

**CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting, 2023, Session 6**

**19 January 2023**

**Presidency of the Council of the European Union**

1. In previous Parliamentary sessions, the Scottish Parliament's European Committee has taken evidence from the Ambassador of the EU Member State holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union regarding its priorities and their relevance to Scotland.
2. The Presidency rotates amongst Member States every six months according to a pre-set order. On 1 January 2023, Sweden assumed the Presidency of the Council of the European Union and will hold the Presidency until 30 June 2023.
3. At this meeting, the Committee will take evidence from—
  - Mikaela Kumlin Granit, Ambassador of Sweden to the United Kingdom.
4. A SPICe briefing on the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union is attached at **Annexe A**.
5. SPICe has also recently published a [briefing on the European Commission Work Programme for 2023](#).

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# **Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Thursday,  
19 January**

## **Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union**

### **Introduction**

In previous Parliamentary sessions, the Committee's predecessor committees have regularly taken evidence from the ambassador to the United Kingdom of the country which holds the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union. The evidence sessions allowed committees to hear about the EU's policy objectives every six months. Following EU exit these evidence sessions were paused.

However, the Committee has agreed that as a result of the Scottish Government's policy commitment to maintain alignment with EU law where appropriate, it is important that the Scottish Parliament and its committees continue to engage with the EU policy and legislative process and that a broad understanding of legislative and policy developments at an EU level is therefore essential.

The Committee has therefore agreed to invite the Swedish Ambassador to the UK to give evidence on the Swedish Government's priorities for its Presidency of the Council of the European Union which takes place between 1 January and 30 June 2023.

### **The role of the Presidency**

The Presidency has two main tasks:

- To chair meetings of the nine different [Council configurations covering a range of policy areas](#) (with the exception of the Foreign Affairs Council) and the Council's preparatory bodies, which include meetings of member state

officials such as the [Permanent Representatives Committee \(Coreper\)](#), and working parties and committees dealing with very specific subjects.

- Representing the Council in relations with the other EU institutions, particularly with the Commission and the European Parliament.

The Swedish Presidency is the third of the current trio of presidencies, with France and the Czech Republic preceding it. The [trio programme had identified four core themes](#):

- To protect citizens and freedoms, by focusing on respecting and protecting European values – democracy, rule of law, gender equality, etc. – and on strengthening both the Schengen area and the common asylum and migration policy.
- To promote a new growth and investment model for Europe, based on sustainable green growth and on strengthening the EU's industrial and digital sovereignty.
- To build a greener and more socially equitable Europe that better protects the health of Europeans.
- A global Europe that promotes multilateralism and renewed international partnerships, while adopting a shared vision among the 27 Member States regarding strategic threats.

## The Swedish Presidency priorities

Whilst the trio programme's priorities will inform the work of the Swedish Presidency, they were agreed before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has presented new and challenging questions for EU member states focussed on security and energy. These challenges were set out at the beginning of [Presidency Priorities](#):

“Sweden is assuming the Presidency of the Council of the European Union at a time of historic challenges for Member States and the Union as a whole. Russia's illegal, unacceptable and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine is a threat to European security, with dire consequences for migration, as well as global food and energy supplies. Ukraine is fighting for its survival as a nation – and for the security and lives of its citizens. The EU and its Member States have rallied unprecedented support for Ukraine and will remain firmly by its side. Continued cooperation with trusted partners, including a strong transatlantic link, needs to be secured.

European economies are severely affected by Russia's war as well as the ongoing manipulation of energy supply. Rising inflation levels, interest rates and energy prices have left companies and citizens struggling. While decisive action has been taken, it is imperative that we stay firm in our transition to the green economy and safeguard the basis of our economic model for long-term growth.

Our unity and readiness to act remain key to EU security, resilience and prosperity.”

As a result of these challenges, the Swedish Government’s high-level priorities for the next six months are:

- Security - unity
- Competitiveness
- Green and energy transitions
- Democratic values and the rule of law.

## **Security – unity**

Security is a priority for the Presidency which arises out of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the response of EU member states to it. In response to the Russian invasion, the Presidency wrote:

“The Swedish Presidency will prioritise continued economic and military support for Ukraine, as well as support for Ukraine’s path towards the EU. This will require further efforts at both national and EU level. Further steps are needed for reconstruction and reform towards EU integration.”

In addition to responding to the invasion, the Presidency has highlighted the need to “build consensus towards a robust European security and defence policy, in close cooperation with partners”.

## **Competitiveness**

Alongside responding to the situation in Ukraine, a key priority for the Presidency will be to boost the economic competitiveness of the EU. Key factors in achieving this are recognised as the operation of the single market and taking advantage of global trade opportunities.

## **Green and energy transitions**

Alongside responding to high energy prices, the Presidency has committed to ensuring Europe must lead by example “by delivering on ambitious climate goals, boosting growth and competitiveness”. In addition the Presidency will seek to ensure that the right regulatory framework and policies are in place to support the transition from fossil fuels to resource efficiency.

## Democratic values and the rule of law

The Presidency has committed to seek to ensure the principle of the rule of law is upheld and that fundamental rights are protected in line with the EU's commitment to democratic values.

The Swedish Presidency has published a [full list of its priorities](#) for the next six months, broken down by the EU sectoral council they relate to.

## Key policies and legislation

The Presidency's legislative priorities are informed by the work programme of the European Commission. SPICe has published a [briefing on the European Commission Work Programme for 2023](#).

The Presidency's priorities include commitments to make progress on a number of legislative proposals yet to be published by the European Commission but included in the [2023 Work Programme](#). Some of the key policy and legislative measures the Presidency has committed to make progress on over the next six months are:

- To support the European Commission's efforts in the day-to-day implementation of the EU-UK agreements.
- Prioritise work on proposals for Directives on [the transfer of criminal proceedings](#) and on [asset recovery and confiscation](#).
- Implementation of the [EU Drugs Strategy encapsulated in the EU Drugs Action Plan 2021–2025](#).
- Advance the negotiations on a [Pact on Migration and Asylum](#).
- Make progress on the proposal to revise the [Asbestos Directive](#) and begin work on a proposal to revise the [Chemical Agents Directive](#).
- Make progress on three proposed Directives: on [equality bodies](#), on [binding measures for transparency in salary-setting](#) and for [an anti-discrimination directive](#).
- Make progress on the [strategy for health and social care](#).
- Use the [EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) as a springboard for highlighting disability policy issues to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of human rights for people with disabilities.
- In the area of health, the Presidency will advance the Commission's forthcoming proposals on updating the [general pharmaceutical legislation](#) and proposals on new regulations [concerning orphan medicinal products](#) and [paediatric medicines](#).

- The Presidency will seek to improve the [working of the Single Market](#) by focusing on efforts to eliminate trade barriers for both goods and services, along with efforts to improve the application of and compliance with the existing internal market regulations. The Presidency will also work to establish a path for how EU economic competitiveness can be strengthened in the years to come focused on the digital and green transition.
- Make progress on legislative proposals on [short-term accommodation rentals](#) in the internal market
- Initiate negotiations on an upcoming proposal for a [directive to expand and upgrade the use of digital tools and processes in company law](#).
- In the area of industry the Presidency will also prioritise the review of the [Euro 7 emissions standards for combustion engine vehicles](#), and initiate negotiations in the Council.
- A number of measures to progress the [Fit for 55 package](#):
  - Prioritise putting in place the regulatory framework required to achieve the EU climate targets and reduce EU greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 per cent by 2030. The Presidency will focus on trilogues (informal tripartite meetings on legislative proposals between representatives of the Parliament, the Council and the Commission) on transport legislation within the Fit for 55 package.
  - Continue to drive the informal trilogues with the European Parliament forward regarding the proposals for a revision of the Renewable Energy Directive and the Energy Efficiency Directive.
  - Prioritise moving the negotiations on any remaining parts of the Fit for 55 package forward with a high level of ambition in the Environment Council.
- Contribute to the implementation of the [European Data Strategy](#) and make progress on the [Data Act](#).
- Make progress on the proposal for a [revision of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive](#).
- Progress the negotiations on the [revision of geographical indications](#) and the [proposal for a Farm Sustainability Data Network](#).
- Prioritise negotiations on the revision of the [Food Information to Consumers Regulation](#) and its food labelling provisions and the [Regulation on the sustainable use of plant protection products](#).
- To further the aims of the [circular economy](#), the Presidency intends to advance the work in the following areas:

- The new [Ecodesign Regulation](#) and [Construction Products Regulation](#), both of which aim to contribute to a circular economy with reduced environmental and climate impacts.
  - The revision of the [Packaging Directive](#).
  - Work on the EU regulatory frameworks that promote non-toxic material cycles, increased use of high-quality recycled materials in products, and other business models that promote a circular economy.
  - Progress on the revision of the [Waste Shipments Regulation](#).
- Make progress on the [Regulation on nature restoration](#).

## Why does this matter to Scotland?

The EU's legislative agenda continues to be of interest to Scotland, primarily because the Scottish Government has a [policy commitment to align with EU law](#). The political priorities and overall policy direction of the EU will also continue to be of interest to Scotland from a geopolitical perspective.

Today's evidence session with the Swedish Ambassador to the United Kingdom is an opportunity for the Committee to discuss the following issues:

- How the Swedish Government is approaching its role as President of the Council of the European Union.
- How the Swedish Presidency's priorities have evolved as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- How the Swedish Presidency is working with Josep Borrel, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs to ensure a coordinated EU response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- How the Swedish Presidency is seeking to develop the EU's energy security and to ensure an EU-wide response to rising energy prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- The policy areas and legislation the Swedish Government is seeking to make progress on during its Presidency.

**Iain McIver, Senior Researcher, SPICe Research**

**13 January 2023**

Note: Committee briefing papers are provided by SPICe for the use of Scottish Parliament committees and clerking staff. They provide focused information or respond to specific questions or areas of interest to committees and are not intended to offer comprehensive coverage of a subject area.

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