

KEY SUSTAINABILITY PRIORITIES FOR THE DANISH PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EU

Publication date:

July 2025

Contact:

Mattia Bonfanti, Irene Chiocchetti (IEEP), Paweł Wiejski (Reform Institute)



ABOUT:

From 1 July to 31 December 2025, Denmark will hold the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union, taking charge at a critical time for the EU's climate and sustainability agenda. This six-month period will be decisive for setting Europe's climate trajectory through 2040 and beyond.

BRIEF

Denmark will preside over key climate negotiations, most notably the EU's 2040 emissions reduction target and the submission of the EU's updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement. Denmark brings a strong domestic record on climate and a pro-climate agenda, aiming to restore the EU's leadership in global climate policy, accelerate the green transition, and advance sustainable agriculture and energy infrastructure.

Denmark inherits the presidency from Poland, whose approach favoured security concerns, regulatory simplification and economic competitiveness over ambitious climate policies. The Polish presidency notably supported the simplification of green regulation, made efforts to dilute ETS2, contributed to delaying the 2040 climate targets proposal, limiting available time for discussion before COP30, in particular on NDC and creating a more difficult starting point for the Danish Presidency. However, Poland made significant progress towards ending the EU energy dependence on Russia, successfully achieved Council conclusions on energy security, and did substantial work in preparation for COP30 (with the exception of NDC). The Poles also managed to reach Trilogue agreements for the Soil Monitoring Law, which has been highly discussed since its publication, and for the targeted revision of the Waste Framework Directive. These can be considered their main successes.

The Danish presidency is now tasked with restoring momentum and attempting to get green policies back on track from their previous derailment.

Key Sustainability Priorities for the Danish Presidency of the Council of the EU

1. The EU 2040 Climate Target and 2035 NDC

The centrepiece of the Danish presidency's climate agenda will be facilitating agreement on the EU's 2040 climate target. On 2 July, just two days into the Danish presidency, the European Commission published its [long-overdue proposal to reduce EU net greenhouse gas emissions by 90% compared to 1990 levels by 2040](#), a goal Denmark was the first Member State to publicly endorse.

From this target, the EU will derive its revised 2035 NDC, which must be submitted to the UNFCCC by September, before COP30 in November. Failure to reach a political agreement in time risks excluding the EU from the next round of international climate pledges, which would undermine its role as a global leader on climate just as other major emitters, such as the U.S. and China, are recalibrating their climate strategies.

Securing a consensus in these negotiations will be challenging. Some Member States are pushing to decouple the 2040 target from the 2035 NDC, seeking more flexible timelines or demanding sector-specific exemptions. Others are advocating for the inclusion of international carbon credits under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, allowing wealthier EU countries to outsource their emissions reduction to poorer third countries, a sharp departure from the EU's current principles, which emphasise domestic action.

Denmark is in support of both targets, as well as the goal of climate neutrality by 2050, and will push for the EU to remain a climate leader in international negotiations such as COP30 and the UN Climate Convention. It will aim to use its leadership to broker compromises and align Member States around a high-ambition position ahead of COP30.

2. Green Regulation

Denmark inherits the presidency during a turning point in EU environmental governance, as the European Commission has recently moved to simplify many of its flagship sustainability initiatives, including the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) and the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD). The Danish presidency is also beginning just as the EU has initiated a sharp deregulatory turn, with the Commission discarding its proposed law to fight corporate greenwashing, the Green Claims Directive, following a request from conservative lawmakers. Additionally, more simplification proposals will be announced during the presidency, including on chemicals, agriculture, and sustainable finance. Denmark has generally been supportive of simplification, but insists it is committed to the EU Green Deal and upholding sustainability principles, so it remains to be seen how it will balance the two.

3. Sustainable Agriculture

The EU is expected to present its post-2027 CAP proposal in July, and Denmark is positioned to act as a voice for green interests in negotiations, with the presidency saying that it will focus on ensuring a "green, simple, and market-oriented CAP." Denmark has already introduced the EU's first targeted pricing system for greenhouse gas emissions in agriculture, as well as a national plant-

Key Sustainability Priorities for the Danish Presidency of the Council of the EU

based food strategy, which it would like to expand to an EU-wide action plan, making it a rare EU country to push environmental regulation in the agricultural sector, given strong lobbying from farmers. The presidency plans to host a high-level conference on plant-based foods in September, followed by a “Plant Food Inspiration Summit” in October, reflecting its commitment to building a sustainable food system.

4. Electrification and Clean Energy

The Danish presidency has a stated goal to increase the share of renewable energy in the EU, including expanding and reinforcing energy infrastructure and production capacity. In accordance with the actions of the preceding Polish presidency, energy security remains a high priority for Denmark, and it will aim to continue phasing out Russian gas at the EU level with the finalisation of the REPowerEU proposal. The presidency will also follow up on the [Action Plan for Affordable Energy](#) and initiate discussions on an updated EU energy infrastructure framework, with a focus on grid development and simplified approval processes for clean energy projects.

Conclusion

The Danish Presidency comes at a pivotal moment for EU environmental and climate policy. With critical files on the table, from 2040 climate targets to post-2027 CAP reform, Denmark has a chance to re-establish the EU’s green leadership. To do this, our recommendations are as follows:

- To strengthen security, Denmark will have to work to tie energy policy directly to EU security, highlighting how electrification and renewable build-out can reduce energy imports, lower fossil costs, and support job creation, thereby strengthening resilience.
- The 2040 climate target being a top priority, for Denmark, it will be crucial to resolve any controversy around the use of international carbon credits under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, addressing concerns about quality, monitoring, and climate integrity.
- Given the publication of the Multiannual-Financial Framework for 2028-2034 in the second half of July, Denmark will start negotiations and should promote a competitiveness-focused green transition by pushing for performance-driven national plans and a European Competitiveness Fund within the upcoming EU long-term budget negotiations.
- Denmark’s presidency should seize the opportunity to present forward-looking frameworks for agricultural emissions and to embark on discussions with the other Member States and EU institutions at a crucial time, as the European Commission is actively exploring policy options for agricultural climate action.

Key Sustainability Priorities for the Danish Presidency of the Council of the EU

- Overall, the Danish Presidency will have to reinforce EU climate leadership, keeping Europe competitive and secure in a challenging and changing geopolitical landscape.

By promoting an ambitious sustainability agenda, the Danish Presidency can help the EU deliver on its climate commitments and strengthen its role on the global stage ahead of COP30. In September, the [Think2030 Dialogue Denmark](#) will mark a flagship event, tackling issues like green industrial policy, mobilising private finance, and the role of agriculture in climate action.

This analysis is the result of a discussion and presentation convened on 30 June 2025 as part of the Think Sustainable Europe network's ongoing efforts to connect environmental think tank voices and policy experts with the European Council Presidencies' priorities. Organised jointly with CONCITO (Denmark) and the Reform Institute (Poland), the meeting provided a forum for cross-border learning, enabling participants to exchange lessons from the Polish Presidency and anticipate opportunities and challenges for the incoming Danish Presidency. By sharing strategies and experiences, the TSE network aims to strengthen engagement, improve policy coordination, and build capacity for shaping environmental priorities across the EU. Find out more about [Think Sustainable Europe](#).



This work has been produced with the financial support of the LIFE Programme of the European Union. The paper reflects only the views of its authors and not the donors.