

Briefing on the Swedish EU-Presidency priorities before the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs 25th of January 2023

Thank you,

Chairman and Members of the Committee,

It is an honour for me to brief the Committee on the priorities of Sweden's Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

This is Sweden's third time in the EU-Presidency role since we became EU-member in 1995 (previously 2001 and 2009).

And we are delighted that the Swedish EU-presidency coincide with Ireland celebrating 50 years of EU-membership.

The central role of the Presidency is to lead the work of the Council at all levels. Another important task is to advance the EU agenda in the common interest of all the Member States.

During the Presidency, there will be some 2 000 formal meetings and we will organise 150 informal meetings in Sweden (including 12 informal ministerial meetings). We will welcome some 17 000 delegates to Sweden to attend the meetings.

Most important we will, together with the Commission and the European Parliament, address some 350 current policy and legislative issues during the first half of 2023. This is at the core of the EU-Presidency.

Swedens Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson presented the priorities in December. And they are based on the trio programme jointly developed by Sweden, France and the Czech Republic.

The motto for the Presidency is a safer, greener and freer Europe.

The four priorities of the Presidency will be:

Security – unity

Green transition and Energy transition

Competitiveness

Democratic values and the rule of law – our foundation

These are the four priorities but as is the case with all Presidencies you have also to be prepared for the unexpected. So you have to be flexible and ready to change focus depending on external events.

Security - unity

The primary task of the Swedish Presidency is to help ensure Europe's security.

The EU's rapid and determined response to the Russian aggression against Ukraine was a sign of strength. Maintaining this unity as regards both enhanced support to Ukraine and sanctions against the Russian regime will be a difficult but absolutely key task.

Not only the external security but also Internal security must be strengthened through better border surveillance and enhanced police cooperation.

Green transition and energy transition

The Swedish Presidency aims to finalise negotiations on the remaining parts of the EU Fit for 55 climate package.

The EU has ambitious target of reducing its net emissions by at least 55 per cent by 2030 and achieving climate neutrality by 2050 and we will be making key contributions to meet this target.

In order for the EU to be able to rapidly reduce its dependence on Russian gas and other fossil energy sources, more fossil-free and reliable electricity, including nuclear power, is needed, with respect for the right of each country to decide on its own energy mix. The EU must be well-equipped for next winter as well.

The Swedish Presidency will need to be prepared to take additional emergency measures to manage the energy crisis and energy costs. The first quarter of 2023 may also see work begin on a major reform of the European energy market.

Competitiveness

We will during our Presidency celebrate one of EU:s greatest achievements - the Single Market.

We will mark the 30th anniversary of the internal market by looking forward and setting a long-term competitiveness agenda for the Union

The Single Market works well for goods, but needs to be developed for services and digital business models. We will also push for an ambitious free trade agenda with our trading partners around the world.

A competitive economy is a prerequisite for both the green transition and for the EU to be ready to respond to future crises.

Democratic values and the rule of law

In recent years we have seen challenges to the rule of law mounting both here in the EU and globally. Independent judiciaries and functioning democratic institutions are necessary for mutual trust between Member States. Upholding the principle of rule of law and fundamental rights is therefore an essential element of Swedens Presidency of the Council.

The Commission Rule of Law Report presents significant developments at EU level which is encouraging.

Also Europe's geopolitical position has changed and the need for unity has never been greater.

Mr Chairman

Finally, I would like to add the following on enlargement. The Presidency will follow up on the European Council's decision to grant candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova and to offer a European perspective to Georgia, and will continue the EU integration process of the Western Balkan countries. The future of these countries and their citizens lies in the EU. The EU needs to continue to support these countries in their efforts to implement reforms as part of the accession process. Reforms in the area of the judiciary and rule of law are crucial.

Thank you for your attention.