

Priorities of the Dutch presidency in 2026



On 1 January 2026, the Netherlands took over the annual rotating presidency of the Benelux Union from Luxembourg.

The Dutch presidency will focus on three priority policy areas, closely aligned with the core areas covered by the Benelux Union Treaty:

- 1. Economic cooperation and internal market*
- 2. Safety and resilience*
- 3. Future-proof transition, including energy cooperation.*

The Presidency will endeavour to intensify cooperation between our countries and eliminate border barriers wherever possible. This year will see a particular focus on interaction between the Benelux and the EU.

The Benelux's special position as Europe's testing ground will be used to take innovative steps to help strengthen our three countries. This contributes to strengthening the EU, and can provide inspiration for other Member States. As president, the Netherlands will also focus on influencing European decision-making jointly from a Benelux perspective. The Netherlands will likewise explore opportunities for joint or coordinated implementation of EU legislation.

1. ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND INTERNAL MARKET

Economic cooperation within the Benelux Union is a key pillar of the Dutch presidency in 2026. The Netherlands aims to leverage the strong economic integration between the three countries to promote joint growth, innovation and economic resilience. Improving internal market cooperation is a key aspect, with efforts focused on removing unnecessary barriers between the Benelux countries and more broadly within the EU, such as territorial supply constraints. The Benelux countries are jointly advocating for EU legislation to counteract such constraints.

The Dutch presidency is committed to removing barriers that unnecessarily impede the cross-border activities of businesses and citizens. Examples include efforts aimed at the recognition of professional qualifications between countries, enabling cross-border e-invoicing or Benelux efforts to introduce European Business Wallets.

Under the Dutch presidency, the Benelux Union will continue its efforts to promote the multilateral Treaty on the automatic recognition of higher education qualifications and to explore the accession of new states to this treaty. Poland is expected to be able to join in 2026. A conference will be organised for higher education institutions in the countries that have signed the treaty.

The legal tools of the Benelux Union are ideally suited to reducing border barriers and promoting cooperation between border regions. The Interreg project 'Schakelpunt Grensbelemmeringen Vlaanderen - Nederland' (referred to in English as the Flanders-Netherlands Border Barriers Schakelpunt) is instrumental in better identifying these obstacles and may serve as inspiration for similar projects in other border regions. In this way, the Benelux is supporting the implementation of the BRIDGEforEU regulation.

2. SECURITY AND RESILIENCE

In addition to the Dutch focus on the competitiveness of the Benelux, another priority seeks to intensify cooperation in the area of resilience, not least in light of geopolitical developments.

The Netherlands' primary focus in this regard is on raising awareness at all levels of society in order to prepare for crisis situations. Joint crisis simulations and knowledge exchange are useful for this purpose. Collaboration between actors engaged in crisis management, such as emergency services and government agencies, is thereby strengthened.

To strengthen our resilience, the Netherlands continues to focus on making optimal use of the instruments of the Benelux Police Treaty. This will enable us to take more effective action against the undermining of society by organised crime. Promoting closer knowledge-sharing within the Benelux on hybrid threats is an explicit part of the presidency's agenda, in close conjunction with the EU preparedness strategy and the European Resilience Coalition.

In addition, the presidency will continue to pay attention to readmission and return agreements, as well as visa exemption agreements for holders of diplomatic and service passports that are concluded within the Benelux framework. In 2025, treaties were signed with Belize, Suriname, and Kyrgyzstan. Both the entry into force of these treaties and the negotiation of new treaties will receive special attention from the presidency.

However, the commitment to resilience extends beyond crisis preparedness or justice and security cooperation. It also includes food security and secure supply chains. Given the three countries' shared security challenges, our interwoven production chains and the role of the Netherlands as an agro-logistics hub in Europe, a joint Benelux approach is essential.

3. FUTURE-PROOF TRANSITION, ENERGY COOPERATION

The Netherlands is convinced that the Benelux Union can play a leading role in strengthening a future-proof economy, with a prominent place for innovation. From this perspective, the Benelux will focus on enhancing sustainable mobility. Among other things, the Netherlands would like to promote cross-border cycle traffic and to take steps within the Benelux to promote autonomous road transport.

The Netherlands sees circularity as an opportunity to combine sustainability and economic growth. Through cooperation within the Benelux, the Netherlands aims to contribute to a fully circular economy by 2050. To this end, it will seek complementarity between EU initiatives and Benelux projects.

Energy occupies an increasingly prominent position in national security strategies and resilience plans. Measures to increase the resilience of the economy, population, and digital and other infrastructure require a comprehensive vision of the strategic importance of energy security.

Regional energy cooperation is key in today's climate. An exchange of best practices for the minimum operational requirements that energy supplies must meet will be used as a basis for practical recommendations.

Regional cooperation can also contribute to a more efficient and faster energy transition to future-proof our energy supply. The Benelux can also play a role in European discussions on energy pricing, market integration, electricity market reform, the development of offshore grid connections and offshore wind projects. This works best through the Pentilateral partnership between the Benelux, France, Germany, Austria and Switzerland, and the North Seas Energy Cooperation (NSEC), whose secretariat is based in the Benelux and which the Netherlands will also chair next year.