For The Europe We Value

A Framework for the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU

European Movement Ireland

2026 Presidency of the EU July–Dec

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For the Europe We Value

A Framework for the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU

1. Introduction

Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union from July to December 2026 will be a unique opportunity to provide leadership on some of the most important issues facing the EU. The EU Presidency coincides with negotiations on the EU's next long-term budget – the 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the implementation of major climate and digital legislation, increasing pressure on civic space and democracy, and growing scrutiny of the EU's commitment to European and international law.

The EU is founded on the shared values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, as enshrined in the Treaty on European Union (TEU). These values are not simply the foundation of the European project; they are principles that bind Member States together and should continue to guide the Union's policies and actions.

Ireland's Presidency **programme**, which identifies EU values as one of its three core pillars, is very much welcomed. However, given the ongoing attacks on international law and multilateralism, an intensified security agenda and the EU's current competitiveness drive, it is important to reiterate the central role of EU values to a successful Presidency.

On the global stage, Ireland has long been recognised as a strong advocate for multilateralism and international human rights and humanitarian law. Ireland's EU Presidency offers an opportunity not only to advance the Council's legislative agenda, but to reinforce the principles on which the EU was founded.

For this purpose, the *For The Europe We Value* Framework sets out how the Irish government can use its Presidency to demonstrate leadership rooted in EU values and fundamental rights. It identifies practical actions across the key policy areas that will define the Presidency, from protecting civic space and strengthening democracy, to maintaining the EU's climate ambition, promoting a rights-compliant foreign policy, ensuring digital regulation protects fundamental rights, advancing a rights-based approach to migration and asylum, and strengthening equality across the Union. These recommendations can serve as a yardstick for the Irish government in ensuring that its Presidency furthers the protection and promotion of EU values.

EU Values: Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union

Article 2 Treaty on European Union (TEU): *The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.*

EU values represent conditions for membership, mutual trust between Member States and provide a foundational compass for EU law. Article 2 of the TEU provides a point of normative guidance for all EU law and policies. Furthermore, the rights outlined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union give legal effect to EU values. Article 2 is increasingly invoked by the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), which has confirmed that these values are reflected through principles that impose "legally binding obligations for Member States".[1]

For The Europe We Value

A Europe that stands up for human rights, dignity, democracy, rule of law, equality and freedom

1 Fundamental Rights Agency, Fundamental Rights Report, Challenges and Achievements in 2025, https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fundamental-rights-report_challenges-and-achievements_2025.pdf

2. Protected and Enabled Civic Space

A **vibrant civil society** is a prerequisite to a healthy democracy in Europe. As guardians of EU values, civil society organisations (CSOs) facilitate citizen participation and ensure accountable and transparent governance by Member States and EU institutions alike. CSOs provide a platform for communities, including the most excluded voices of society, enhancing the legitimacy of the EU.

Against a backdrop of **democratic backsliding**, the environment for civil society continues to deteriorate both at EU level and in some Member States, as documented by the Council of Europe's **Commissioner for Human Rights**, the **Fundamental Rights Agency** and **civil society**. European civil society faces increasing pressures, such as restrictive legislation; the stigmatisation of groups receiving foreign funding; **restrictions** on freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression, and campaigns to delegitimise civil society, in addition to organisational pressures in the context of **funding cuts**.

The Irish government can use the opportunity of the EU Presidency to urge Member States and EU institutions to guarantee the ability of CSOs to operate safely and without fear of losing financial resources.

2.1 Protect and expand funding for civil society in the 2028-2034 MFF

- The EU Presidency will coincide with a critical period in the 2028-2034 MFF negotiations. The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme, the EU's flagship funding programme for democracy, rights and civil society, provides a primary source of funding for many CSOs. Given the ongoing delegitimisation and defunding **efforts** by some MEPs in the European Parliament, it is imperative that an ambitious CERV+ budget is protected as part of the **AgoraEU** (the MFF's programme for culture, media, and civil rights) regulation negotiations. Moreover, it is important that the EU's Strategy for Civil Society is adequately funded through CERV+.
- While the Cyprus Presidency, under the Council of the EU's MFF negotiating box, proposes an **overall reduction** of around 2% to the Commission's proposed MFF, it proposes cutting funding for AgoraEU and Global Europe by approximately 4% respectively. As negotiations advance in the Council, it is important that proposed cuts do not result in a disproportionate burden on programmes supporting culture, civil society and the EU's external action.
- Civil society funding, including operating grants, should be ringfenced and protected across the 2028-2034 MFF, not only through AgoraEU but also through other relevant MFF instruments, including the National Regional and Partnership Plans (NRPPs), the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF), the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), Global Europe and PEACEPLUS.

2.2 Reaffirm the legitimate advocacy role of civil society

- Over the past two years, civil society's advocacy role and funding have come under increasing **scrutiny** in the **European Parliament** and the **European Commission,** with rights-based advocacy work increasingly being reframed in several EU countries as a threat. As a result, several European NGOs, including watchdog organisations, have faced **significant funding cuts**. The legitimate role of CSOs working to promote and protect EU values, including through advocacy and participation in EU policymaking, should be explicitly endorsed and safeguarded by the EU institutions and representatives through their actions and public statements, and funding should be protected, including in the next MFF.

2.3 Promote open dialogue between EU institutions and CSOs

- In line with the TEU, the Commission's 2023 **recommendation on participation** and the EU's **Strategy for Civil Society**, the EU is required to ensure open, transparent and regular dialogue with civil society. At a **time when civil society voices and access to decision makers are being restricted**, efforts to ensure meaningful participation in policymaking are crucial. EU institutions and Member States must support the roll-out of the Civil Society Strategy Platform - a structured mechanism for regular dialogue between EU institutions and civil society - as well as the strengthening of broader mechanisms for effective civil society participation at EU and national levels. Civil society dialogue mechanisms should be aligned to the Strategy's 10 guiding principles, to ensure that civil society views are **represented** in finalised policies and legislation.

3. A Green Agenda for a Sustainable and Competitive EU

Given the scale of the **climate challenge** facing Europe, environmental protection and climate justice must remain central to EU policymaking and aligned to the original ambition of the European Green Deal. Despite the green transition being essential to building a sustainable, resilient and competitive Europe, recent years have seen delays to, and the weakening of, key **environmental policies and safeguards**.

In the current Commission's mandate, environmental CSOs have come under increasing **pressure**, while the EU's simplification agenda has raised concerns about the weakening of sustainability, due diligence and environmental **standards**. As key climate and environmental legislation will continue to be negotiated during Ireland's EU Presidency, including as part of the **Environmental Omnibus,** the Irish government should use the opportunity to maintain the EU's climate ambition and call for it not to be diluted further.

3.1 Promote an EU long-term budget that safeguards climate and environmental ambitions

- As part of the ongoing negotiations on the 2028-2034 MFF, a dedicated and centrally managed fund for organisations working on environmental justice and climate action must be ringfenced either through maintaining the LIFE Programme, the EU's dedicated funding programme for the environment and climate action, or through establishing a similar mechanism. This is imperative to ensure protected, predictable and sustainable funding for communities and organisations working on the frontline to protect nature.
- Robust funding for the environment and climate across the MFF should be promoted by increasing the environmental and climate **target to 50% (from the Commission's proposed 35%),** and ensuring NRPPs dedicate a minimum share of funding to biodiversity objectives.

3.2 Prioritise the growth of the renewable and clean energy sector under the European Competitiveness Fund

- Against the backdrop of significant geopolitical instability and successive energy crises, it is urgent that the EU supports an accelerated energy transition in the upcoming MFF. The European Competitiveness Fund should be **utilised** in order to bridge the **current funding gap** that the European Commission estimates is needed for the EU to achieve its 2030 climate targets.

3.3 Safeguard the Emissions Trading System from dilution

- **Agriculture and industry** emissions are cited by the European Environmental Agency (EEA) as the biggest pressures on biodiversity in the EU, underlining the urgency of reducing greenhouse gas emissions as an essential means to tackle climate change and protect ecosystems. The Emissions Trading System (ETS) has proven to be an effective tool in reducing carbon emissions within EU industries, with emissions in covered sectors dropping **by 50%** since 2005. A formal review of the system is scheduled for **July 2026**,

while **pressure** from energy-intensive **industry** and some **Member States** to dilute aspects of the ETS continues to mount. However, many businesses see the ETS as a **strategic tool** for the EU's competitiveness. As the EU adapts its legislation to ensure progress towards the 90% greenhouse gas target by 2040, any attempts to weaken the current ETS should be resisted and current proposals to include buildings, roads and additional sectors in ETS2 advanced.

4. A Rights-Compliant EU Foreign Policy in the Middle East

Despite the ceasefire, Israel's genocide against Palestinians in Gaza continues. Israeli forces have killed over 1,000 Palestinians in Gaza between the start of the ceasefire in October 2025 and June 2026, with the total death toll now estimated to be over 73,000. Israeli authorities continue to block crucial humanitarian assistance including food, shelter and essential medicines. Irish development organisations, human rights organisations and MEPs report that Israel has intensified its illegal annexation and severe human rights violations in the West Bank. In Lebanon, Israeli forces have forcibly displaced over 1.2 million people since 2 March 2026, while targeting civilian infrastructure and killing at least 3,800 people, including health care workers and journalists.

The EU has the legal responsibility to take immediate measures to halt and prevent further Israeli violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. Its unwillingness to do so to date represents a profound moral and legal failure of the bloc. Ireland's EU Presidency offers an important opportunity to demonstrate moral leadership and realign EU Foreign Policy, insisting that it complies with the bloc's obligations under international law, as well as its founding treaties, particularly Article 3(5)[2] and Article 21[3] of the TEU. As long as the EU continues to trade with a country found to be committing atrocity crimes, its claims to be upholding EU values will ring hollow.

4.1 Call on the EU to urgently use its leverage to pressure Israel to halt its escalating violations of international law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Lebanon

- In light of Israel's widespread and persistent breaches of the human rights clause (Article 2) of the EU-Israel Association Agreement, as confirmed by the EU's internal **investigation** in 2025, pressure must be intensified at EU level to urgently **suspend** the Agreement. As the situation continues to deteriorate in Gaza and the West Bank, the Irish government should use the EU Presidency to continue to build alliances among likeminded Member States committed to upholding the EU's legal obligations. It should also engage with Member States who have resisted the EU taking more action, in order to compel the response so urgently needed at EU level.
- In line with the 2024 International Court of Justice's (ICJ) **advisory opinion**, call on the EU to urgently institute an immediate ban on EU business and trade with illegal Israeli settlements.
- Engage at EU level to **immediately suspend** all arms transfers to and military cooperation with Israel, in line with its obligations under **international law**, including the ICJ's 2024 **provisional measures** and Member States' obligations to prevent genocide under the 1948 Genocide Convention.

[2] Official Journal of the European Union, Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union, Article 3(5) "In its relations with the wider world, the Union shall uphold and promote its values and interests and contribute to the protection of its citizens. It shall contribute to peace, security, the sustainable development of the Earth, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of the child, as well as to the strict observance and the development of international law, including respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter.", https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDF

[3] Official Journal of the European Union, Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union, Article 21 asserts that EU foreign and security policy is guided by 'the principles that have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law.', https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDF

- Call for the EU's compliance with international accountability efforts. In particular, call for urgent action to protect the International Criminal Court (ICC) by urging the EU to amend and activate its Blocking Statute in order to protect ICC judges and officials that have been targeted by US sanctions.

5. Digital Regulation and Human Rights

With major EU digital legislation in various stages of implementation – including the Digital Services Act (DSA), Digital Markets Acts (DMA), the AI Act and forthcoming Digital Fairness Act – Ireland's Presidency is taking place at a pivotal moment for shaping the EU's digital ecosystem.

The proposed **Digital Omnibus** includes changes to EU laws on non-personal data governance, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and cybersecurity laws. GDPR is not a barrier to competitiveness when properly **enforced**. As a key digital and regulatory hub in Europe, Ireland has a particular responsibility to ensure that EU digital regulations are fully implemented and that simplification in the digital sphere does not come at the expense of data protection, transparency, or the protection of consumer rights.

5.1 Anchor digital enforcement – including simplification measures – in fundamental rights protections

- Ireland should prioritise robust regulatory oversight in the digital industry and lead coordinated EU-wide action to protect citizens – particularly minors, women and vulnerable groups – from algorithmic harm, disinformation, addictive platform design, and the effective oversight of large online platforms.
- A human rights-centred model of digital governance is essential to the success of the EU's competitiveness agenda. This means listening to voices from civil society and ensuring early consultation with experts, as well as risk assessments, on possible digital deregulation measures to prevent the erosion of rights. Given the speed of the Digital and AI simplification processes and **concerns** regarding the weakening of safeguards and transparency obligations, in addition to inadequate consultations and **impact assessments**, it is imperative that the simplified digital legislation is implemented in compliance with fundamental rights.

6. A Rights-Based Migration and Asylum Policy

The early stages of the implementation of the **EU Pact on Migration and Asylum**, including Ireland's International Protection Act, which entered into force 12 June 2026, will coincide with the Irish Presidency. Despite the agreement on the Return Regulation on 17 June 2026, detention and deportation cannot become the default for EU asylum policy. Immigration detention should remain a measure of last resort and the principle of *non-refoulement* (deportation to a country where a person's life or freedom would be threatened) must be fully respected. The Return Regulation poses serious risks to the **human rights** of rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants as explicitly warned by **civil society organisations**, the UN, **legal experts** and academia.

6.1 Ensure the EU's Migration and Asylum Policy is consistent with refugee international law

- Given the **human rights risks** inherent in the design of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, including weakened asylum procedures and expanded use of detention, Ireland's Presidency is an opportunity to reinforce the importance of a rights-based migration and asylum policy and promote implementation of the Pact in a way that is consistent with EU and international law obligations. Similarly, as the International Protection Act is rolled out in Ireland, it is imperative that remaining **human rights concerns** are addressed and necessary safeguards put in place.
- As Member States prepare to embed the Return Regulation, the Irish government can show leadership in reiterating the urgency of Member States' compliance with their **obligations** under the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU and international law, in particular the absolute prohibition of *refoulement,* the prohibition of torture, ill treatment and arbitrary detention, and the right to effective remedy.

7. Equality and Fundamental Rights

While the EU has made significant progress in advancing equality and fundamental rights, these achievements cannot be taken for granted. Across Europe, LGBTIQ people and other minority communities are facing increasing hostility, including attempts to roll back legal protections, restrict civic space and normalise discrimination. Rising levels of **hate speech, hate crime, and discrimination**, alongside often polarising political rhetoric, are undermining the safety, dignity and equal participation of many members of these communities. The EU must continue to strengthen and expand legal protections against discrimination, ensuring that all individuals enjoy equal treatment regardless of race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation or gender identity.

Ireland's experience in advancing equality through democratic consensus, including becoming the first country to introduce marriage equality by popular vote, gives it particular credibility to build alliances across the Council and champion the protection of fundamental rights for all. Ireland should use its EU Council Presidency to reinforce the principles of equality and human rights and ensure they are consistently upheld across the Union.

7.1 Promote effective implementation of equality strategies

- Ireland should use its Presidency as a platform to shape and support the full and effective implementation of existing EU equality strategies, including the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy, the European Accessibility Act and the new Anti-Racism Strategy 2026-2030. Equality considerations should be mainstreamed across relevant policy areas to ensure that commitments made at EU level are reflected in legislative and policy developments. This includes working with Member States to resist attempts to weaken existing protections for LGBTIQ people and other minority communities.

7.2 Promote strengthened anti-discrimination frameworks

- Current protections against discrimination **remain uneven** across the EU and are largely concentrated in the field of employment. Renewed efforts are needed to advance the proposed **Horizontal Equal Treatment Directive** and outstanding gaps in the EU's anti-discrimination framework need to be addressed. Ireland can seek new impetus in the Council of the EU, which is necessary following the Commission's withdrawal of the Directive in 2025, after it had previously been blocked in the Council.

7.3 Call for a strengthened EU response to hate speech and hate crime.

- Sustained efforts are needed to strengthen the EU's response to hate speech and hate crime, including progress towards extending the list of EU crimes under **Article 83(1) TFEU**. The **Anti-Racism Strategy 2026-2030** is an opportunity to promote a more consistent ap-

proach to tackling hate-motivated offences across Member States. In parallel, the EU must develop stronger accountability measures to address the **rising spread of hate speech online**, building on existing EU digital legislation while safeguarding freedom of expression and other fundamental rights.

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