

PRIORITIES FOR JANUARY-JUNE 2016

Dutch Presidency of the Council of the EU

WEBER SHANDWICK MEMO 16 December 2015

ON 1 JANUARY 2016, THE NETHERLANDS WILL ASSUME THE PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION FOR THE NEXT SIX MONTHS.

As one of the six founding members of the EU, the Netherlands is among the most experienced Member States when it comes to EU decision-making. In addition to the regular Council meetings, it has planned over 150 informal meetings, primarily taking place at the Royal Marine Etablissement Amsterdam (MEA), aimed at showcasing the country as innovative, green and smart.

The Dutch Presidency is expected to be business-minded, pragmatic and focused on concrete initiatives. It will seek to concentrate on the 'essentials', rigorously applying the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, as well as supporting the cutting of red tape to boost economic growth and encourage better regulation. This approach dovetails with that of the Juncker Commission.

In addition, as a mainstay of international law, the country will adopt a rules-minded approach to the Presidency. As the home of institutions such as the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court, The Hague has often been branded the Legal Capital of the World. It is also home to Europol and Eurojust, which will boost the Presidency's credentials in trying to find common ground between Member States' differing approaches to terrorism.

A business- and rules-minded Presidency will be important as Europe grapples with the aftermath of the latest events in Paris, from the implementation of

RELEVANT DATES

29 January Informal EU
Directors General meeting

18-19 February European
Council

17-18 March European
Council

23-24 June European
Council

the agreement reached at the Paris Climate Conference (COP21) to addressing terrorism and extremism.

The Presidency will try to stick to the Trio Programme agreed with Slovakia and Malta and the Strategic Agenda agreed by the European Council in June 2014. However, it is worth remembering that these programmes were prepared in different times and politically charged dossiers are bound to vie for attention on the Council's policy agenda.

Presidency guiding principles

Focus on the essentials – The EU is most effective when it stays close to its competences and is not too prescriptive.

Making connections – Mutual solidarity is the basis of European cooperation. The EU has to promote this message more effectively to its citizens while taking into account their input.

Creating innovative jobs and growth – Sustainability and economic competitiveness should be addressed in tandem in order to be more effective.

Please find below our analysis of the Dutch Presidency Priorities in the fields of financial service and taxation, competitiveness and urban affairs, employment and social affairs, healthcare and food safety, digital economy and society, climate, energy, environment, transport, and international trade.

Presidency policy priorities

1 - Migration and international security

2- Europe as an innovator and job creator

3 - Sound finances and a robust Eurozone

4 - Forward-looking climate and energy policy



FINANCIAL SERVICES AND TAXATION CALENDAR

15 January ECOFIN Council

28 January International Conference on MFF

12 February ECOFIN Council

24 February EMU Seminar

8 March ECOFIN Council

22-23 April Informal ECOFIN Council

25 May ECOFIN Council

17 June ECOFIN Council

Financial Services and Taxation

The Dutch Presidency will continue the post-2009 trend of placing ‘stimulating growth and jobs’ at the top of its economic and financial affairs priorities. With its strong emphasis on healthy fiscal policy, as shown by Dutch Finance Minister and Eurogroup President Jeroen Dijsselbloem, The Hague is eager to further strengthen the **Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)**. Emphasis will be placed on reforms and fiscal consolidation, deepening the single market, and promoting better governance.

In the context of completing the Banking Union, the Commission presented a proposal for a **European Deposit Insurance Scheme (EDIS)** in November and the Presidency will need to facilitate a common position on the proposal within Council. The Hague considers this a first step towards the establishment of a European Deposit Guarantee Scheme (DGS), although it should be preceded by further harmonisation of banking regulations (single rulebook).

When it comes to progress on key financial services dossiers, the preceding Luxembourgish Presidency will be a tough show to beat. However, given its strong banking sector, one of The Hague’s key priorities is to move forward on the **Capital Markets Union’s (CMU) remaining elements**. Council agreed on a mandate for negotiations with Parliament on the long-awaited CMU Action Plan, but defending the quickly-cut Council deal in front of what are likely to be rather hostile MEPs is bound to be an ordeal, particularly on the proposal for a Regulation on Simple, Transparent and Standardised (“STS”) Securitisations.

While inter-institutional relations may prove to be trying at times, this is not expected to be the case at the five ECOFIN Councils scheduled to take place over the course of the Presidency’s term. As the Commission continues to roll out CMU Action Plan items, the question remains ‘how does this impact the real economy?’ With the important role that SMEs play in the Dutch economy, the Presidency will likely approach the CMU from a position of expertise and local knowledge of the challenges faced by Member States. We expect relatively pain free compromises on those initiatives yet to be closed, thanks to the strong political support already established.

When it comes to taxation, The Hague aims to prioritise action on tax evasion and tax avoidance, including strengthening transparency around tackling corporate tax avoidance. Commission proposals for the **transposition of the measures on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS)** agreed within the OECD are expected under the Dutch Presidency. However, no smooth ride is expected on the



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COMPETITIVENESS
AND URBAN AFFAIRS
CALENDAR

27-28 January

Informal
Competitiveness
Council

29 February

Competitiveness
Council

16 March High-Level
Group on Governance

14-15 April

Informal Joint
Transport and
Environment Council

26-27 May

Competitiveness
Council

30 May Informal

Ministerial meeting on
Urban Development

Corporate Tax Package, given the unanimity rule in the Council on these matters and the ambitious nature of the Commission's proposals. The Dutch will concentrate on reforming the structure and mandate of the EU Code of Conduct Group on business taxation and will prioritise finishing work on the **anti-BEPS Directive and the Interest and Royalties Directive (IRD)**.

The Presidency will likely kick off work on the **VAT Action Plan** if the Commission manages to present its proposal in early 2016. Discussions will also focus on providing more efficient national tools to fight VAT fraud. Furthermore, discussions may continue on the **Common Financial Transaction Tax (FTT)**, although the Dutch are not part of the eleven Member States that agreed to proceed on this issue through 'enhanced cooperation'.

Competitiveness and Urban Affairs

With its highly open economy, strong services sector and extensive digital infrastructure, the Netherlands benefits significantly from the progressive completion of the single market. The Hague aims to evaluate the Commission's **Single Market Strategy** at the Competitiveness Council to give political direction to the roll-out of the Strategy's primary initiatives.

In a similar vein, the Dutch Presidency is committed to mainstreaming competitiveness across all EU policy areas. This implies cutting red tape and implementing the Commission's better regulation agenda, which is the responsibility of Dutch national and First Vice President Frans Timmermans. Concretely, the Presidency will develop '**better regulation targets**' and aim to reduce the workstreams in Council.

This will also involve implementing the **Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Regulation** expected by the end of 2015. The agreement updates working relations between the EU institutions, including rules of procedure on legislative programming, trilogue negotiations, how to conduct impact assessments, delegated and implementing acts, and transparency. The Presidency aims to adopt Council Conclusions on Better Regulation at the Competitiveness Council on 26 May.

In terms of sector specific actions, the Presidency will try to advance the Single Market Strategy for Goods and Services and the Digital Single Market Strategy, and improve the legal framework for SMEs. It will also bring forward the priorities of the **European Research Area** and promote investment in R&I with a **focus on 'open science'** including open access to publications and optimal re-use of data.



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When it comes to urban affairs, The Hague believes that Europe’s cities are key to achieving the EU 2020 objectives. The EU Urban Agenda aims to align EU policy with urban practices through measures which promote mobility, accessibility, and multicultural openness. These efforts should lead to the adoption of the **Pact of Amsterdam** establishing an **EU Urban Agenda to empower cities** at the Informal Ministerial meeting on 30 May. Preparatory work will be done at a meeting of the High-Level Group on Governance on 16 March. The Urban Agenda will be supported through a new **European Fund for Urban Innovative Actions** providing € 371 million in public funding in the period 2015-2020.

The urban dimension and its impact on transport and environment policy will be discussed in the combined Informal Joint Environment and Transport Council on 14-15 April.



EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS CALENDAR

8 February
Conference on decent work in the European labour market

16 February General Affairs Council

7 March EPSCO Council

19-20 April Informal EPSCO Social Council

16 June EPSCO Employment Council

Employment and Social Affairs

Improving intra-EU labour mobility and coordination of social security systems among Member States will be high on the agenda. In February 2015, Dutch Minister for Social Affairs, Lodewijk Asscher, suggested a plan against social dumping and a revision of the Posting of Workers Directive. However, the Commission postponed the publication of its **Labour Mobility Package** and may do so again. The package included a Review of the Posting of Workers Directive and a proposal for improving the coordination of social security systems.

The Dutch Presidency is also expected to focus on **strengthening legislation to promote decent working conditions and poverty reduction through an integrated approach** (housing, health, education), particularly within the European Semester Process. It intends to discuss the Annual Growth Survey package together with the implementation of country-specific recommendations (CSRs) in the Spring Councils, as well as organising a Joint debate on the European semester with the European Parliament foreseen for March 2016.

Actions following up on the Work Plan for Youth (2014-2015) will also continue under a **new 36 month EU Work Plan for Youth** starting in January 2016. Council



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may discuss the role of the youth sector in preventing violent radicalisation and adopt Conclusions on cross-sectoral cooperation on participation to promote young people's health and wellbeing in the transition to adulthood, particularly for youth with mental health issues.

Council positions on a range of key dossiers in the area of employment and social affairs were already reached under the Luxembourgish Presidency. This includes the **Council recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market** and the **Regulation reforming the European jobs network EURES**. Here, Council is awaiting Parliament's position before entering into negotiations ahead of the adoption of the Regulation. Formal agreement is also expected on the **European Platform to tackle undeclared work** since triologue negotiations were concluded under the Luxembourgish Presidency.

With the Labour Mobility Package delayed and various dossiers requiring only rubberstamping, few politically sensitive and complex files remain on the table. The **Directive on women on company boards**, presented by the Commission back in 2012, is one such file. Council has not yet reached a General Approach, so it remains to be seen if The Hague will prioritise this dossier.

Another difficult dossier is the **Equal Treatment Directive**. Discussions on this file have been ongoing since it was proposed in 2008, although the Luxembourgish Presidency advanced significantly on provisions regarding the accessibility and alignment with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Linked to this, the Dutch will kick off Council discussions on the **EU Accessibility Directive**, proposed in December 2015.

**HEALTHCARE AND
FOOD SAFETY
CALENDAR**

10 February AMR
Conference

17-18 February
Meeting Heads of
Medicine Agencies

Healthcare and Food Safety

In health and food safety, the Dutch Presidency will focus on the threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), market access rules for medicines, and ingredients of food products. In addition, e-health and patient empowerment will be addressed with a dedicated e-health week in Amsterdam held from 8 to 10 June 2016.

In light of the expiry of the EU Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance at the end of 2016, **AMR will form the main focus of the Dutch priorities on health policy**. The Presidency is expected to organise a ministerial conference for health and veterinary ministers in February aimed at promoting the One Health approach (health, animals, food, environment) in tackling AMR. Council Conclusions are expected to inform the EU's post-2016 Action Plan.



22 -23 February
Ministerial
Conference
on Product
Reformulation

2-3 March Expert
Meeting on Access to
Medicines

18 April Informal
Health Council

8-10 June
eHealth Week

17 June
EPSCO Health Council

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The Presidency will furthermore inform and encourage a political discussion around **access rules for medicines**. In this context, the focus will be on innovation for the benefit of patients, early access tools and addressing the high pricing levels of medicines. Given the significant national competences in this area, an expert meeting involving national ministries, health agencies and other competent authorities will be held in March. It is yet to be determined if this discussion will lead to Council Conclusions.

In the area of food, The Hague will focus on **food products improvements** and promoting the lowering of fat, salt and sugar contents of food. A voluntary agreement between government and the food chain to improve the nutritional composition of food and

drinks by 2020 already exists in the Netherlands. Ensuring a level playing field will therefore be an important objective. A ministerial conference is set to take place on 22-23 February 2016 in Amsterdam on product reformulation and composition, which may lead to the adoption of Council Conclusions at the EPSCO Health Council meeting in June. The Dutch Presidency will also aim to adopt a **'roadmap for action'** at the ministerial conference outlining next steps.



Digital Economy and Society

Following extensive deliberations on the Commission's **Digital Single Market Roadmap (DSM)**, legislative proposals are expected in the first half of 2016. With the DSM as one of its top priorities and in line with its broader push for an 'innovative Europe', the Dutch Presidency plans to tackle them head on, along with driving the Council's approach to policy initiatives planned for the second half of 2016.

DIGITAL ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

27 January

Competitiveness
Council

29 January Informal
Telecommunications
Council

20 April Digital
Summit

12-13 May Meeting
on Cyber Security

26 May Digital
Council

2-3 June Conference
on Digital and Open
Government

7 June TTE
Telecommunications
Council

The Dutch Presidency will be the first pleased to hear that final compromises have just been secured by the Luxembourgish Presidency on the **General Data Protection Regulation**. With a deal also reached on the Network and Information Security Directive earlier in December, the Hague is left with the logistical handling of adoption procedures. Both files are considered a foundation of the trust building parts of the DSM.

The Commission finally published its **Communication on Copyright**, an initiative tightened in scope and ambition after months of debates and pushbacks from stakeholders. The Commission also published its **proposal on common contract law for cross-border online sales**, a reincarnation of the thwarted Common European Sales Law. The Hague is ambitious on both proposals and keen to reach formal Council positions – or ‘General Approaches’ – for each proposal by June.

The Presidency could also have a legislative role to play on a yet to be confirmed **Communication on Cloud Computing**, pencilled in for February 2016, as well as an **initiative tackling transparency and pricing in parcel delivery services** with an expected proposal due in May 2016.

Yet, while more initiatives outlined in the DSM policy programme are in their design phase, the Dutch Presidency does not intend to stand idle. Indications are that The Hague wants to proactively tackle some of the pending initiatives with Member States to influence the Commission’s approach. **Addressing online platforms** is one such example. The Hague has been working on a study on the need to regulate Internet platforms, due to be presented to the Dutch Parliament in December, which is expected to argue against new rules for platforms.

A policy conference is scheduled for 20 April in Amsterdam to address online platforms alongside issues related to the reform of the EU telecom regulatory framework. The conference is well-timed in order to influence the Commission following its analysis of responses to the various public consultations this autumn and ahead of the Digital Council on 26 May, as well as any potential legislative initiatives in the second half of 2016.

On top of all this, the Presidency will focus its Informal Telecommunications Council on **Industry 4.0, geo-blocking and the collaborative economy**. This may generate political direction from Council amidst growing debates around the Internet of Things, content portability and the impact of disruptive digital applications on the traditional economy – think Uber and AirBnB. The Competitiveness Council on 27 January will focus on the Digitalisation of Industry.

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CLIMATE CALENDAR

4 March Environment Council

17-18 March European Council

14-15 April Informal Joint Transport and Environment Council

20 June Environment Council

Climate

For The Hague, issues relating to climate change, the environment and sustainability should be addressed in an integral manner, ensuring that adopted measures reinforce one another where possible. It will seek to ensure, where appropriate, that both economic goals and responsible use of resources and energy become part of a long-term model for sustainable growth. The Commission is due to present an **initiative on next steps for a sustainable European future** in the course of 2016.

Having been in the grip of the UNFCCC Paris climate conference (COP21) throughout 2015, 2016 will be a year of delivery for the Dutch Presidency. The **COP21 agreement forms the framework** within which EU climate policy will be addressed and the Presidency may have to take a supervisory role when it comes to the **follow up and implementation of agreed legal provisions in EU law**. The Environment Council on 4 March and European Council on 17-18 March are due to discuss the follow-up to COP21.

The Paris climate deal may also influence other climate policy discussions, notably the Commission's proposal for a **reform of the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS)**, which is critical for achieving the EU's 40% greenhouse gas emissions reduction target by 2030. This highly technical and controversial dossier will have a major impact on energy-intensive industries and fossil fuel power installations.

The Environment Council will likely be the site of heated debates, with the Competitiveness Council potentially considering issues related to carbon leakage. Rumour has it that The Hague aims to organise a debate specifically focused on the carbon leakage protection regime. However, since the European Parliament is not expected to adopt its position before the autumn, the Dutch will set the scene, rather than progressing far in the negotiations.

Linked to this will be the preparations for the **upcoming session of the Assembly of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)** taking place after the summer of 2016. Member countries will discuss a global emissions trading scheme for aviation and the Presidency will likely have to facilitate a common position within Council beforehand.

Finally, it should be noted that various developments at national level may impact the Presidency's operational flexibility in Council when it comes to climate and energy policy. For example, there is currently pressure on The Hague to accelerate its climate efforts, for example through the recent motion in the Dutch parliament



calling on the government to investigate the impact of closing all coal-fired power stations and the landmark Urgenda Foundation climate case. In this case the Court of the Hague instructed the Government to pursue higher CO2 emission reductions and put in place the policies to achieve this.

Given this context, the Dutch government is expected to launch a public consultation on its post-2020 energy and climate policy mid-next year. Against this background, it is planning to organise a conference with the Sociaal Economische Raad (SER), the official economic advisory council to the government, on Dutch energy and climate policy and the importance of public support and participation in the energy transition.

All in all, we expect that this domestic pressure combined with the momentum of the COP21 could result in a Presidency which is forceful on climate measures, albeit unclear on its national position.

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ENERGY CALENDAR

4 February High-Level Meeting on North Sea Regional Cooperation

3 March TTE Energy Council

11 April Informal Energy Council

6 June TTE Energy Council

Energy

The Commission has identified 2016 as a **year of delivery for the Energy Union Strategy** and the Dutch Presidency has mirrored this by identifying its roll-out as one of its key priorities. This approach is closely connected to The Hague's broader intentions to showcase the country as innovative, green and smart.

In terms of concrete legislative initiatives already on the table, the Dutch Presidency will be responsible for initiating inter-institutional negotiations with the Parliament on the **revised Energy Labelling Directive**.

When it comes to upcoming initiatives, the Dutch Presidency will launch Council discussions on the package of policy and legislative initiatives which the Commission is expected to present on 10 February 2016. Legislative proposals will likely include a **review of the Regulation on security of gas supply** and of the **Decision on the information exchange mechanism for intergovernmental agreements**.

In terms of non-legislative initiatives in the package, the Presidency will be in charge of initiating the Council's internal discussions on initiatives such as the **EU Strategy for LNG and Storage** as well as the new **EU Strategy on Heating and Cooling**. It is expected that these initiatives will include elements that will feed into future legislative reviews, such as the **Renewable Energy Directive and the Energy Efficiency Directive**.

The Dutch Presidency will also focus its efforts on shaping the Council's political guidance ahead of Commission proposals in the second half of 2016. These



include the proposal on electricity market design, as well as the reviews of the Renewable Energy Directive and the Energy Efficiency Directive. The Dutch Presidency will work towards ensuring that the Council's position on these is taken into account in the Commission's original proposals, since these instruments will set many of the objectives and targets agreed within the 2030 energy and climate framework. The issue of political guidance is due to be discussed at the Informal Energy Council on 10-11 April 2016.

Given the central role of the Netherlands as a hub in the European energy system, both as a major gas producing and transit country and as importer and transit country for raw materials via the Rotterdam harbour, the Dutch Presidency will pay particular

attention to initiatives contributing to the consolidation of the internal energy market. This is especially relevant when it comes to regional cooperation and renewable energy production. The Presidency aims to host a High Level meeting on the potential of North Sea regional cooperation on 4 February.

With the need for a European Energy Union well established, the Dutch Presidency will have to build on the progress achieved by its preceding Presidencies, while at the same time ensuring that the Council's views are duly taken into account during the continuation of the Strategy's roll out.



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Environment

The **new Circular Economy Package** will be a key environmental dossier for the Dutch Presidency. The Hague has announced that it will prioritise discussions on the revised proposals, but it will prove challenging to shape a legislative text that strikes the right balance between environmental and industrial dimensions. Coordination with First Vice President Frans Timmermans, who carries horizontal responsibility for sustainable development, will surely be a key vehicle for the Dutch Presidency.

ENVIRONMENT CALENDAR

4 March

Environment Council

4 April 'Make it Work'

High-Level Meeting

14-15 April Informal

Joint Environment and
Transport council

20 June Environment

Council

27-29 June

Conference on Future-
proof Nature Policy

The importance of these discussions, particularly those on innovation and the circular economy, also links back to the better regulation agenda and the **British-Dutch-German 'Make It Work' initiative**. Through this initiative, various Member States and the Commission aim to identify options for improving the implementation of EU environmental legislation across Europe. The initiative will come into play when the Commission presents its **Communication on monitoring and reporting obligations in environmental policy** expected in early 2016.

The Hague will be able to use its experience with the so-called **Dutch 'Green Deals'** to suggest alternatives to regulating when it comes to promoting certain developments. The Green Deals are agreements between project promoters and authorities, mainly targeting large-scale demonstration projects facing regulatory difficulties, that seek to alleviate barriers to sustainable innovation.

In terms of process, the internal debate on the Circular Economy Package will kick off by addressing the technical matters upfront. The Presidency expects to hold working group meetings every three weeks. Even more, sources have hinted that a number of expert-level meetings, rather than attachés, could take place in-between the working groups to accelerate progress around the technical details.

The Commission is expected to present the Package to Member States and engage in a preliminary discussion at the Environment Council on 16 December. On 4 March, a political debate could take place while Council conclusions on the Action Plan are envisaged for June 2016. The Presidency also envisions a stakeholder event focusing on this issue.

Other key issues that will have to be addressed under the Dutch Presidency include the triologue negotiations on the **revised National Emissions Ceiling Directive** and the **Fitness Check of the Birds and Habitats Directives** - the Presidency intends to host an international conference on the Fitness Check at the end of June. Furthermore, the Presidency is strongly committed to **implementing the Sustainable Development Goals** and will seek to support the Commission in developing a proposal dedicated to this purpose.

Transport

The Presidency's key priorities in transport focus on the aviation, maritime and railway sectors, with a particular interest in sustainability, the development of the European transport sector and related infrastructure under the TEN-T framework. With a mix of existing regulatory dossiers and agenda-setting, the Presidency's

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TRANSPORT CALENDAR

20 January

Aviation Summit

15 February High-level Meeting on Short Sea Shipping

15 March TTE Transport Council

14-15 April Informal Joint Environment and Transport council

13 June TTE Transport Council

20-22 June High-Level Conference on Tail Freight Corridors

work on transport will be closely intertwined with the Energy Union agenda and key objectives in CO2 emission reductions.

Reaching agreement within Council and with Parliament on the **Aviation Package**, which the Commission presented in December, will be a strategic priority. The Commission's aim to reach a deal with Council on a mandate for negotiations on comprehensive agreements with third countries before the end of the Dutch Presidency will prove challenging. Member States hold widely diverging positions on issues such as market access, state-subsidies and fair competition. The Presidency will therefore organise an Aviation Summit at the outset of its term in January.

In the maritime sector, the Dutch Presidency will also prioritise the controversial **Port Package** in the area of the maritime transport sector, dealing mainly with market access to port services and financial transparency of ports. The Presidency's activities will also focus on passenger ship safety and possible proposals on a simplified regulatory framework in light of the recently concluded Fitness Check. Overall, in both the maritime and aviation sectors, the Dutch Presidency aims to bring the EU's policy focus from a regional to a global approach, preferring the development of global rules through the IMO and the ICAO.

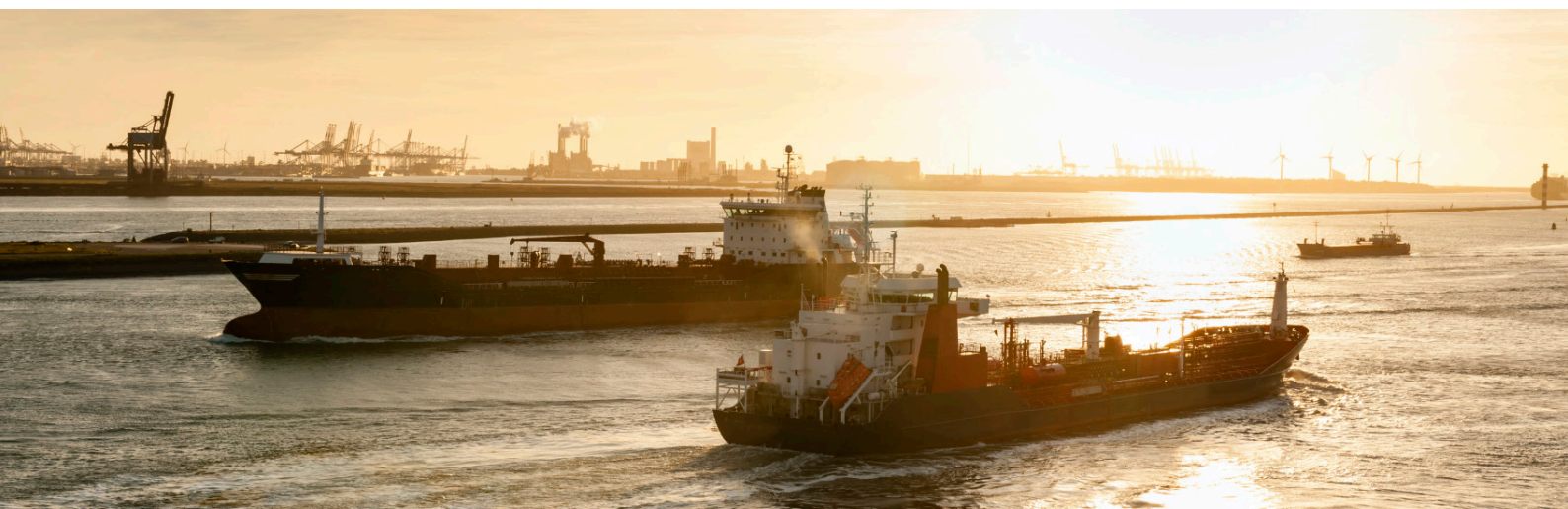
With the Netherlands maintaining one of the most densely used railway networks in the world, another key priority will be the successful conclusion of triologue negotiations on the **Fourth Railway Package**. Member States adopted a General Approach on the market opening and governance proposals in October 2015. However, key issues related to security on the tracks remain challenging.

When it comes to road transport, the Presidency's activities will be mostly agenda-setting. An Informal Joint Transport and Environment Council has been scheduled for April focusing on **smart mobility, innovation and self-driving, as**

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well as decarbonisation and alternative fuels. This relates to the Commission Communication on the decarbonisation of the transport sector, expected after the summer break.

Connecting these areas to heavy-duty vehicles, the Presidency will also aim to discuss platooning; linking several self-driving trucks. It will organise a **European Truck Platooning Challenge**, which has already received the backing of the industry.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE CALENDAR

2-3 February

Joint Trade and
Development Council

13 May Trade Council

5 February Informal
Foreign Affairs
Council (Gymnich)

International Trade

The Netherlands is a historically active trading nation and its current-day economy is greatly intertwined with global trade. The trade agenda for 2016 will offer ample opportunity for The Hague to leave its mark.

In terms of strategic importance, the bilateral negotiations with the U.S. on the **Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)** continue to top the agenda and will require considerable attention, in particular when it comes to investment protection. The Commission and Council are eager to conclude negotiations before the U.S. presidential elections in November 2016.

Another priority is concluding the **EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)** negotiations. The 'shadow' of the Japanese House of Councillors election in mid-2016 is also boosting negotiations in this case.

The elephant in the room may be the consideration of granting **China 'Market Economy Status' in the WTO** and, closely connected, the **EU-China negotiations for a Bilateral Investment Agreement (BIT)** and China's intended participation in the 'Juncker Plan for Investment in Europe.' Battle lines are already being drawn in Council and finding common ground will be highly challenging.

In addition to Japan and China, the Commission's trade 'pivot' also includes bilateral negotiations with various of **ASEAN member countries**. Council has already paved the way for negotiations to commence with the Philippines and other countries may follow, although the strategic objective of a region-to-region agreement with ASEAN remains.

Furthermore, after finalising the scoping exercise, the Commission may request negotiating directives to modernise the FTAs with Mexico and Chile to a level comparable to, and compatible with, CETA and TTIP. In the case of Mexico, this could involve discussions on the potential of third countries to 'dock on' to the



TTIP agreement, as the Commission previously indicated that this would be considered towards the end of the TTIP negotiations. In addition, the Commission could request negotiating directives to start FTA negotiations with Australia and New Zealand.

In terms of ratification, the Commission aims to submit the negotiated outcome of the **EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)** to Council and Parliament for approval as early as possible in 2016. This may prove challenging, since a solution is yet to be found for amending the provisions on investment protection further to the Commissions' new approach.

Implementation of the trade section of the **EU-Ukraine Association Agreement**, which will enter into force in January 2016, will also be high on the Presidency's agenda. At the same time, The Hague will have to deal with the outcome of a domestic consultative citizens' referendum due to take place in April 2016.

Finally, in the area of multilateral negotiations, the Dutch Presidency will be investing in the implementation of the recently ratified Trade Facilitation Agreement, as well as facilitating the ongoing negotiations of the **Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA)**.

The Hague will also promote its **'aid and trade' agenda** at EU level, stressing the strong link between EU trade and development aid. Not only will it have to **follow-up on the WTO's 10th Ministerial Conference** in Nairobi, Kenya, from 15 to 18 December 2015, it is also expected to facilitate a compromise position within Council and with the Commission on the EU's position on **future relations between the EU and the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP)**, given that the Cotonou Agreement expires in 2020.

The Dutch Presidency is planning to organise back-to-back Trade and Development Council meetings, including a joint session on sustainable global value chains, international corporate social responsibility and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. The Presidency will aim to promote **public-private cooperation in development aid**, as well as discussing the balance between internal and external actions.

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