

Hungary's Presidency of the EU

SOLIDAR's Commentary on the International Cooperation Aspects

On July 1st, Hungary began its six-month rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union, which will run until December 2024. The <u>Programme of the Hungarian Presidency</u>, revolves around 7 main priorities:

- New European Competitiveness Deal;
- The reinforcement of European defence policy;
- A consistent and merit-based enlargement policy;
- Stemming illegal migration;
- Shaping the future of cohesion policy;
- A farmer-oriented EU agricultural policy;
- Addressing demographic challenges.

Why is the Presidency Important?

The Presidency of the EU represents the Council in its dealings with other EU institutions. It negotiates legislative texts with the European Parliament and deals with the European Commission. See more on the role of the EU Presidencies here.



What are the Presidency's Priorities for International Cooperation?

When it comes to international cooperation, the program of the Hungarian presidency of the EU prioritizes Europe's strategic independence and economic competitiveness, military security, the externalization of European borders to manage migration and development cooperation is seen as a set of measures to refrain people from migrating. The Programme lacks reference to a human rights-based approach to development, to policy coherence for development as well as any engagement on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development nor the Paris Agreement.

According to SOLIDAR, the **New European Competitiveness Deal** if not rooted in high labour and environmental standards as well as in fair partnership with partner countries, it risks perpetrating unfair practices such as green extractivism, social dumping and exploitation of cheap labour force. In relation to the **defence policy**, it raises several concerns for its lack of reference to peacebuilding, human rights, and social justice. SOLIDAR considers that EU Defence Policy should be built upon the <u>Common Security Principles</u>, where cooperation represents the central element for mutual security (versus mere military deterrence).

In relation to Trade, while open and fair-trade relations are seen as a cornerstone of European competitiveness, there is no reference to the role trade policy shall play in promoting sustainability, environmental and human rights protection in partner countries. According to SOLIDAR, a step in this direction would be for EU's trade agreements to incorporate a binding chapter on sustainability, setting forth complaint mechanisms and sanctions in the event of non-compliance with social, environmental, and human rights clauses, and conditioning the signature and ratification of any agreement on the inclusion of that chapter.

The Global Gateway is mentioned several times in the program where the Presidency announces the adoption of the 2025 Flagship Projects' list and the intention to adopt Council Conclusions on the effective implementation of the Global Gateway Strategy. It is worth noting the reference to the strategy also in relation to humanitarian cooperation. SOLIDAR calls for the full engagement of CSOs in the selections of the 2025 flagship projects and full transparency of the selection process and will follow closely the elaboration of the "Council Conclusions on the effective implementation of the Global Gateway Strategy".

Finally, when it comes to the conflict in the Middle East, SOLIDAR regrets the lack of commitment to promote the respect of international law and international humanitarian law and calls on the Presidency to work towards an immediate and permanent ceasefire and the recognition of a viable Palestinian State. For reference, in the Presidency's Programme, the word "Business" is mentioned a total of 11 times, while "Trade Unions", "Civil Society", and "NGOs" are never mentioned, showing a rather blind attitude of the Presidency.



Hungarian Presidency Programme	SOLIDAR's view
Priorities	
1. New European Competitiveness Deal	1. No race to the bottom!
key priority of the Hungarian Presidency in order to restore economic development and create the conditions for sustainable growth, deepen the internal market, focus on supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, promote the green and digital transition in partnership with European economic stakeholders and citizens, international	Enhanced competitiveness has the potential to improve the wellbeing of European people, foster sustainable growth and promote the transition to greener and fairer societies. But this can only be ensured if a New European Competitiveness Deal becomes a European Innovation Deal. In this regard, public investments in research for development are key. Furthermore, the promotion of green and digital transition should be done with the involvement of social partners and civil society actors in a meaningful way. The focus should not solely be on strategic interests but also on fostering inclusive partnerships that advance social equity and decent work. Competitiveness shall be rooted in high labour and environmental standards as well as in fair partnerships with partner countries in the Global South.
2. The reinforcement of European defence policy	2. From European security to Our Common Security!
and emerging conflicts on the continent and around the world	The Presidency's approach to the European defence policy to be reinforced by improving international crisis management responsiveness and Europe's capacity to act, it is very narrow, short term and raises

and emerging conflicts on the continent and around the world clearly demonstrate that Europe needs to significantly improve its defence capabilities, international crisis management responsiveness, and capacities. Beyond defence policy alliances and cooperation, the European Union must play a greater role in guaranteeing its own security by strengthening its resilience and capacity to act." The Presidency s'approach to the European defence policy to be reinforced by improving international crisis management responsiveness and Europe's capacity to act, it is very narrow, short term and raises several concerns for its lacking reference to peacebuilding, human rights, and social justice. Strengthening European defence capabilities must not come at the expense of humanitarian considerations and the welfare of vulnerable populations. The focus should change from international crisis management responsiveness to international crisis management responsiveness to international crisis management prevention. In line with the Common Security framework, SOLIDAR promotes "the idea that cooperation can provide the security that humans crave and that ultimately, nations and populations can only feel safe when their counterparts feel safe".



Hungarian Presidency Programme	SOLIDAR's view
	 In this regard, SOLIDAR considers that the EU Defence policy shall be built upon the six Common Security Principles: All people have the right to human security: freedom from fear and freedom from want. Building trust between nations and peoples is fundamental to peaceful and sustainable human existence. There can be no common security without nuclear disarmament, strong limitations on conventional weapons and reduced military expenditure. Global and regional cooperation, multilateralism and the rule of law are crucial to tackling many of the world's challenges. Dialogue, conflict prevention and confidence-building measures must replace aggression and military as a means of resolving disputes. Better regulation, international law and responsible governance also need to be extended to cover new military technologies, such as in the realms of cyberspace, outer space and "artificial intelligence" (Common Security Report, 2022). Finally, EU development cooperation and humanitarian aid budgets shall not be used, cut or reallocated to
	defence purposes.
3. Stemming illegal migration	3. Ensure safe and legal pathways to migration
several years is not only a challenge to the Union as a whole but also places a huge burden on individual Member States,	The Hungarian Presidency's position on migration raises concerns as it reduces it to boards' management relying on the externalization of European borders overlooking the humanitarian aspects of migration. SOLIDAR emphasizes the need to tackle the root causes of forced migrations such as poverty, conflicts, and climate change. SOLIDAR values positively the reference to the triple nexus humanitarian -



Hungarian Presidency Programme	SOLIDAR's view
requires effective, even short-term instruments. In order to find the appropriate solutions, closer cooperation with countries bordering the EU is indispensable, as well as with the key countries of origin and transit."	development peace that the Presidency mentions in the section on International Development Cooperation. The European Union has a critical role in addressing these underlying issues. Effective cooperation with neighboring and transit countries should ensure the protection of migrants' fundamental rights and dignity throughout their journeys. Furthermore, ensuring legal pathways to migration is essential. While undocumented migrants represent less than 0.3% of the EU's population, their lack of legal migration options makes them vulnerable to smugglers, life-threatening risks, and severe exploitation upon arrival in Europe.

Europe in the world

4. Middle East

"Regarding the Middle East, it is regrettable that the conflict that erupted in the autumn of 2023 has halted progress resulting from the Abraham Accords, the Israeli- Palestinian talks under the Aqaba process, and the development of EU-Israel and EU-Palestinian relations. The EU most resolutely condemns Hamas for its brutal and indiscriminate terrorist attacks throughout Israel and recognises Israel's right to self-defence. Our common objective is to prevent a regional escalation of the conflict, alleviate the suffering of innocent civilians, and resolve the humanitarian crisis. To this end, particular attention is needed for the immediate and safe delivery of humanitarian aid to the civilians in need in Gaza.

4. Peace and A viable Palestinian State

When it comes to the Israelian-Palestinian conflict, SOLIDAR call on the EU Presidency to step up the EU's diplomatic efforts for a **just and lasting peace**, and to work towards an immediate and permanent ceasefire and the recognition of a viable Palestinian State. The EU's Presidency shall keep recalling the obligations to respect and implement the orders of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) of 26 January and 24 May which are legally binding: unless evacuations guarantee safety in transit, proper shelters and the right to return, they amount to forcible transfers which are a war crime.



Hungarian Presidency Programme	SOLIDAR's view
As another priority, the Hungarian Presidency will strive to ensure the significant role of the EU in the long-term political settlement of the conflict.	
5. Asia	5. Fair and equal partnership with Asia
relations between the EU and Asia, and with the countries of the Indo-Pacific region. The peace and prosperity of the Asian continent have a direct impact on European stability and competitiveness; therefore, dialogue and mutually beneficial cooperation should be maintained with all regional partners.	SOLIDAR supports the need for dialogue and mutually beneficial cooperation with regional partners in Asia. Yet, such cooperation should be based on fair and ethical trade practices that benefit all parties involved and contribute to promoting sustainable development, ensuring the respect of international labour and environmental standards. The implementation of initiatives like the Indo-Pacific strategy and Global Gateway must be subject to an ex-ante and ex-post assessment of its impact on inequalities, as well as social, labour and environmental rights in partner countries.



cultural heritage, addressing interrelations of nutrition and health, responding to challenges posed by climate change,

Hungarian Presidency Programme	SOLIDAR's view
6. Latin America	6. An ambitious renewed EU-CELAC partnership
Europe, including Latin America . The Hungarian Presidency aims to enhance mutually beneficial cooperation with the countries of the region through international and regional frameworks, in the spirit of equal partnership , for example in the areas of climate change, connectivity, energy, and food	When it comes to the relations with Latin America, the emphasis on equal partnership is welcomed. The Presidency shall follow the path of the previous Spanish and Belgian Presidencies and keep strengthening the bi-regional relationships between the EU and the CELAC . As highlighted by the <u>EULAC working group</u> , the partnership shall be rooted in the promotion of Just Transition for both regions, the promotion and protection of civic space, fair and sustainable trade and investments agreements, the fight against inequalities and the establishment of an official multi-stakeholder monitoring mechanism to ensure long-term engagement and commitment with civil society in the renewed EU-CELAC partnership.
7. Africa	7. A fair and equal partnership with Africa
support best practices aimed at assisting communities in crisis areas and promoting sustainable development, thus encouraging people to remain in their home regions. In this context, we support strengthening direct cooperation with	From SOLIDAR's perspective, the Hungarian Presidency's focus on assisting communities in crisis areas and promoting sustainable development is appreciated, but it needs a more comprehensive approach. Furthermore, the approach should not aim at encouraging people to remain in their home regions, but to ensure that migration is a free choice and not forced by external factors. While decent job creation , women's economic empowerment, education and vocational training are important, SOLIDAR emphasizes the importance of ensuring these efforts contribute to long-term social justice and equity.



Hungarian Presidency Programme

and cooperating with local organisations to promote peaceful coexistence among communities of different religions and ethnicities. During the Hungarian Presidency, priority will be assigned to highlighting various humanitarian and development aspects of food security issues, and particularly best practices for establishing local value chains, supporting small and family farmers, promoting climate-friendly food production, and strengthening the resilience of local production. Throughout the semester, we plan to adopt Council Conclusions, under Hungarian Presidency priorities, on global food security, as well as about the special report by the European Court of Auditors regarding the operation of the EU Trust Fund for Africa".

"From the toolkit of development policy, we aim to highlight those elements that constitute the most effective approach to addressing the root causes of migration locally. Therefore the primary focus of the Hungarian Presidency will be on strengthening the humanitarian-development peace nexus in fragile contexts, addressing the root causes of migration, tackling issues of global food security, as well as supporting partnership collaboration based on the EU's new approach (bilateral partnership agreements)".

SOLIDAR's view

and cooperating with local organisations to promote peaceful coexistence among communities of different religions and ethnicities. During the Hungarian Presidency, priority will be assigned to highlighting various humanitarian and development aspects of food security issues, and

We believe that education is key to access to decent work, but the right to education should not be instrumentalised and limited to providing access to labour market. Additionally, SOLIDAR stresses the importance of addressing structural causes of poverty and conflict through inclusive and participatory processes, ensuring that civil society, marginalized communities and indigenous people are consulted and involved in decision-making.

The reduction of development cooperation to a set of measures to refrain people from migrating fails the spirit and the objective of EU development cooperation and its primary goal of reducing poverty and promoting access to essential human rights. The focus on EU-Egypt relations as a model of this "new partnership cooperation" reiterates the disregard for the grave violations of fundamental human rights perpetuated by the Egyptian Government which are acknowledged also in the EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy. Instead, the EU should uphold human rights and accountability in negotiation of a strategic partnership with Egypt and other partners countries.



Hungarian Presidency Programme	SOLIDAR's view
"To better understand the new partnership cooperation of the EU and showcase domestic best practices, we intend to organise a study visit to Egypt for the CODEV-PI and RELEX HQ/Global Gateway working groups. The Hungarian Presidency will also pay special attention to fragile states and the Sahel region. The complex challenges can only be successfully addressed by developing a comprehensive foreign policy toolkit in which international development cooperation and related strategic communication play an important, though not exclusive, role. For these regions, the most critical issues are restoring security and basic services and creating jobs."	
"As to humanitarian cooperation, we will focus on forgotten crises, education about emergencies, preventive actions, and localisation . We aim to promote the Global Gateway	8. A Transparent Global Gateway that benefits people In relation to the Global Gateway, SOLIDAR stresses the importance of ensuring that the flagship projects are approved through a transparent process, with open consultations, that they will benefit local communities, and promote sustainable development and environmental protection. Investments should prioritize social infrastructure, human rights, sustainable development and environmental protection.



Hungarian Presidency Programme	SOLIDAR's view
9. Trade	9. Trade for Just Transition!
European toolkit to strengthen and build global, regional, and bilateral relations. To fulfil the global role of the EU, an ambitious, open, comprehensive and credible trade policy is necessary." "Easing tensions with trading partners in the wake of protectionist trends in global trade is an important priority for us. Strengthening open and fair-trade relations is a cornerstone of European competitiveness. Under the	In line with the a Global Green Deal and the EULAC working group joint paper, SOLIDAR considers that a credible EU Trade and Investment Policy entails, among others, the elimination of the Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanism and guaranteeing environmental obligations. Moreover, SOLIDAR supports the focus on sustainability and inclusivity but emphasizes the need for the EU's trade agreements to incorporate at least one binding chapter on sustainability, setting forth complaint mechanisms and sanctions in the event of non-compliance with social, environmental, and human rights clauses, and conditioning the signature and ratification of any agreement on the inclusion of that chapter. This would prevent social and environmental dumping and race to the bottom in partner countries as well as leverage Trade policy's potential to contribute to decarbonize the economy and promote Just Transition.
of restrictive measures on trade." 10. Climate change and environmental protection	10. EU for a Global Just Transition
"The Hungarian Presidency attaches great importance to the fight against climate change . We are already facing the adverse effects of climate change, including extreme weather events such as floods, droughts and storms which require	SOLIDAR reads with satisfaction the reiterated commitment to fight climate change, but we regret the weak, if not absent, mention of Just Transition as a holistic policy framework, and stresses the need to



most effectively exploit the opportunities of the green

transition. The Hungarian Presidency intends to follow a

holistic approach to explore synergies between different

playing field, and foster European leading position in the

international partners on green initiatives and calls for

nurture and develop the Union's relations with its

increased global ambition."

policy areas to promote greening the economy, ensure a level

global green technology market. Our Presidency continues to

Hungarian Presidency Programme the European Union's leading role in global climate policy by implementing the EU's nationally defined contribution and strengthening the level of global ambition." "Apart from contributing to preserving the European leading role in the relevant international negotiations, the Hungarian Presidency continues to follow the EU-designated path of leading by example while focusing on the possibilities to "SOLIDAR highlights that for this to happen the transition needs to be fair and just; solid relations with international partners can only be built on mutually beneficial partnership and not on extractivism; finally the EU shall lead the promotion of Just Transition globally, making sure that the EU does not hinder but instead supports and helps partner countries in delivering on the sustainable development goals and develop their own just transition plans.