentation, improving access to finance, supporting innovation and advancing the digital economy. The implementation of key digital legislation, including the Digital Services Act, the Digital Markets Act and the Artificial Intelligence Act, continued to shape debate on how Europe can maintain competitiveness while ensuring trust and accountability in the digital environment.

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence and the global race for technological leadership have further highlighted both the opportunities and the risks associated with increasingly powerful AI systems. These developments have underlined the need for Europe to strike a balance between innovation, competitiveness and effective safeguards, while ensuring transparency, accountability and public confidence in the deployment of AI technologies.

Progress on initiatives relating to the Savings and Investments Union and wider discussions on regulatory simplification also underlined the importance of creating conditions that allow European businesses to innovate and grow.

The **Values** pillar has remained equally significant. The Presidency period saw continued attention given to democratic resilience, the rule of law, media

freedom and the integrity of democratic processes. The growing influence of digital technologies, the spread of misinformation and disinformation, and concerns relating to foreign interference have highlighted the need to strengthen the foundations of democratic governance throughout the Union. Enlargement also featured prominently within this pillar, reflecting its role in promoting democratic reform, stability and resilience across Europe.

Security considerations have continued to shape the European agenda throughout 2026. Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, instability in neighbouring regions, cyber threats and attacks on critical infrastructure have reinforced the need for preparedness and resilience. Cybersecurity, hybrid threats and the protection of critical infrastructure increasingly sit at the intersection of security, competitiveness and democracy, requiring coordinated responses at both European and national level.

Alongside these thematic priorities, discussions on the future MFF have highlighted the challenge of balancing competing policy demands, including support for agriculture, cohesion, competitiveness, security, enlargement and climate action. These debates are likely to continue shaping the Union's strategic direction beyond the Irish Presidency.

As the Presidency concludes, many of the issues that framed its opening remain central to the Union's future. The experience of the second half of 2026 has reinforced the importance of unity, cooperation and effective policymaking in responding to a rapidly changing international environment.

Questions for Consideration

- What lessons can be drawn from the Irish Presidency in responding to interconnected economic, technological and security challenges?
- How can the European Union continue to strengthen competitiveness while safeguarding standards, democratic values and social cohesion?
- What priorities should guide future work on the MFF?
- How can interparliamentary cooperation be strengthened to enhance accountability?
- What further steps are required to strengthen the European Union's resilience in an evolving geopolitical environment?