

FINLAND'S PRESIDENCY IN THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

PRESIDENCY IN BRIEF

EU2019.FI

I Finland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union: A country of 5.5 million people representing over 500 million people

- Finland takes on the Presidency of the Council of the EU on the 1st of July. This is the 3rd EU Presidency for Finland after joining the EU in 1995 (previously in 1999 and 2006).
- Holding the Council Presidency means, above all, representing all 28 EU Member States and working together towards common good.
- A vibrant time: new European Parliament, new Commission, rule of law and human rights, the next multiannual financial framework (MFF) to be discussed, Brexit to name a few.
- Key words for Finland: Solution-driven, concrete results, consistency, sustainability, obeying rules. Finland is an active, open and pragmatic honest broker. Our foreign policy is values-based.
- Our presidency slogan: "Sustainable Europe – sustainable future"

II Sustainable Europe – Sustainable Future: Priorities for Finland’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union

1) To strengthen common values and the rule of law

The European success story is anchored in democratic institutions, human rights and the rule of law. Our values are not for sale.

The unity of the European Union is more important than ever. By acting together and defending our common values the EU can tackle the major challenges of our time. Unity makes us a stronger global player.

2) To make the EU more competitive and socially inclusive

Key elements: The single market, ambitious, open and rules-based free trade, wellbeing and skills as a foundation to inclusive growth, inclusive economic union.

Special focus on youth employment and on inclusion among young people. We cannot afford to lose a generation.

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3) To strengthen the EU’s position as a global leader in climate action

This means committing to making the EU carbon neutral by 2050. Finland will facilitate the process in order to define the key elements of the EU’s long-term climate strategy in the European Council by the end of 2019.

Generating sustainable growth and boosting employment with the help of bioeconomy and circular economy.

4) To protect the security of citizens comprehensively

A strong, united and effective EU external action is essential in order to promote peace and stability. Finland will highlight comprehensive approach to security and countering hybrid and cyber threats. EU needs to strengthen its security and defense cooperation to protect its citizens.

III Finland's Presidency – focus on sustainability and concrete climate action

- We believe that a successful Presidency can be arranged by ecologically sustainable means and with a smaller carbon footprint following United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in all meeting arrangements in Helsinki.
- We have decided to rethink Presidency traditions and practices in line with the principles of sustainable development. Finland will offset the carbon emissions caused by air travel to Presidency meetings in Helsinki and Brussels (approx. 0,5 million EUR), instead of handing out traditional presidency gifts.
- As a concrete global climate act, we will be funding projects in Honduras, Laos, Uganda and Vietnam. The projects will produce clean energy and reduce deforestation, for example.

III Sustainable Presidency arrangements

- We are keeping the amount of informal ministerial and other EU meetings reasonable & favouring videoconferencing when possible. The meeting venue, Finlandia hall, can be reached conveniently by public transportation.
- Paying attention to water and energy consumption; Serving tap water in meetings; Serving more vegetarian dishes; Cutting down on food waste.
- We also want to emphasize the importance of the circular economy, for example by replacing the use of paper and single-use plastic materials with digital applications and Finnish innovations.
- Our Embassies and people are onboard. They are also committed to concrete climate acts all around the world and are inviting everybody to take part. We consider it important that we together seek common solutions and aim to change our habits.

IV EU more important than ever according to Finnish people

- EU membership means sharing common values. EU Member States are natural allies.
- EU approval rating at all-time high in Finland and the whole EU (2019 Eurobarometer), 79% of Finns identify themselves as EU citizens.
- The benefits of Finland's EU membership according to Finnish people: peace – the EU is first and foremost a peace project –, EU single market & the four freedoms (free movement of goods, capital, services and persons), trade policy and agreements.
- A frequently asked question – what does EU membership cost? The cost of EU membership is only 50 EUR a year per Finnish citizen.