

**Voluntary Report** – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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**Report Name:** Priorities of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU

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**Report Highlights:**

On January 1, 2024, Belgium took over the rotating Council of the EU Presidency for the following six months. In this role, Belgium will lead the European agenda within the Council and promote cooperation among Member States. This report provides an overview of the Presidency's priorities for the next six months. The first three months of the presidency will focus on progressing key legislative files, such as new genomic techniques (NGTs). The remaining three months will focus on setting the agenda for the new Commission and Parliament and the future of Europe. Belgium is taking a holistic approach to agriculture in its presidency program, while ensuring food security and enhancing the sustainability of food production and consumption.

On January 1, 2024, Belgium commenced its 13<sup>th</sup> rotation as President of the Council of the EU for the following six months. In this role, Belgium will lead the European agenda within the Council and promote cooperation among Member States. During this time, Belgium is responsible for scheduling and chairing all ministerial meetings at the EU level, except for the Foreign Affairs Council. Belgium is the second country of the Trio Presidency Program comprised of Spain, Belgium, and Hungary. The Trio Presidency Program is a common program developed by three consecutive Council presidencies to ensure continuity in their actions over the 18 months of rotating leadership. <https://belgian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/>

The European Parliament is expected to go into recess after March 31, 2024, to allow politicians the time to campaign ahead of June 6-9 elections, which will require Belgium to focus its efforts on concluding legislation during the first three months of its term. During the last three months, it will work on setting the [strategic agenda](#) for the next EU legislative term, which will commence its five-year term following the June elections.

### **Protect, Strengthen and Prepare:**

Belgium has divided its priorities into three overarching categories: protecting people, strengthening the economy, and preparing for the future. Six thematic areas focus on these priorities:

- defending **rule of law, democracy, and unity**
- strengthening our **competitiveness**
- pursuing a **green and just transition**
- reinforcing our **social and health agenda**
- protecting **people and borders**
- promoting a **global Europe**

<https://belgian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/programme/priorities/>

Overall, Belgium will continue to support Ukraine, accelerate Europe's green transition while improving its competitiveness, and aid in enlargement efforts. Agricultural Minister David Clarinval is focused on safety and transparency throughout the food chain, the future of the Common Agricultural Policy, and food security. As Chair of the Council AGRIFISH Committee, Minister Clarinval is also focused on making progress on EU files, such as the EU's new genomic techniques (NGT) proposal.

### **The Presidency's Priorities for Agriculture and Fisheries:**

The Belgian Presidency will promote a holistic approach to agriculture and fisheries as part of its program, while ensuring food security and enhancing the sustainability of food production and consumption. The Belgian Presidency will also focus on resilient forests and animal health and animal welfare.

<https://belgian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/programme/the-belgian-presidency-programme/>

### *A Sustainable and Resilient Agri-Food and Fisheries Sector*

- The Presidency will work on ensuring food security and autonomy by the reduction of the EU's dependency on third countries for certain strategic resources and ensure an efficient and effective follow-up to the implementation of the common agricultural and fisheries policies (CAP and CFP).
- Regarding the CAP, the Belgian Presidency will initiate reflections on a future, post-2027 framework.
- The circular economy and innovation will also be a focus as it relates to agricultural markets and trade-related agricultural issues to build a future-proof and resilient agriculture, fisheries, and food sector.
- The Presidency will continue the ongoing discussions on new genomic techniques (NGT), the sustainable use of plant protection products (SUR), and the production and marketing of plant reproductive material (PRM).
- The Presidency will finalize the file on breakfast directives with the view that the costs, benefits and risks associated with the transition to a sustainable food system should be shared equally throughout the food chain.

### *Resilient Forests*

- The Presidency will also initiate work on the forest monitoring framework and continue discussions on the instruments implementing the EU forest strategy and on the production and marketing of forest reproductive material (FRM).

### *Prevention in Animal Health and Animal Welfare*

- The Belgian Presidency will prioritize animal health and disease prevention under the umbrella of the 'One Health' initiative and will concentrate on rolling out vaccines against prevailing epizootic diseases and other animal diseases that significantly impact the respective sectors.
- The Presidency will advance the forthcoming proposals on animal welfare with a view to harmonize EU practices and better enforcing legislation. The welfare of companion animals will also be of importance to the Belgian Presidency.

### **Agricultural Agenda:**

The calendar of meetings under the Belgian Presidency (January – June 2024) can be downloaded from the Council's website at: [Indicative High-Level Calendar](#) and [List of Events](#)

Belgium has already planned its program for agriculture in some detail. The tentative calendar of Agriculture and Fisheries (AGRIFISH) Council meetings:

- o January 23, 2024
- o February 26, 2024
- o March 26, 2024
- o April 29-30, 2024
- o May 27, 2024

### **Other Meetings on Agriculture:**

The informal meeting of ministers on the theme of strategic food autonomy will be held from April 7-9, 2024, in Limburg. In April, the ministers will discuss the annual performance reports for the CAP, future steps for the CAP, and the review of the EU's plant protein policy. On June 24-25 in Luxembourg, the Council agenda includes debates on seeds, animal transport, and the post-2027 CAP. The situation of the agricultural markets will also be assessed by the EU ministers, including the effects of imports of Ukrainian agricultural products.

### **Results of First AGRIFISH Meeting:**

The Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU held its first [AGRIFISH meeting on January 23, 2024](#), with Agricultural Minister David Clarinval as Chair. Minister Clarinval highlighted EU competitiveness, strategic autonomy, and food sovereignty as key aims, as well as food security in the context of growing economic crises, geopolitical conflicts, and climate change. Ministers briefly discussed the EU's trade with its main trading partners, including Ukraine, the UK, and the US, and they noted continued support for Ukraine and their commitment to contributing to global food security. In tackling agricultural challenges, Clarinval supports science-driven solutions. Ministers welcomed the Commission's initiative to begin a strategic dialogue on the future of agriculture to help depolarize the debates around agriculture and the green transition. The Belgian presidency will also pay close attention to animal health and welfare, and it will start work on a forest monitoring framework. The next AGRIFISH meeting will be held on February 26, 2024, and the [agenda is available here](#).

### **Attachments:**

No Attachments.