

## **Taking forward the Strategic Agenda**

18-month programme of the Council (1 January 2016 - 30 June 2017)

### **SUMMARY**

This document is a short summary of the Council's work programme as established by the future Netherlands, Slovak and Maltese Presidencies, covering the period January 2016 to June 2017. In drafting the programme the three presidencies have been guided by the five priorities of the Strategic Agenda adopted by the European Council in June 2014.

#### **A Union of jobs, growth and competitiveness**

The priority of the Union is to deliver sustainable economic growth and job creation. This will require further deepening of the single market, in particular in the area of services and the digital agenda. Measures will be taken to improve the conditions in which SMEs are able to thrive, and there will be a particular focus on restoring levels of investment in a wide range of areas such as research, infrastructure and transport. Increasing the competitiveness of European industry will also require swift progress on trade agreements, including TTIP. Work will be taken forward on completing the architecture of the Economic and Monetary Union, including an enhanced cycle of economic policy coordination and making further progress towards the completion of the banking union and the establishment of a capital markets union.

#### **A Union that empowers and protects all its citizens**

The economic and financial crisis raised significant challenges to Europe's social model in its various expressions. Work therefore needs to be taken forward to invest more in human capital, equip society for the future, combat poverty and social exclusion and protect all of Europe's citizens. This will require tackling unemployment (particularly youth and long-term unemployment) as a matter of priority. Measures will also be taken to improve labour mobility, support fair labour standards, promote equal treatment, and encourage more inclusive and modern education systems. Social protection systems will also be adapted to face today's challenges, not least demographic trends. Health and safety will remain a key objective. Work will also continue in the area of taxation as part of the overall objective of ensuring social fairness.

#### **Towards an Energy Union with a forward-looking climate policy**

Work will be taken forward on achieving a complete and fully functioning energy market. This will concentrate on interconnections, enhancing regional cooperation and strengthening international energy relations. Increasing energy security remains a key objective. Energy efficiency and energy prices will also be addressed. There will be appropriate follow-up to the UN Climate Change Convention (COP 21), and work will progress on the revision of the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) and emissions reductions in other sectors ("non-ETS"). At the same time there will be a focus on environmental issues such as developing a circular economy through improved resource management, and the development of a more competitive resource-efficient economy.

## **A Union of freedom, security and justice**

The basis for work in this area are the Strategic Guidelines agreed by the European Council in June 2014. Addressing the challenge of migration and refugees will remain high on the agenda. This will include further work on the future development of the Common European Asylum System, efforts on relocation, resettlement, returns and readmission, stepping up the fight against human trafficking, and taking forward work in relation to legal migration. Work will also focus on management of the EU's external borders. A further priority will be the implementation of the European Agenda on Security. Work will be taken forward on a comprehensive and integrated approach to cyber security and to serious and organised crime. The fight against terrorism will be a top priority for the Council. In the area of justice, there will be a focus on combating fraud against the financial interests of the Union, including work on the European Public Prosecutor's office, data protection, and promoting and safeguarding the rule of law and fundamental rights.

## **The Union as a strong global actor**

The forthcoming global strategy on foreign and security policy will play an important role in defining the EU's political ambitions, objectives and the instruments to achieve them. The review of the Neighbourhood Policy will also play an important role. The Common Security and Defence Policy will be further developed, with a strengthening of civilian and military capabilities, enhanced cooperation with international bodies such as the UN and NATO, and a better integration of human rights considerations. Work will continue on bolstering partnerships, particularly those with like-minded parties, but also with partners with growing global and regional influence. There will be close cooperation in many areas with the US. The EU will also reaffirm its strong commitment to Asia, including at the 11th ASEM summit, and on Africa the EU will work on implementing the EU-Africa roadmap adopted in 2014. Development policy and cooperation remain central elements of the EU's external action. Work will focus on improved joint programming, and better linking the EU's external relations instruments in line with its comprehensive approach. A particular focus will be the implementation of the post-2015 agenda on sustainable development.

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