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From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Permanent Representatives Committee

Subject: Taking forward the Strategic Agenda
18-month Programme of the Council (1 July 2020 - 31 December 2021)

Delegations will find attached the 18-month programme of the Council, prepared by the future German, Portuguese and Slovenian Presidencies and the High Representative, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Council.

The programme**I. INTRODUCTION**

The COVID-19 pandemic constitutes an unprecedented challenge for Europe and the whole world. As a global health crisis, it has affected the societies and the economies of EU Member States in a dramatic way. It requires urgent, decisive, and comprehensive action at the EU, national, regional and local levels¹. The three Presidencies stand to do everything that is necessary to reinforce the resilience of Europe, to protect our citizens and to overcome the crisis, while preserving our European values and way of life. In doing so the Trio is committed to the five strands of action identified in the Joint statement of the Members of the European Council of 26 March 2020.

The COVID-19 crisis, declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO), has put and continues to put Member States' societies and particularly healthcare systems to a severe test. Member States and EU institutions have stood together in the spirit of solidarity to coordinate and implement relevant healthcare measures. Only if health policy is effective in containing and eventually overcoming the threat posed by COVID-19, can a lasting recovery in all other sectors of the economy and public life unfold.

¹ See the Joint statement of the Members of the European Council, 26 March 2020.

While many measures to address the crisis have already been undertaken during the Croatian Presidency, a lot more remains to be done, in particular as regards controlling the pandemic and getting Europe's societies and economies back to full functionality by fostering sustainable and inclusive growth, integrating inter alia the green transition and the digital transformation, and by drawing all lessons from the crisis² and tackling its socio-economic consequences. To this end, as an overarching priority, the three Presidencies are determined to implement all appropriate measures serving a robust recovery of the European economy, in line with a sustainable and inclusive growth strategy, that takes account of the goal to achieve climate-neutrality by 2050 and addresses the significant social impacts and human dimensions. The Trio will follow-up on the forthcoming Commission proposals to put into place a more ambitious, wide-ranging and coordinated crisis management system within the EU.

The Trio is committed to the principles of the Joint European Roadmap towards lifting COVID-19 containment measures and of the Roadmap for Recovery:³ The plan for recovery must be based on solidarity, cohesion and convergence; the recovery must be flexible, agile and evolving; it must be inclusive and co-owned by all involved; while fully respecting our values, rights, and the rule of law.

The three Presidencies will do their utmost to restore and further deepen the Single Market, take forward the Green transition and the Digital transformation, strive for digital sovereignty, ensure the strategic autonomy of the EU through a dynamic industrial policy, support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups, screen foreign direct investment, build more resilient infrastructure in particular in the health sector, and produce critical goods in Europe to reduce over-dependency on third countries – in line with the key recommendations of the recovery roadmap.

² See the Joint European Roadmap towards lifting COVID-19 containment measures, 15 April 2020.

³ A Roadmap for Recovery - Towards a more resilient, sustainable and fair Europe, 22 April 2020.

The Trio will contribute to and steer when needed the unprecedented investment efforts to fuel the recovery, targeted at commonly agreed objectives and focused on where it is most needed. These efforts will include safety nets for citizens, companies and sovereigns, and a Recovery Fund linked to the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to push for sustainable recovery.

The three Presidencies consider important the global challenge posed by the pandemic and the role of the EU as a global actor having a particular responsibility to help frame a global response through multilateralism and a rules-based international order. This will include pursuing key policy priorities where there are important resource gaps, boosting response capacities in countries with the weakest health, water and sanitation systems, especially in Africa, and mitigating the severe socio-economic consequences. A global response requires greater regional collaboration in working on new diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines. The three Presidencies will engage in all these efforts in a true “Team Europe” approach.

The Trio will invest in developing a system of governance⁴ that leads to a more resilient, efficient and effective EU, keeping our core values in the centre of its approach.

In order to achieve the above objectives, the Trio will implement the measures of the Action Plan accompanying the Roadmap for Recovery. The Trio is also committed to implementing the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, including through an EU Social Summit in May 2021 at the invitation of the President of the European Council and hosted by the Portuguese Presidency.

⁴ In line with the Roadmap for Recovery - Towards a more resilient, sustainable and fair Europe, 22 April 2020

While the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its fall-out is the foremost priority for the Trio, it is also essential that the normal working of the EU institutions resumes so that the Trio make tangible progress in implementing the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024. The three Presidencies firmly believe that by building on our European values and the strengths of the European Union, we can shape our common future, promote the interests of our citizens, businesses and societies, and safeguard our way of life. For the Union to achieve its full potential, the Trio will foster unity among Member States. This will be achieved through sincere cooperation based on our common values, and respect for subsidiarity and proportionality.

The Trio firmly believes that the Conference on the Future of Europe should deliver concrete results for the benefits of our citizens and should contribute to the development of our policies in the medium and long term so that we can better tackle current and future challenges.⁵

Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027

The three Presidencies consider important to reach agreement on the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027. The MFF will be a key instrument to support a lasting recovery. It should provide support to Member States for sustained investment in the EU's strategic objectives and all policies, in line with the Roadmap for Recovery. Together with a Recovery Fund the next MFF will be the ambitious answer Europe needs, supporting our common priorities. The Trio commits to work tirelessly to obtain the consent of the European Parliament and to finalise the outstanding sectoral proposals as soon as possible, while at the same time firmly following the mandate given by the European Council. The Trio will do its utmost in order to avoid any unnecessary delays with the implementation of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 and its related programmes. Timely adoption of legislation of all investment related and other relevant policies is of crucial importance in order to give an adequate and forceful answer to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and to other strategic objectives and continued challenges of the Union.

⁵ See European Council Conclusions, 12 December 2019.

Future relationship between the EU and the United Kingdom

On 1 February 2020, the United Kingdom withdrew from the European Union. Unless an extension is agreed, the transitional period following the withdrawal of the United Kingdom will expire on 31 December 2020. In its conclusions of 13 December 2019, the European Council reconfirmed its desire to establish as close as possible a future relationship with the United Kingdom in line with the Political Declaration and respecting the previously agreed European Council's guidelines, as well as statements and declarations, notably those of 25 November 2018. The European Council reiterated in particular that the future relationship with the United Kingdom will have to be based on a balance of rights and obligations and ensure a level playing field. In line with European Council guidelines and conclusions and the Political Declaration, the Council adopted on 25 February 2020 negotiation directives defining the scope and terms of the future partnership to be negotiated between the European Commission and the United Kingdom. The Trio will strive for a comprehensive partnership with the United Kingdom that is fair and equitable for all Member States and in the interest of our citizens to enter into force by the end of the transition period.

The Commission's adjusted Work Programme for 2020

The Trio will take into account the Commission's adjusted Work Programme for 2020. The Trio appreciates that the Commission is fully committed to delivering on all of its major initiatives announced in its original Programme, and that the proposals which are essential or support the immediate recovery will be adopted as initially planned. The Trio invites the Commission to adopt as swiftly as possible all major initiatives, which were delayed because of the pandemic. The three Presidencies welcome the Commission's intention to make more use of Strategic Foresight in order to take a more pragmatic, long-term approach to assist in guiding the Union's policies for the years to come.

II. PROTECTING CITIZENS AND FREEDOMS

The three Presidencies firmly believe in the importance of democracy, human rights, the rule of law and our open societal models, which are the foundation of European freedom, security and prosperity. In this respect, the three Presidencies look forward to the forthcoming European Democracy Action Plan and its accompanying proposals, also with regard to media freedom, pluralism and independence. The Trio underlines the vital role of free and pluralistic media, whose fact-based, timely and credible reporting and dedication to combatting disinformation have never been more essential.

The Trio also looks forward to the New Strategy for the Implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The Trio strives to give a new impulse to the accession of the EU to the European Convention on Human Rights as foreseen in the Lisbon Treaty. They will promote cultural and religious diversity as well as youth participation and consider a regular dialogue with citizens as important factors to better implement EU policies.

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic has implied unprecedented restrictions to the way of life, freedom and democratic rights of our societies. The Trio stands ready to support the full application of the Values of the Union, including the Rule of Law throughout the EU.

The Trio looks forward to the setting up a European rule of law mechanism that applies equally to all Member States. This preventive tool shall deepen a constructive dialogue among Member States and foster a joint awareness of the rule of law in all of them. To this end, the Trio will organise a comprehensive dialogue in the Council on all elements of the annual report by the Commission. Supporting unity among member states and the principle of sincere cooperation, respecting subsidiarity, proportionality and promoting multi-level governance will be guiding principles of the eighteen months.

The Trio is committed to mainstreaming equality, including gender and LGBTQIA+ rights and equality, promoting cultural diversity, providing equal opportunities for all, fighting against all forms of discrimination including hate crimes, and addressing domestic violence. The three Presidencies welcome the Commission's new Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, covering, amongst others, the issues of gender based violence and equality between women and men in the labour market. Binding pay transparency measures are a useful step in the gender equality area. In this regard, the Trio looks forward to the relevant forthcoming proposal. Bearing in mind that older persons were disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, we will promote intergenerational solidarity, dignified ageing and better protection of the rights of older people and other vulnerable adults. We cannot allow the COVID-19 pandemic to increase inequalities and discrimination of any kind.

The three Presidencies commit to enhancing coordination of the work of the Council in preventing and combating antisemitism, especially with regard to exchanging best practice.

The Trio will promote cultural diversity, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity and with regard to the globally important cultural and creative sectors, their impact on society and economy as well as safeguarding the European way of life.

The Digital transformation presents opportunities but also challenges as regards citizens' rights and freedoms. It is therefore essential that fundamental rights and common values are respected in the process of digitalisation.

The three Presidencies welcome the Commission white paper on Artificial Intelligence and look forward to following-up on it in all dimensions, including research and innovation, applications in education, ethical and human-centric aspects, their global governance, risk-based regulatory framework and the aspect of liability for artificial intelligence. Furthermore, the Trio will work towards better protecting our societies from malicious cyber activities, hybrid threats and disinformation. Transparent, timely and fact-based communication will be pursued in order to reinforce the resilience of our societies. The forthcoming act on operational and cyber resilience of financial services and the review of the Network and Information Security (NIS) Directive will be useful steps in this regard. The Trio will step up efforts at European level for a mandatory minimum level of Information Technology (IT) security for devices that are connected to the internet.

The three Presidencies welcome the Commission's announcement to propose a New Pact on migration and accompanying legislative proposals and commit to take these forward as a matter of priority. The EU needs a comprehensive permanent and predictable solution for migration. This would need to include a functioning resilient and crisis-proof Common European Asylum System with the necessary balance between responsibility and solidarity. Situations of disproportionate migration pressure to one or more Member States should be addressed. This will need to be complemented by enhancing legal pathways for migration while at the same time improving returns.

This comprehensive approach should also include a step-up in the fight against illegal migration, human trafficking and smuggling, while at the same time addressing the root causes of migration and forced displacement. The external dimension should be approached by means of reinforcing partnerships with the countries of origin and transit.

When it comes to the functioning of Schengen and the protection of the EU's external borders, the Trio will focus on the operationalisation of the European Border and Coast Guard regulation, the implementation of the new functionalities envisioned in the interoperability regulations, the revision of the Schengen Evaluation Mechanism and will do its utmost to restore the full functioning of the Schengen area. The importance hereof has become even more apparent in light of the restrictions imposed as response to the COVID-19 crisis.

Besides the successful implementation of the interoperability package the three Presidencies look forward to further initiatives related to the new EU Security Union Strategy, to improve cooperation and information sharing in the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) field, including our common instruments (EU-Information Systems), and will strive towards enhancing police, customs and judicial cooperation in criminal and civil matters, including through e-Justice mechanisms. Strong and adaptable police cooperation facilitated through well-coordinated joint action will be vital for promoting the free movement of goods, services and persons to foster economic and social rebound from COVID-19 in the months and years to come. In particular, it will be important to implement effective prevention measures and to continue to enhance our fight against terrorism, serious and organised crime, radicalisation and (violent) extremism and cross-border crime, as well as to improve cooperation with third countries. Of particular interest in this regard could be the announced Commission proposal on a targeted recast of the European Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (EUROPOL) Regulation in order to reinforce operational police cooperation.

The EU needs to further strengthen the resilience of our societies by supporting and arranging for plans of appropriate actions, with a view to a comprehensive coordination, in full respect of the competences and responsibilities at different levels of the EU, of the Member States and within the Member States, in cases of emergencies such as pandemics or large-scale cyber-attacks. The three Presidencies are determined to take full account of the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic for the EU, also in the framework of European civil protection. Depending on current developments and based on experience gained, the Presidencies will aim to further enhance the EU crisis response and strengthen the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, including further development of RescEU and other capacities, addressing the challenges related to the stockpiling of essential health material and repatriation of citizens stranded in third countries and continue the lessons-learnt process through the setup and launching of the EU Knowledge Network, which is to be systematically advanced on the basis of a pandemic scenario.

III. DEVELOPING OUR ECONOMIC BASE: THE EUROPEAN MODEL FOR THE FUTURE

The COVID-19 pandemic will have a long-lasting impact on the EU's and the global economy. In addition to short-term measures providing liquidity of our financial sector, countering a threatening recession by boosting unprecedented investments and ensuring the stability of Member State financing, it is important to also look at the long-term perspective and to improve the EU's competitiveness and sovereignty and continue to provide a stable and conducive environment for investment within the Single Market. It is therefore even more important now to develop our economic base - something that will remain a key feature throughout the three Presidencies. Working on the Green Deal and Europe's Digital Future, implementing the Action Plan on Circular Economy, investing in Research and Innovation (R&I) and skills to increase competitiveness, providing solutions for global challenges, and creating jobs will play dedicated roles to achieve these objectives.

The Single Market is one of the EU's biggest assets, and it should be developed further. Its principles, values and standards underpin the EU's leadership and active role in promoting a rules-based world order and a level playing field at home and abroad. The Trio will work towards strengthening the foundations for future competitiveness and growth of the Union. This includes fully restoring the Single Market to its functioning before COVID-19, removing the remaining unjustified barriers, including in services, in the Single Market and ensuring the effective and fair implementation, application and enforcement of Single Market rules including those on investment protection. Further, Single Market policy needs to be aligned with the EU industrial, SME, and digital policies. The Trio is prepared for the follow up to the Commission's Barriers Report and Enforcement Action Plan. The COVID-19 pandemic shows that strengthening the resilience of the single market in times of crisis is vital. In order to, amongst others, increase growth and competitiveness of the Union after the pandemic, better regulation as well as the reduction of compliance costs and administrative burden will also be high on the agenda.

As SMEs play a crucial role for sustainable economic growth, employment, and social cohesion in our societies, they require reliable and stable framework conditions that constitute an integrated, coherent and future-oriented approach and a systematic and consistent implementation of the “think small first” principle. To ensure this, the three Presidencies stand ready to follow up and to further develop on the Commission's SME strategy to strengthen the EU policy for small and medium-sized businesses.

The strengthening of SMEs and industrial competitiveness in Europe is an essential aim of the Trio, as it serves European economic sovereignty and helps its resilience. The EU's recovery strategy from the COVID-19-crisis and the long-term strategy for sustainable growth also requires an ambitious EU industrial policy strategy, including addressing competition, state-aid regulations and overall framework conditions, and the strengthening of key technologies, also through aligning science, research, and innovation policy and promoting the EU's technological autonomy. The identification of strategic value chains, the new framing of industrial eco-systems and further work on the identification of industrial alliances and Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEIs) will be important components. The Trio will build on the Commission's EU Industrial Strategy and propose next steps for implementation and monitoring. Moreover, the Trio will follow the ongoing European Commission's evaluation of competition rules and, after the results of the assessment, will promote the results, potential changes and the modernisation of the European competition framework against the backdrop of global developments and the digital transformation. It also intends to enhance the efficiency, innovation orientation and sustainability of public procurement while taking into account the lessons learned during the COVID-19 crisis and the need to re-boost the EU economy.

An effective and flexible Cohesion Policy should ensure investments to address the enormous economic and social challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis; and should also invest in an innovative, smart economic and social transformation, towards a greener, low-carbon Europe. It should cover all regions⁶ support their competitiveness and strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion and reduce disparities. The Trio will do its utmost for the timely adoption of the Cohesion legislative package in order to start the implementation of the new Cohesion Policy cycle without delay.

The Trio will explore the role of financial and economic policy for sustainable and inclusive growth.

The financing of the economy needs to become more robust, also in the light of the COVID-19 crisis. To this end, deepening the Economic and Monetary Union in all its dimensions as a priority, and the work on all elements of the further strengthening of the Banking Union, as well as the strengthening of the Capital Markets Unions, should continue in the agreed way. In particular the three Presidencies look forward to the forthcoming reviews of the Directive on Markets in Financial Instruments repealing Directive 2004/39/EC and the Regulation on Markets in Financial Instruments (MiFID II and MiFIR), the Benchmark regulation, as well as proposals implementing the final Basel III reforms. Progress in these areas will also enhance the international role of the euro, which should be commensurate with the global economic and financial weight of the Union. The Trio considers the review of Solvency II as an opportunity for a targeted further development of one of the most advanced prudential systems in the world.

Bringing the financial sector to the digital age, the forthcoming proposals on crypto assets and on operational and cyber resilience of financial services as well as the Digital Finance Strategy and an embedded European Payments strategy are of particular interest.

The three Presidencies will improve the EU's fight against money laundering and terrorist financing, based on, inter alia, the Commission Action Plan for a comprehensive Union policy on preventing money laundering and terrorist financing.

⁶ Taking into account the specificities of the regions referred to under art 349 TFEU.

Mobilising sustainable finance and strengthening financial inclusion can support achieving the 2030 Agenda, its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the objectives of the EU Green Deal. Therefore, the three presidencies look forward to a renewed sustainable finance strategy, which will complete the Sustainable Europe Investment Plan.

For it to function appropriately, the Single Market requires a level playing field and fair and effective taxation. The three Presidencies intend to further promote fair taxation in an ever more digitalised economy - in particular with respect to an effective minimum taxation - and to advance the initiatives set out in the Action Plan to fight tax evasion. They will promote the revision of the Tobacco Excise Directive and the Energy Taxation Directive.

The protection of EU borders against fraudulent goods and tapping the potential of EU customs legislation are essential to strengthen the Customs Union. The three Presidencies look forward to the upcoming Action Plan on the Customs Union and the proposal to establish a Customs Single Window.

The intellectual property framework is highly relevant for innovation in the EU as a cross-cutting issue for all sectors of the economy. The Trio will work towards a coherent Intellectual Property Strategy.

The EU needs the appropriate, performant and resource-efficient infrastructure to be able to fully benefit from the dual-transition, green and digital.

The Trio aims to implement the Energy Union, through an integrated, interconnected and properly functioning European energy market focused on sustainable energy and the transition to climate neutrality. They will explore in how far the energy sector can contribute to the recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic. The three Presidencies will foster close cooperation and exchange among Member States on the implementation of the Energy Union's Governance and the 2030-energy framework. In addition, they look forward to the Commission's initiatives for the energy sector, inter alia, a new approach for exploiting Europe's offshore renewable energy potential, innovative fuels, measures to help achieve smart sector integration, including a facilitated decarbonisation of the gas sector and adapting the existing Trans-European Networks for Energy (TEN-E) Regulation to the perspectives of a climate-neutral economy to arrive at a fit-for-purpose energy infrastructure.

Safe, innovative and connective transport, including promotion of alternative sustainable fuels and drivetrains, will be a priority; as will the interoperability and sustainability of the European connectivity through the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). The Trio looks forward to the Strategy for sustainable and smart mobility and is committed to start working on key proposals. The Trio will seek to safeguard the flow of supply chains in times of Union-wide challenges and will address the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on the transport system, notably in the civil aviation sector. The Trio will aim at strengthening the transport sector and its resilience. Furthermore, the Trio will analyse the impact that the pandemic has had on intra-EU transport flows, transport operators of all modes of transport and transport infrastructure.

The three Presidencies are convinced that the digital transformation is something that will shape the everyday life in Europe, but also something that Europe can shape. It presents an opportunity but also a challenge to the EU and its societal and economic model as well as to its competitiveness and sovereignty. In this regard, the three Presidencies will give special attention to the digitalisation of services and organisations in particular in public administration. In order to maintain and foster a responsible innovative, sustainable and competitive European digital ecosystem, particularly in sectors of strategic importance and in the area of key enabling digital technologies and infrastructures (including data infrastructures), the EU's digital sovereignty needs to be further strengthened. In this regard, Artificial Intelligence is a key technology with enormous potential for value creation. With that in mind, the Trio looks forward to the forthcoming proposals following up on the Communication on Shaping Europe's Digital Future, the White Paper on Artificial Intelligence, the European Strategy for Data and the Digital Services Act and to further endeavours within the European Blockchain Partnership as well as the announced Media and audio-visual Action Plan.

Digitalisation has far-reaching effects and therefore needs to be addressed coherently across the Union's internal and external policies. Development of infrastructures, connectivity (including gigabit connectivity by 2025 and 5G), user-focused services, as well as their safeguarding in times of crisis, plus the enhancing of regulations, investments, opportunities and impacts related to environmental and climate protection or sustainable development, health - all will play an important role. The establishment of a sufficient data ecosystem according to the EU Commission's data strategy (incl. data infrastructure, data and privacy protection, responsible use of data, data spaces, data accessibility, data sharing, and data security) will play a crucial role in Europe's success of shaping the digital transformation.

European research, health and education systems must be ready to fully take on the challenge of technological and societal changes, also linked to digitalisation, fostering innovation for growth and jobs, by promoting research and innovation, improved performance in health and investments in people's skills and education; and seeking synergies within the European scientific, research and innovation communities so as to maximise – also in order to overcome the COVID-19 crisis - the full potential of research and innovation across the Union. In this respect the Trio welcomes the Commission Communication on the Future of Research and Innovation and the European Research Area, the updated Digital Education Action Plan, further development of European Education Area and new strategic framework for cooperation in the field of education and training and the updated Skills Agenda, and looks forward to advancing their follow-up in the Council. Experience of the challenges faced during the COVID-19 outbreak demonstrates that the areas of education, skills and research must be sufficiently flexible and resistant to interruptions in their regular cycles. Exploiting the potential of education, research and innovation for transformative solutions and achieving the SDGs will require a multilevel approach that will strategically focus the efforts of these policy areas at all levels within each sectoral initiative and integrate them at EU level into a common approach. At the same time, a re-conceptualisation of the European Research Area will be required to fulfil the Treaty obligation of setting up an area in which researchers can pursue a truly European career and, like knowledge and technologies, circulate freely across borders and systems. Special attention will be also given to the ethical aspects of the renewed European Research Area (ERA) and to the citizen science where the three Presidencies will implement some joint activities. As a response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Presidencies will encourage the work on the establishment of the joint EU laboratories through the Joint Research Centre (JRC) for the development of medicines and vaccines.

The three Presidencies will strive for the timely adoption of the legislative proposals of the Horizon Europe programme and Erasmus+ in order to start the implementation of the new policy cycle without delay, including the Regulation on the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) recast and the Decision on the EIT Strategic Innovation Agenda for 2021-2027. The same holds true for other EU-programmes, such as Digital Europe, Creative Europe and European Solidarity Corps.

Consumer protection must be adapted to the challenges of - and, where necessary, strengthened in view of - the digital transformation and the Agenda 2030. Consumers' vulnerabilities in different sectors should be taken into account. The three presidencies support the Commission's efforts to improve consumer law enforcement and strengthen international cooperation. Consumers' trust in a high level of consumer protection and transparent consumer information are important factors supporting the recovery of Europe's economy after the COVID-19 crisis. The Trio awaits the Commission's Consumer Agenda tackling the respective lessons learned and intends to rapidly take forward concrete proposals such as the common charger and reviewing the Roaming Regulation and looks forward to other proposals such as the revision of the General Product Safety Directive.

The EU needs to foster a competitive space sector and its integration into European economy, by increasing the use of space technologies and applications to support public policies. Based on the adoption of the proposed Regulation on a European Space Programme and the transformation of the European GNSS Agency (GSA) into the EU Agency for the Space Programme (EUSPA), the three Presidencies aim to shape the way for a new era in the EU's space activities. They will also pursue establishing a European position on key principles for the global space economy and the development of New Space, including market driven approaches and opening space to new actors.

Support will have to be provided to the tourism industry in the EU, which is especially affected by the current COVID-19 crisis, in particular to SMEs and the civil aviation sector. Together with Member States and the Commission, the Trio is ready to work on a joint and coordinated response in line with the Roadmap for Recovery, that will ensure a gradual and safe resumption of tourism activities, the promotion of sustainable tourism and that will reassure consumers. A response should address short-term relief, assistance to businesses, as well as long-term recovery.

IV. BUILDING A CLIMATE-NEUTRAL, GREEN, FAIR AND SOCIAL EUROPE

a. Building a climate-neutral and green Europe

The three Presidencies are fully committed to the objective of achieving a climate-neutral EU by 2050, in line with the objectives of the Paris Agreement, while ensuring that the transition is cost-effective, just, socially balanced, fair and achieved in a way that preserves the EU's competitiveness. In this respect, the Trio welcomes the Commission's communication on the European Green Deal and the Sustainable Europe Investment Plan, which the three Presidencies would aim to tackle as a matter of priority, including the European Climate Law, the climate adaptation strategy and followed by other legislative proposals in 2020-2021. The Trio is committed to take all these initiatives forward and to enhance climate action both domestically and through external action, in particular by agreeing to submit an Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) update to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2020, in line with our obligations under the Paris agreement and after a thorough impact assessment.

In terms of resource efficiency, the circular economy and waste management, the three Presidencies welcome the New Circular Economy Action Plan and are prepared to take forward any initiatives stemming from that. Consumers have an important role in driving the green transition and in this respect the Trio eagerly awaits the Commission proposal on empowering consumers.

The protection and sustainable use of biodiversity and natural resources forms yet another key element in the green transition. The EU and its Member States will lead and step up efforts against biodiversity loss, also with regard to the link between biodiversity and human health. The Trio supports the EU's commitment to lead by example and strongly contribute to the adoption of an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework and its implementation. The three Presidencies will promote sustainable and circular agriculture and fisheries, food systems, sustainable forest management in line with a strengthened EU Forest Strategy post 2020 covering the whole forest cycle and promoting the many services that forests provide as well as a sustainable bioeconomy, including with a focus on guaranteeing food supply and the integrity of food supply chains in times of crisis, animal welfare and further hope to bring the 8th Environmental Action Programme to fruition. Special attention will also be given to sustainable water management, as well as a comprehensive Oceans Agenda, including blue growth.

Agriculture resilience and vitality of rural areas throughout EU territory are key to ensure territorial cohesion, as well as, citizens' access to safe and affordable food. The three Presidencies will do their utmost for the timely adoption of the legislative proposals of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in order to start the implementation of the new policy cycle without delay.

In the context of the Just Transition Mechanism, the three Presidencies are also committed to the timely adoption of the legislative proposal for a Just Transition Fund.

The Trio stresses that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals is essential to achieving a better and more sustainable future for all, leaving no one behind. For this, the 2030 Agenda should be mainstreamed in all of the EU's external and internal policies at the appropriate level of detail.

b. Building a fair and social Europe

The three Presidencies are convinced of the strengths of the European Social Model, and believe that further progress can still be achieved.

More can be done to ensure the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Based on the existing division of competences between the EU and its Member States, the Trio is committed to advancing this work. To foster upward convergence in the EU is one of its objectives, as well as to support social cohesion. Means to reach this objective are notably an EU framework for national minimum wages, instruments to protect jobs and incomes in times of economic shocks, access to social protection for all workers and the self-employed, in particular the most vulnerable groups, and better social inclusion. The Trio will strengthen the efforts to fighting poverty as well as by encouraging the debate about future initiatives regarding minimum income protection. A response to alleviate the social consequences of the pandemic is needed. This will call for support to Member States' economies and to the measures undertaken. The announced proposals related to a minimum wage and unemployment reinsurance scheme, which the Council intends to examine, the initiative to fight youth unemployment as well as guarantees for children, are important steps for the further implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The work in the areas of employment and social affairs will focus on the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. The work will include the areas of occupational safety and health and the protection of workers in precarious employment, particularly those in non-standard forms of employment and on the use of flexible forms of work such as teleworking, including through digital tools.

The three Presidencies will drive forward efforts to achieve an EU-wide coherent implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Tripartite Declaration of Principles on Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy. They call for the development of a new communication on “Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)” including an EU action plan on responsible business conduct and taking into account experience and lessons from the COVID-19 crisis.

Work and working conditions are undergoing rapid change, notably due to digitalisation and population ageing. In order to actively shape the future of work, the Trio is looking forward to the announced ways to improve the occupational safety and health of all workers, the working conditions of platform workers, teleworkers and of workers in other non-standard forms of work. Demographic challenges should be tackled further. The labour market participation of all groups and intergenerational cooperation and dialogue should be strengthened. Artificial intelligence will be of central importance to developments in work and society. Labour policy is particularly concerned in the areas of skills, safety and security and social dialogue. Access to vocational training and education and life-long-learning is essential for allowing workers to acquire the skills that are required on the labour market and to adapt to changes even where these are acute and unexpected.

Inclusive access to education, also by digital means, should be ensured, through the Updated Skills Agenda for Europe and the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion. Investment in skills, including in re-skilling and up-skilling opportunities as well as in digital skills will be essential to address a widening skills gap and the changing work patterns.

Promoting culture and media will contribute, inter alia, for inclusive and cohesive societies, also by supporting the cultural and creative sectors through the Creative Europe Programme. The Trio also looks forward to Commission initiatives related to a Child and Youth Guarantees.

A Union policy for a citizen-friendly EU will further contribute to the development, and growth and appropriate living environments by taking into account the special needs of rural and coastal areas as well as fostering an integrated and sustainable development of cities and regions. The Union supports good quality healthcare for all by, inter alia, securing the supply chain for medicinal products as an important element of access to medicines. In this context, the Trio will also closely cooperate with the Commission in the elaboration and follow up of the “Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan”. The Trio also intends to contribute to improving healthcare literacy.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that certain health related processes, at the EU level – both in the field of joint procurement at EU level and in the development and manufacturing of vaccines and anti-microbial and anti-viral drugs – can be improved upon. Legislation in the field of medicinal products and medical devices should be upgraded to allow for a rapid adjustment to market crisis and a principle of self-sufficiency, inter alia in terms of availability of medicines, vaccines and medical equipment. In this context, while respecting national competences, the Trio takes good note of the Commission's intention to help to ensure that Europe has the supply of affordable medicines to meet its needs. The three Presidencies will also focus on the legislation in the area of “repurposing” while allowing for a common approach in the procurement of data in clinical trials in fast and efficient way. Reflection on the creation of “joint treatment facilities” between interested countries will be encouraged. Pandemic preparedness in the EU needs to be strengthened, inter alia, by promoting the digital exchange of health data in full respect of privacy rights as well as by reinforcing existing cross-European structures such as the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC).

V. PROMOTING EUROPE'S INTERESTS AND VALUES IN THE WORLD

The three Presidencies together with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy will contribute to the effective preparation of Summits and EU Leaders' meetings organised by the President of the European Council with Heads of State and Government from third countries and regions, both in EU-institutional and in multilateral format. The Trio in cooperation with the High Representative will also ensure follow-up to the discussions in the European Council on foreign affairs and international relations.

The three Presidencies will cooperate closely with and collectively support the High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy in fulfilling his tasks and will seek the active engagement and dedicated support of all Member States to the Union's foreign policy.

The Trio by supporting the High Representative, will take as many tangible steps as possible to increase the EU's capacity to act decisively and in unity to effectively promote Europe's interests and values and to defend and further shape a rules-based international order, in line with international law and human rights in today's contested world, strengthening multilateralism and the UN system. We will seek to bolster the EU's standing as a global leader, promoting peace, prosperity and human rights for all.

This requires the mobilisation and strategic use of the entire range of the EU's external action, from diplomacy to development, trade, international cultural relations, or energy policy, including security and defence instruments, and active information and communication. The Trio is committed to playing its part in this joint endeavour together with the High Representative, all EU institutions and Member States to assert a strong EU in a multilateral world with close region-to-region ties. This includes the EU's ability to respond to complex emergencies. Therefore, it will be a priority of the Trio to evaluate the crisis response of the EU and the EU Member States to the COVID-19 pandemic, to identify gaps and challenges, best practices, and ways of improving mutual cooperation and coordination. The approval and implementation of the neighbourhood, development and international cooperation instrument will allow the promotion of our interests and values and a better alignment of our cooperation with EU external policy priorities.

The Trio welcomes the decision to open accession negotiations with the Republic of Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia and reaffirms the EU-perspective of the Western Balkans and its objective to proceed with the enlargement process towards the Western Balkans based on the recent Commission communication on the enhanced enlargement methodology, where relevant, and deepen cooperation, including as agreed at the Zagreb Summit.

In this context, the Trio will pay particular attention to tackling the significant socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis in the Western Balkans countries and the recovery of its economies, including creating positive perspective for the young. The Trio will support the connectivity in all its dimensions and thus narrowing the developmental gap between the EU and the region. Promoting democracy, the rule of law, and media freedom represent our joint EU narrative, which should be addressed through effective strategic communication. Emphasis should also be given to addressing outstanding issues, strengthening resilience against hybrid threats and disinformation through closer cooperation in the areas of CSFP, among others, tackling disruptive influences in the region.

The transatlantic partnership and the trade relations of the EU with the US will be one of the major focuses of the Trio, closely cooperating with the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy, in order to further rely on the mutually beneficial and balanced relationship.

The EEA and EFTA countries are close partners. Ensuring a close coordination with the EEA EFTA states and Switzerland on the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic is highly important since the EFTA states have a high level of economic integration with the EU through the EEA internal market and the close network of contracts with Switzerland.

Together with the High Representative and the Commission, the Trio will pursue an ambitious neighbourhood policy towards the East and the South. It especially seeks to help its immediate geographic partners successfully emerge from the COVID-19 crisis and to strengthen their overall resilience. Moreover, the Trio will put a strong emphasis on supporting the High Representative in contributing to addressing major conflicts in the Union's neighbourhood and beyond, such as in Libya, the Sahel region, Syria, and Eastern Ukraine.

The Trio, in cooperation with the High Representative, will also contribute to the preparation and subsequent implementation of the commitments to be undertaken at the upcoming Eastern Partnership Summit. Work will also continue on the implementation of the June 2019 Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions on EU's engagement to the Black Sea regional cooperation and the EU's Black Sea Synergy initiative.

The Trio supports the High Representative in the stocktaking process regarding the five guiding principles on EU-Russia relations in order to actively shape EU policy.

The EU will intensify its cooperation with the OSCE, which can make a significant difference to security and stability in Europe due to its unique geographical range, autonomous institutions, network of field operations and overall diplomatic potential.

In the light of the increasing geopolitical significance of the region as a bridge between Europe and Asia, the EU will take forward the key priorities outlined in the new EU Strategy on Central Asia adopted in June 2019. The EU will strive to improve the connectivity between Europe and Asia, as set out in the Connecting Europe and Asia strategy.

Supporting the efforts of the High Representative, under the three Presidencies, the EU will strive to intensify its cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), with the aim to reach a "Strategic Partnership". In this context the President of the European Council is exploring the possibility of an EU-ASEAN Leaders' meeting. The EU will continue fostering dialogue and cooperation with Asia through the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), which is planning to hold its 13th Summit on 16-17 November 2020, in Phnom Penh (Cambodia), and envisages an EU-China Leaders' Meeting. In addition, annual EU summits with China, India, Japan and the Republic of Korea will be prepared. The Trio will step up its efforts in implementing and advancing the EU Asia Connectivity Strategy pursuing a value-based approach that puts a clear focus on compliance with international standards, sustainability and transparency. An EU-India Leaders' Meeting is scheduled to take place in Porto in May 2021 at the invitation of the President of the European Council and hosted by the Portuguese Presidency.

The EU-African Union (AU) Summit, to be held in October 2020, and the EU-AU Ministerial meetings foreseen will be important opportunities for the development of relations and cooperation with Africa. The three Presidencies will also pursue the adoption of Council decisions on the signing and conclusion of the post-Cotonou agreement.

Under the three Presidencies, the European Union should continue in doing its utmost to ensure solidarity with Africa in the fight against COVID-19. In close cooperation with the High Representative, the three Presidencies will ensure that, in its relations with Africa, the EU will work towards realisation of the joint priorities agreed upon at the EU-African Union Summit, including sustained peace and security on the African continent as well as sustainable and inclusive growth, investment, job creation and human development, while at the same time seeking joint and positive solutions to the climate, migration and mobility issues. The EU will also support the economic integration project of the African Continental Free Trade Area and intensify intercontinental efforts to fulfil the commitments to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Together with the High Representative, the Trio remains committed to strengthening the EU's political partnership with Latin America and the Caribbean. The EU must remain engaged with countries in the region and continue to pursue results through different paths, including by updating the agreements in force - as is the case with Mexico and Chile, and moving forward with Mercosur. The challenges we face call for the EU to play its global role in full. The various crises in the region, in particular in Venezuela, will require intense political engagement.

The Trio remains committed to open, ambitious and fair, sustainable, rules-based trade. Trade policy is a critical part of a holistic economic policy response to the crisis. Reform of the WTO to strengthen the multilateral rules-based order and reform of the international investment dispute settlement regime are key elements in this regard. At the same time, the Trio will continue working on ambitious bilateral free trade and investment protection agreements, while ensuring a level playing field and improved access to public procurement markets. Negotiations of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Indonesia will likely be concluded in 2021. FTAs with Australia and New Zealand are under negotiation and might be concluded in the course of 2021. The three Presidencies will also work towards the conclusion of a Partnership and Co-operation Agreement with Thailand in 2021. The Trio will strive for the signature of the EU-Mercosur Association Agreement and the modernised EU-Mexico Global Agreement, and the Modernisation of the Association Agreement with Chile. Best efforts will be done to ensure the signing of Geographical Indications Protection Agreement and the conclusion of the negotiations of an ambitious and balanced Comprehensive Agreement on Investment with China. The Trio will work towards a possible re-launch of negotiations on an ambitious EU-India trade and investment protection agreement.

The EU shall look to work better together in the field of development cooperation and to further strengthen its international partnerships in this area in an inclusive way. The three Presidencies underline that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs provide a transformative political framework to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development globally, and will ensure that the EU and its Member States continue to lead ambition and action. The Trio, in cooperation with the High Representative, also remains committed to addressing the broader impacts of domestic actions at international and global level and recalls the EU's commitment to ending hunger and malnutrition. In this regard the three Presidencies welcome the UN World Food Systems Summit scheduled for 2021 and highlight the need to adopt coherent EU policies. Moreover, addressing a full range of water challenges with the aim of developing a comprehensive approach to water that takes into account the humanitarian-development-peace nexus as well as environmental, global health and nutrition aspects will be on the agenda.

The three Presidencies will also work towards strengthening the European financial architecture for development, as a follow-up to the Council conclusions of 5 December 2019 and the short-term and long-term measures identified by the Wise Persons Group report of 2020. The Trio will also steer the work for the Council's approval of the third Gender Action Plan and its implementation.

Supporting the efforts of the High Representative to promote and further strengthen an effective rules-based international order, the Trio is fully committed to increase the prominence of effective, treaty-based international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation as key pillars of global peace and security.

The COVID-19-pandemic and other crises are having wide-ranging effects on humanitarian needs worldwide. Under the three Presidencies, the EU will strive to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance to those in need. Carrying forward the work of the previous Trio, especially the November 2019 Council Conclusions on International Humanitarian Law, we will advocate for the safeguarding of humanitarian space and the promotion of International Humanitarian Law. We seek to have all Member States and the EU as signatories of the Humanitarian Call for Action.

The appearance of the COVID-19 virus has shown the relevance of Global Health cooperation and a transparent crisis reaction. Against this backdrop the Trio is committed to work together to give the EU and its Member States a stronger and more strategic voice in international fora dealing with Global Health, such as e.g. the World Health Organisation (WHO). The EU and its Member States shall support partner countries in strengthening their comprehensive health systems and in mitigating the severe socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic. Team Europe is the tangible expression of the European resolve to express our global solidarity. At the global level, working with the research and innovation sector on a vaccine will allow accessibility to partner countries in order to fight the expansion of the pandemic.

Under the three Presidencies, the EU will continue to implement the EU Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) and its updated Action Plan to improve the way the Union responds at global scale to maritime security threats and challenges affecting people, activities and infrastructures, in particular through intensified diplomatic cooperation with international partners, notably in the Gulf of Guinea, and coordinated capacity building. The policy response will be examined in the light of the implementation report of the European Union Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) Action Plan to be elaborated in 2020.

Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

Supporting the work of the High Representative and working closely together with the Member States, the three Presidencies are strongly committed to enhance all aspects of the CSDP with the overall goal of making the EU a responsible, capable and reliable actor and global partner for peace and security. Therefore, the Trio partners are determined to continue strengthening the EU's ability to act in order to be able to respond adequately and decisively to crises that directly affect our interests and security – where possible with our partners and where necessary independently.

Our ability to act depends on a clear and common understanding of what we want to be able to do as Europeans in the area of Security and Defence as laid out in the EU Global Strategy. A political-strategic guidance is necessary if we want to live up to the expectations of the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024. Therefore, the Trio will lend its full support to the work lead by the High Representative towards a ‘Strategic Compass’. A shared threats analysis will provide the basis for this strategic dialogue to help advance towards a shared political understanding and more goal-oriented defence capability-planning and development.

The Trio will continue efforts to increase CSDP-JHA cooperation, support to national processes to increase capabilities for civilian CSDP missions and many more actions ensuring the full implementation of the civilian CSDP Compact by early summer 2023. Several workshops and two high level Annual Review Conferences will take place, and a Centre of Excellence on Civilian Crisis Management will be established.

Progress on the further development of and coherence among the EU defence initiatives will continue, including with the implementation of the ground-breaking steps of the last two years in all key areas (Permanent Structured Cooperation - PESCO, Coordinated Annual Review on Defence - CARD, and the European Defence Fund - EDF). This should include a stronger, inclusive and sustainable European Defence Technological and Industrial Base that takes into consideration the role of SME.

Coherence among EU defence related initiatives aiming at fulfilling the EU Level of Ambition in security and defence will continue to be promoted in an output-driven approach with a view to strengthen defence cooperation, thus endowing the Union with the right set of capabilities and enhancing its role as a security provider. Further enhanced strategic political coordination and monitoring of the implementation will be paramount to ensure a coherent approach in European Defence capability development.

At the same time, the three Presidencies together with the High Representative remain fully committed to the transatlantic security partnership by ensuring complete complementarity of all CSDP related initiatives to NATO. Strengthening the cohesion and capacity for joint action of both NATO and the EU will include military mobility, cyber security and defence, development of capabilities, hybrid threats, capacity building. In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, this also comprises military assistance to civilian authorities and measures to enhance resilience/civil preparedness. Thus, priority will be given to the close cooperation of both organisations and the strengthening of NATO's European pillar. The established informal staff-level cooperation with NATO constitutes a solid basis for strong and continued engagement as highlighted in the progress reports produced so far.
