Historical Context of the European Council

Created in 1974 as an informal discussion forum between heads of state or government of European Union member states, the European Council has come a long way to establish itself as the institution that defines the political direction of the European Union. The way the Council does so is not by negotiating or enacting laws but rather by setting the Union's political priorities. The Council's main tool is the adoption of conclusions, reached through meetings, that focus on concerning issues and promote specific actions or goals that other EU bodies ought to consider.

To better channel the EU's political direction, the Council adopts a five-year agenda. The latest agenda, meant to cover the time period of 2019 to 2024, aims to focus on four specific priorities: protecting citizens and freedoms; developing a strong and vibrant economy; building a climate-neutral, green, fair, and social Europe; and promoting European interests and values on the global stage. This year is the last of the current agenda, which highlights the need to deliver on these four priorities through concrete and impactful conclusions to topics of continental relevance. These topics are explored in the section below.

Context of the Central Theme

Europe has long nurtured an energy dependency with Russia. As President Putin embarked on an invasion of Ukraine and Brussels exchanged economic sanctions with Moscow, part of the consequences included an extreme reduction of Russian gas to European countries. Eastern Europe was particularly affected, as countries such as Hungary, the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic, and Germany, have heavy dependency on Russian gas. Since then, prices have increased a staggering fifteen-fold, as energy is required for heating, industrial processes, and general power requirements. Different members of the Union have floated a variety of solutions, including price caps, applying subsidies, regulating tariffs, and even nationalizing energy companies. There is reasonable discussion to be had regarding these options, but their effect needs to be taken in the context of the bloc, and how the actions of one member can have detrimental spillover effects to the rest. Beyond requiring a solution for the short term, it's also important to consider the infrastructure required to guarantee a sustainable and independent future for European energy.

New trends have begun to define the business and industrial landscape across the world. Europe's policy in this matter is focused on maintaining competitiveness by promoting job creation and economic growth through a business-friendly environment. That being said, the importance of these new trends demands careful discussion to ensure the bloc properly supports Europe's development in critical economic areas. Out of the many new developments, consider the weight of the following: First, the influence of automation systems, such as robotics and artificial intelligence. Although being the first to regulate artificial intelligence through the AI Act, the way in which this technology promises to unlock productivity reckons discussion as to not fall behind other rivals such as China and the United States. Second, the ongoing discussion on sustainability and environmental responsibility. Balancing economic development and productivity with its environmental impact is an area in which Europe has excelled, but it's also an area that demands constant

focus to ensure key objectives such as the Sustainable Development Goals are achieved. The business world has begun to promote DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) in its internal corporate processes, and Europe can enact regulations to give shape to standardized DEI practices. Other areas of focus include e-commerce, global trade, and the use of personal data by corporations. As the Council discusses these and many other factors that affect economic development, it's important to keep in mind not only how proposals can affect different members of the bloc, but also how focus on particular key technologies will grant a strategic competitive advantage to Europe, enabling our continent to achieve its goals of job creation and economic growth through a business-friendly environment.

In recent years, Germany has led the European Union due to its economic and political influence. 2015 was no different when then-Chancellor Angela Merkel oversaw what she considered to be an extraordinary situation and opened Germany's door to over one million migrants. Setting aside how such measures fueled a rise of hard-right politicians and promoted racial disputes, Chancellor Merkel set the tone for a continent-wide refugee policy. As of January 2022, the European Union harbored 23.8 million non-EU citizens as residents, representing 5.3% of the bloc's population of 447 million. Three-quarters of these non-EU citizens are focused on Germany, Spain, France, and Italy. Put into perspective, this is below the norm when compared with high-income countries, as Switzerland has 30.2% of non-nationals, Norway has 16.1%, and the United States has 13.5%. Countries have different approaches, but in general, the current policy of the European Council has been to establish an effective, humanitarian, and safe migration policy. Despite this data and the approach it promotes, perception is different as an influx of immigrants tends to promote anti-immigrant attitudes that affect the local political landscape and its social fabric. Immigration has created several problems, including gang violence that required the army's intervention in Sweden, and as mentioned before, the rise of support towards political candidates with attitudes hostile to migrants. Muddling the waters is the fact that Europe requires immigration not only to fill needed jobs but also to stave off a population decline. On-going conflicts, such as Ukraine and a rise in Middle Eastern instability, all but promises that more refugees will show at Europe's doors. How they're integrated will be critical to ensure that Europe's effective, humanitarian, and safe intentions are fulfilled.

Research Questions

Answering the following questions through in-depth research will allow you to better engage with the topics facing the Council.

TOPIC A: Energy Crisis: Investing in a sustainable energy future for Europe.
1. What are viable measures to take in the short term to address the energy shortage in Europe?
2. How should Europe's future energy infrastructure look? To what extent should this future include nuclear reactors, and to what extent should it maintain its dependence on fossil fuels such as gas?

TOPIC B: Supporting Europe's business and industry future.
1. What are the business and industry trends European Council members ought to focus on to better guarantee a competitive advantage?
2. To what extent should the European Council intervene in corporate affairs through regulation?
3. How could specific economic actions affect, either positively or negatively, different members of the bloc?

TOPIC C: Migration and asylum policies: Reviewing the European Union's approach.

1. Should the European Union maintain its current approach toward immigration? Why?
2. What measures countries outside the Union are taking that could be adapted to the European approach?
3. How should the Council manage the perception that immigrants are unwelcomed, both at home and abroad, and the attitudes that perception fosters?

Discussion questions

The following questions can help you and other members of the Council have a more fruitful and engaging discussion.

1. Which members of the European Council share the same interests as you, and which ones are most likely to oppose your proposals based on their differing interests?
2. What negotiation tactics can you employ to convince the European Council to adopt conclusions favorable to your interests?
3. What are red lines related to these topics that you're not willing to cross? What are the red lines others might hold that could derail or block possible discussions?
4. How does an ideal conclusion look like for the country you represent?

Sources of Information
1. European Council. (2017). The European Council - Consilium. Europa.eu; European Council. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/european-council/
2. European Council. (2017). Setting the EU's political agenda. Europa.eu; European Council. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/european-council/role-setting-eu-political-agenda/
3. Flanagan, M., Kammer, A., Pescatori, A., & Stuermer, M. (2022, July 19). How a Russian Natural Gas Cutoff Could Weigh on Europe's Economies. IMF. https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2022/07/19/blog-how-a-russias-natural-gas-cutoff-could-weigh-on-european-economies
4. Zettelmeyer, J., Tagliapietra, S., Zachmann, G., & Heussaff, C. (2022, December). Beating the European Energy Crisis. International Monetary Fund. https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2022/12/beating-the-european-energy-crisis-Zettelmeyer
5. De La Baume, M. (2017, August 27). Angela Merkel defends open border migration policy. POLITICO; POLITICO. https://www.politico.eu/article/angela-merkel-defends-open-border-migration-refugee-policy-germany/
6. ukteam. (2023, December 14). Migration to the EU: facts, not perceptions. United Nations Western Europe. https://unric.org/en/migration-to-the-eu-facts-not-perceptions/
7. Dražanová, L., & Gonnot, J. (2023). Attitudes toward immigration in Europe: Cross-regional differences. Open Research Europe, 3, 66. https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.15691.1
8. European Council. (2023). EU migration policy. Www.consilium.europa.eu. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-migration-policy/
9. Europe is stuck in a need-hate relationship with migrants. (n.d.). The Economist. https://www.economist.com/europe/2023/10/04/europe-is-stuck-in-a-need-hate-relationship-with-migrants

10. Business and industry. (n.d.). European-Union.europa.eu. https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/actions-topic/business-and-industry_en

11. Europe, a laggard in AI, seizes the lead in its regulation. (n.d.). The Economist. https://www.economist.com/europe/2023/12/10/europe-a-laggard-in-ai-seizes-the-lead-in-its-regulation

White, C. (2023, February 1). The Changing Landscape of Businesses in Europe. Bricz.

https://bricz.com/the-changing-business-landscape-in-europe/