

# Foreword

After serving in the role in 2011 – and after the ensuing interval of over 13 years – in July 2024, Hungary will again take on a noble yet demanding task: for half a year, our country will assume the presidency of the Council of the European Union. It is no exaggeration to state that, in the period of more than a decade that has elapsed since our last mandate, we have witnessed events that have had a momentous impact not only on European integration but on the entire world. Over the last few years, we have survived a pandemic, have faced the horrors of a war unfolding in our proximity, and witnessed the emergence of an energy crisis unprecedented in scale. Even taken on their own, each of these events presented the European continent with a formidable challenge; as a cumulative whole, they have placed a greater burden than ever on the shoulders of the European Union's institutions and its member states.

The rotating presidency of the Council has always played an important role in handling current challenges. The presiding member state has the opportunity, for example, to set the Council's agenda and priorities, fine-tune its policies, and by chairing sessions, can bring the diverging interests of nations closer together. The Hungarian presidency, however, will not only reflect on the difficulties to be overcome, but also on reforming the EU's institutions to better address them. Accordingly, the strategic goals and policy guidelines set during this time will have a great impact on the entire following budgetary cycle.

Given all of the foregoing, it is clear that, while holding the rotating presidency has always set an important task for the nation assuming the role, Hungary will be facing an especially imposing set of challenges and tasks, given the current circumstances.

The University of Public Service is playing an important role in the preparations for Hungary's 2024 EU presidency. The university's Europe Strategy Research Institute will be publishing several collections of studies, thus contributing to raising awareness about academic research in connection with the presidency. In addition, due to its unique teaching portfolio, the university will provide specialised training for the diplomats and delegates who will be implementing Hungary's presidency. This book aims to contribute to these preparations, and to help ensure that our country successfully fulfils its mandate to hold the presidency of the European Council.

This book is the fruit of a three-year interdisciplinary research project which sought to make a scholarly study of the main policy issues relevant to the period of the Hungarian presidency, thus assisting in the preparations for the latter. Initiated and completed by the Europe Strategy Research Institute of the University of Public Service, this volume brings together experts who not only have unparalleled theoretical knowledge, but also practical experience in the day-to-day application of policies. The book deliberately endeavours to change perspectives by reviewing, on the one hand, overarching systemic phenomena, while also offering "snapshots" of the most pressing current challenges. By reviewing such heterogeneous and crucial issues as the Russian–Ukrainian conflict, regional policies, the protection of minorities, the rule of law, family policies, digitalisation, population ageing or the decade-long transformation of the community of nations, the



book's ambitions extend far beyond transmitting mere factual knowledge. It also offers readers a "behind the scenes" perspective that allows them to explore and understand the emerging academic and political conflict zones that underlie the decision-making processes.

The pieces in this monograph have been situated in the policy environment at issue, and thus explore how that policy background may influence the agenda of the Hungarian presidency and in certain cases the authors even offer recommendations in this respect. This volume responds to an important need, namely that of reflecting on the challenges of both the present and the future through the prism of cumulative integration-related experience, and does so in clear and accessible language, following a logical progression and offering scholarly insights that allows all of us to view these issues in a new light. It is for this reason that I can confidently assure our readers – whether they are politicians, scholars or members of the interested public studying the past in order to understand the present and foretell the future – that they have chosen the best possible material with which to pursue this undertaking.

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