

Press release

18-month programme of the EU Council for the Dutch, Slovak and Maltese Presidencies

The EU member states that will hold the next three Presidencies of the EU Council (known collectively as the Trio Presidency) have drawn up an 18-month agenda to ensure that, in addition to the immediate challenges the EU is facing, other important issues will receive the necessary attention and commitment.

It is clear that the challenge of migration and refugees will remain high on the agenda for the Dutch, Slovak and Maltese Presidencies, which will cover the period from January 2016 to June 2017. As the December European Council underlined, steps to strengthen the EU's external borders will be a top priority. The agenda will also include the future development of the Common European Asylum System, work on relocation, resettlement, return and readmission, stepping up efforts to combat human trafficking, and developing measures related to legal migration.

The Strategic Agenda agreed by the European Council in June 2014 forms the bedrock of the Trio's programme. The three Presidencies will be guided by the Agenda's five priorities: a Union of jobs, growth and competitiveness; a Union that empowers and protects all its citizens; working towards an Energy Union with a forward-looking climate policy; a Union of freedom, security and justice; and the Union as a strong global actor.

Jobs, growth and protecting all citizens

The EU's priority is to deliver sustainable economic growth and job creation. This will require further deepening of the single market, particularly in the areas of services and the digital agenda. Measures will be taken to ensure conditions in which SMEs can thrive, and there will be a special focus on restoring levels of investment in a wide range of areas, including research, infrastructure and transport. Increasing the competitiveness of European industry will also require swift progress on trade agreements, including TTIP. The three Presidencies will keep the strengthening of the Economic and Monetary Union on the agenda, and particular attention will be paid to enhancing the cycle of economic policy coordination, and making further progress towards the completion of the Banking Union and the establishment of a Capital Markets Union.

The economic and financial crisis posed significant challenges to Europe's social model in all its various expressions. We need to invest more in human capital, equip our societies 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 more modern education systems. This will lead to a deeper and fairer single market.

Energy market

The Trio Presidency is committed to pursuing a complete and fully functioning energy market by concentrating on interconnections, enhancing regional cooperation and strengthening international energy relations. Increasing energy security remains a key objective. Energy efficiency and prices will also be addressed. There will be an appropriate follow-up to the UN Climate Change Convention (COP 21), and work will progress on the revision of the Emissions Trading System (ETS) and on emissions reductions in other sectors (non-ETS).

Security

A further priority will be the implementation of the European Agenda on Security. A comprehensive and integrated approach to cybersecurity and organised crime will be high on the agenda. 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 Union's financial interests, including work on the European Public Prosecutor's Office, data protection, and promoting and safeguarding the rule of law and fundamental rights.