

TEPSA PRE-PRESIDENCY CONFERENCE IN NICOSIA: CYPRUS IN THE LIMELIGHT

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EDITORIAL



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We are presently in Nicosia for our traditional [TEPSA Pre-Presidency Conference \(PPC\)](#), an event, co-funded by the European Union (EU), which has become a fixture in Europe's political calendar. The PPC is a moment of collective reflection between politicians, practitioners, academics, think tankers, and the public on the upcoming Presidency of the Council of the Union.

Our conversations take place under the bright Mediterranean sky of Cyprus, a small island at the crossroads of three continents and a cradle of ancient civilisation. We are meeting at a stone's throw from the dividing line that separates the Northern part of Cyprus, occupied by Turkey, from the rest of the island. The recent elections that took place in the North were won by pro-European forces. Hopefully, this will rekindle moves towards a settlement of the Cyprus issue. It would be great if the following Cypriot presidency happened under a reunited Cyprus.

The rotating Presidency of the Council is one of the EU's most distinctive and enduring traditions. Born with the European project itself, it remains an expression of its founding principle: equality among Member States. Every six months, a different government assumes the responsibility of steering the Council's work - chairing meetings, brokering compromises, and representing the collective will of the Member States. It is a system that may seem unwieldy from the outside, but inside the machinery of European integration, it performs a crucial function: reinforcing ownership and trust. It reminds Member States that "Brussels" is not an external force but a shared endeavour.

There are recurrent fears that changing the leadership every six months risks fragmentation and uneven momentum, thus complicating policy-making. There is an element of truth in this, but experience shows that the benefits outweigh the drawbacks.

The rotating Presidency system injects fresh energy into the Union and forces national administrations to engage deeply with EU affairs. It creates bridges between national and European perspectives and ensures that the European project remains the shared responsibility of all 27 Member States, and not a technocratic enterprise run by a few.

Most importantly, the Presidency is not a solitary exercise. It functions within a robust institutional architecture that ensures both continuity and coherence. Behind every minister chairing a Council meeting stands a formidable network of officials and diplomats. A key role belongs to the two formations of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER), which coordinate the Union's daily business and prepare ministerial Council meetings. Their institutional memory and mutual trust are the invisible backbone of the Council's decision-making. The General Secretariat of the Council provides logistical support and expertise, but also guidance and advice on how to run Council business. The Commission representatives, who sit in Council meetings at every level, present the Commission proposals and participate in the crafting of compromise texts. All of this happens under the political guidance of the European Council. Together, the various actors form a machinery that, despite its complexity, works with remarkable effectiveness. The rotating Presidency is an important cog in the wheel, within the Council as well as in relation to the European Parliament: legislative texts are hammered out in so-called trilogues where representatives from the Council, the Commission, and the European Parliament meet. Europe's governance depends on cooperation, not hierarchy.

For the country in charge, a Presidency is both an opportunity and a trial by fire. It demands administrative discipline, diplomatic agility, and political balance.

For small Member States, this challenge can seem daunting. Cyprus, like previous smaller Presidencies, must rely on a relatively limited administrative capacity and a compact diplomatic corps. Yet history shows that small Presidencies often excel precisely because they approach the task with humility, discipline, and preparation. They do not seek to reshape the Union in six months but to serve it faithfully. Their success rests on professionalism: on having the right people in the right places, especially in the COREPER chairs, who must combine authority with discretion and the ability to build consensus. The Presidency may last only half a year, but its impact on national administrations endures for decades, creating generations of civil servants and diplomats fluent in the language of European cooperation.

The Presidency government must act as a neutral broker yet it inevitably brings its own perspective and priorities. Cyprus, with its unique geopolitical position and Mediterranean vocation, will naturally seek to give prominence to issues such as energy security, maritime governance, and regional cooperation in the Mediterranean area.

The Cypriot presidency comes at a time of uncertainty for Europe and the world. The international environment has grown harsher. Old assumptions about peace, trade, and the rule of law are under strain. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, China's assertiveness, and the lingering unpredictability of American politics have forced Europeans to reconsider their place in the global order. The question of how to ensure strategic autonomy while preserving an open, rules-based system that underpins European prosperity runs through all of our debates.

This PPC, co-organised by TEPESA, the Cyprus Centre for European and International Affairs and the Department of Politics and Governance of the University of Nicosia, with

the generous support the Foreign Ministry of Cyprus, the Cyprus Forum, and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, captures this urgency.

The first session will allow to present the [Recommendations](#) of the TEPESA network to the incoming Presidency, conveying the perspective of experts on some of the topics dominating the EU's agenda during the upcoming semester. The wide-ranging programme reflects the core challenges of the coming years and provides ideas on shaping the EU for the better.

The EU must rethink its role and positioning as a **global power** on the global chessboard. It must address the **European security challenges**, which have once again emerged as a major threat. As [the Niinistö report](#) shows, it is no longer just confined to military affairs; Europe faces hybrid warfare, disinformation, cyberattacks, and pressures on its internal resilience. There is a new urgency concerning the **perspectives on EU enlargement**, which is both a geopolitical necessity and an existential challenge for the functioning of the EU. The EU's decision to open accession perspectives to Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia - while reviving the Western Balkans' long-delayed hopes - is a bold political act.

To succeed in these endeavours, the EU needs internal reform and renewed public trust in the European idea and long-term political vision. In this respect, questions around **democracy and the role of European citizens** require particular attention. Across the continent, democratic systems are under pressure from polarisation, populism, and external interference. Defending and adapting our democratic institutions, with the active involvement of citizens, is essential for the Union's legitimacy. Equally significant is the EU's **socioeconomic paradigm**. Without sustained growth, Europe cannot be the

global actor it aspires to be. But growth must remain socially just and environmentally sustainable. The European social model, with its emphasis on fairness and solidarity, is not a burden; it is the source of our strength. The final session will be about **energy challenges and green development/transition**. Linking the Green Deal to competitiveness and social inclusion will be one of the Presidency's key tests. Investing in clean technologies is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity, the path to reducing dependence on external energy suppliers and ensuring Europe's long-term security.

The red thread running through all of these themes is the necessity to ensure stable and effective financing of the various policies. In 2026, the negotiations on the future [Multiannual Financial Framework](#) (MFF) will enter a new stage and heat up. The Cypriot presidency will have as one of its key tasks to head the work in the Council on the future MFF and to prepare the ground for the final political settlement at the level of the European Council in late 2026 or early 2027.

Cyprus's Presidency will unfold in a demanding context, but also in a moment rich with opportunity. The [Union stands at a crossroads](#), facing a turbulent world, yet equipped with experience, institutions, and a renewed sense of purpose. The Presidency's task is to channel that energy within the Council structures and in its dealings with the other institutions. If it succeeds, it will reaffirm a simple truth: that the EU is not the sum of its bureaucracies, but a living project of shared sovereignty and shared destiny, a democratic union of states and peoples constantly learning to act together.

All the opinions expressed in this publication are the sole view of the author, and do not represent the position of the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) or of its Members.

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Jim Cloos is TEPSA Secretary-General and a former high-ranking European official of longstanding esteem. Having taken on a key role in drafting the Maastricht Treaty during the Luxembourgish Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 1991, Mr. Cloos has an intricate expertise on EU Affairs and the internal functioning of the European institutions. In the 1990s he served at the European Commission, first as Head of the Cabinet of the Commissioner for Agriculture, and subsequently as Head of Cabinet to the President of the European Commission and his G7/8 Sherpa. Mr. Cloos has been a close collaborator of High Representative Javier Solana in shaping the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. For many years he played a key role in preparing European Council meetings. Before his election as TEPSA Secretary-General, he served as Deputy Director General for General and Institutional Policy at the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union.

