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NOTE

From:	The future Netherlands, Slovak and Maltese Presidencies
To:	Council
Subject:	Taking forward the Strategic Agenda - 18 month programme of the Council (1 January 2016 - 30 June 2017)

Delegations will find attached the 18 month programme of the Council, prepared by the future Netherlands, Slovak and Maltese Presidencies and the High Representative, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Council.

INTRODUCTION

This document sets out the Council's work programme as established by the future Netherlands, Slovak and Maltese Presidencies, covering the period January 2016 to June 2017.

Now that the economy is showing signs of recovery, the Union should focus on delivering strong economic growth. At the same time it faces unprecedented challenges notably to its security and as a result of migration. Responding to these challenges requires a fundamental re-think in several policy areas. But the three Presidencies also have the opportunity to develop new policies in areas where action at the European level can bring real added value.

In establishing the Council's work programme, the three Presidencies have been guided by the priorities of the Strategic Agenda and recent conclusions of the European Council. They have put particular emphasis on the first pillar of the strategic agenda, since inclusive, smart and sustainable growth, jobs and competitiveness remain the top priority over the next eighteen months.

In implementing this programme the three Presidencies will take into account the importance of the principles underpinning better regulation. The Council as a co-legislator has a particular responsibility for ensuring that EU regulation is of the best quality and fully respects the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality, simplicity, transparency, coherence and fundamental rights. Better regulation will help meet the objectives set out in the Strategic Agenda. And a reduction in regulatory burdens will be an important driver for economic growth and competitiveness. The three Presidencies also note the Commission's intention to launch a reflection on an increased role for national Parliaments in the preparation of EU decision-making.

This programme is presented in a new format. It is operational, and seeks to provide a framework for organising and programming the work of the Council over the next eighteen months. Its structure - in five pillars - follows that of the Strategic Agenda. It highlights, for each pillar, those key files and issues that the Council will need to address during the period. Equally, it does not aim to be exhaustive; the three Presidencies will ensure that the Council remains flexible and that it can respond to new developments, and that it swiftly addresses challenges that may appear.

The Presidencies acknowledge that many of the issues set out in this programme impact on each other. They will therefore ensure that all issues are handled in a way which takes full account of the wider context and of the potential impact in other sectors. Each section of the programme may involve the work of several Council configurations. The Presidencies will use every opportunity to improve the working methods of the Council in order to allow for better discussions and better results. They will also work closely with the European Parliament given its pivotal role as a co-legislator together with the Council.

Consistency of priorities across policies and institutions is crucial. The Presidencies have thus had consultations with the President of the European Council, and have ensured that this work programme reflects the Commission's annual work programme for 2016. The Trio programme will also serve as a guide for the three Presidencies in their cooperation with other institutions on annual and multiannual programming.

1. A UNION OF JOBS, GROWTH AND COMPETITIVENESS

Having addressed the immediate effects of the crisis, Europe needs to ensure that its future is on a stronger footing. The Union has focused recently on delivering economic growth and creating jobs, and this will continue to be the main focus of work across all policy areas, until it starts to have an effect on the real economy and in our societies, with a robust and sustainable recovery, able at the same time to deliver high levels of social, health and environmental protection. All institutions consider this to be their top priority. The five areas identified in the Strategic Agenda of June 2014 will be reflected in the work of the Council during the three Presidencies. These cover making full use of the potential of the single market, including in the digital sphere; encouraging a climate of entrepreneurship and job creation; investing in the future; strengthening the global attractiveness of the Union; and deepening economic and monetary union.

The three Presidencies will also focus on environmental issues such as developing a circular economy through calls for improved resource management in the areas of waste, water, air and biodiversity, while creating new green jobs and developing a more competitive resource-efficient economy.

SINGLE MARKET

The single market is the key achievement of the Union and the most effective instrument for creating jobs. Deepening the single market, especially in the digital and services areas, has to be a priority. Enforcement, implementation, simplification and consistency of existing instruments are also high on the agenda. Following the publication of the Digital Single Market Strategy, work on its main elements will be taken forward, with a particular focus on the reform of the electronic communications framework, review of the audio-visual media and copyright law, the rules for cross-border e-commerce, e-government as well as digital economy, start-ups and SMEs.

This priority area includes the following:

- Follow-up to the new Internal Market Strategy for goods and services, including legislative initiatives to facilitate cross-border provision of services and to address discrimination based on nationality, enhancement of mutual recognition, targeted sectoral initiatives on business and construction services, harmonisation and standardisation measures, an initiative on business insolvency law and improved enforcement
- Better follow-up on implementation of CSRs under the European Semester, focussing on structural reforms on the Single Market
- Initiatives issuing from the Digital Single Market package, including those in the areas of regulatory framework for electronic communications, copyright and portability, geo-blocking, digital contracts, audio-visual media and e-commerce, the Cable and Satellite directive, and consumer protection cooperation
- Initiatives on a European research cloud, data ownership, free flow of data and e-government action plan
- The completion of the wholesale roaming market review
- Pending proposals on data protection and web accessibility¹

¹ Subject to work currently ongoing.

- Directive on a single-member limited liability company
- Upcoming Directive to provide a framework for cross-border divisions of companies
- Blue Belt Initiative
- Simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy implementing framework
- Strengthening of the farmer's position in the supply chain
- Circular economy package, including a legislative proposal on waste
- Directive on enhancing shareholder engagement

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND JOB CREATION

Promoting a climate in which SMEs thrive will help open up the potential for the Union to generate further growth and create jobs. Creating the required framework conditions is a priority. This should include further work on regulatory fitness, including reducing regulatory and administrative burdens, and shifting taxation away from labour (see also chapter III below).

Unemployment is a major concern in most Member States. Proposals which help tackle unemployment and which open up opportunities for European citizens will be a key priority. Particular attention will be paid to initiatives in the area of youth, long-term and structural unemployment, as well as full access to the labour market. The annual assessment in the framework of the European semester will provide an opportunity for political discussions on the main issues.

The three Presidencies are determined to work together on the forthcoming Labour Mobility Package removing the remaining obstacles to EU mobility with the aim of smoothing the effect of future economic shocks, supporting fair competition and fair labour standards and in so doing contribute to the shared objective of decent work. The work of the three Presidencies will strive towards inclusive labour markets based on the making-work-pay principle.

This priority area includes the following:

- Implementation of the Better Regulation agenda, including the follow-up of the REFIT programme and pursuing its further reinforcement, in particular for the benefit of SMEs
- Follow-up of the third strand of the Investment Plan to ensure coordinated efforts towards a clear, predictable and stable regulatory framework for investment at European and national level, in particular for long-term investment projects as well as reduced costs of starting and running a business, especially for SMEs
- Mainstreaming industrial competitiveness, including annual Competitiveness reports
- An Action Plan on the European defence industry
- Mid-term evaluation of the COSME programme
- New Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy
- Labour mobility package, including the revision of the coordination of social security systems (Regulations 883/2004 and 987/2009), in particular regarding unemployment benefits and long-term care and the targeted review of Directive 96/71/EC concerning the Posting of Workers in the framework of the provision of services
- Regulation on a European Network of Employment Services (EURES)
- Decision on establishing a European Platform for Undeclared Work
- Simplification of EU legislation on information and consultation of workers
- Employment guidelines
- Youth employment, including the review of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee/Youth Employment Initiatives
- Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market.

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

After a drop in investment in recent years it is crucial that investment levels are restored if the economy is to grow. It is important that the investment climate is improved and bottlenecks removed. The three Presidencies will therefore encourage the further implementation of the Investment Plan for Europe. Particular attention will be given to the full implementation, operation and delivery of the European Fund for Strategic Investment.

The Union's budget, including the European Structural and Investment Funds, is its main investment tool. Sectoral programmes under the current Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) will be implemented. These include tools for investment in infrastructure, technology and research, such as the Connecting Europe Facility, Trans-European transport networks (TEN-T) or the Horizon 2020 programme. At the same time, the regulatory framework for these sectors will be assessed and further improved. Transport, logistics and mobility are key to a strong European economy and a dynamic society. The Trio partners will focus on efforts to maintain and enhance the competitiveness of our transport sector in order to improve regional and global connectivity, create jobs and encourage growth. The Council will work towards maximising the contribution of the cohesion policy towards growth and jobs. Investment in human capital, education and skills, performance and innovation, which are essential for a competitive knowledge-based economy, will also be a priority.

The three Presidencies will work closely together with all the institutions and other stakeholders to further improve the EU budget process and take forward the MFF review with a view to reaching a timely agreement. The Council will follow up the work of the High Level Group on Own Resources, including participating in an inter-institutional conference with national Parliaments.

The priority area includes the following:

- Budgetary issues including:
 - * Annual discharge procedure for 2014 and 2015
 - * EU 2017 budget and ongoing monitoring of payments and adoption of 2016 and 2017 amending budgets and transfers
 - * Review of the Multiannual Financial Framework
- Implementation of the European Fund for Strategic Investment
- Implementation of the Connecting Europe Facility and the TEN-T programme
- Reviews of the cohesion policy co-financing rates for Cyprus, of the application of the top-up of cohesion policy co-financing for programme countries and of cohesion policy-related macroeconomic conditionality provisions
- Follow-up of the Commission Reports on the outcome of the negotiations concerning the 2014-2020 Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes, financial instruments, and the European Structural and Investment Fund programmes and their contribution to the Europe 2020 objectives
- Follow-up of the implementation challenges related to the ex-ante conditionalities
- Urban Agenda
- Implementation of the reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) through multiannual fisheries management plans and the revision of the supporting legislation as well as through the external dimension of the CFP
- Organic farming
- Regulation on Official controls
- Ports services regulation
- Follow-up to the fitness check regulatory framework for EU passenger ship safety

- Revision of the port reception facilities directive
- Single European Sky package (SES II +), Slots Regulation, Air passenger rights regulation, New Aviation Strategy, including revision of the European Aviation Safety Agency regulation and a framework for Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems and negotiation mandates for aviation agreements
- Timely adoption of the Fourth Railway Package
- Review of the advisory structures for the European Research Area
- Ex-post evaluation of the 7th Framework Programme for Research
- Mid-term review of the Horizon 2020 programme
- Spreading excellence and widening participation of Horizon 2020 research and innovation framework programme
- Measures to support the young researchers, attractiveness of scientific career, support of mobility
- Streamlining the Research and Innovation monitoring and reporting landscape
- European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) roadmap 2016
- European Open Science Agenda
- Framework conditions for research and innovation
- Article 185 initiatives on Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA) and on Joint Baltic Sea Research Programme (BONUS 2)
- Continuation, conclusion and implementation, as appropriate, of international science and technology agreements as well as support to relevant science diplomacy initiatives.

- Follow-up to the upcoming Space Strategy for Europe and further development of EU's relations with the European Space Agency
- Mid-term review of the Creative Europe Programme.

GLOBAL ATTRACTIVENESS

Increasing the competitiveness of European industry should allow the Union to fully exploit the potential of trade as a lever for growth. The three Presidencies commit themselves to making rapid progress in all the steps within the remit of the Council for the conclusion of bilateral, regional and multilateral trade agreements, including the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). The three Presidencies will also promote free trade agreements and encourage closer relations with the countries in Europe's neighbourhood. They will aim for a better integration of sustainable development into existing EU external policy instruments and in new trade policy opportunities.

The priority area includes the following:

- Follow-up and implementation of agreements reached in the context of the WTO Doha Development Agenda
- Continuation and conclusion of negotiations for multilateral and plurilateral WTO agreements in the areas of information technology, services, and green goods, and their implementation, as appropriate
- Consideration of granting China "Market Economy Status" in the WTO
- Free trade agreements with Canada and Singapore: finalisation of Council work for signature following the expected opinion of the European Court of Justice
- Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership: continuation and conclusion of negotiations, including on investment protection
- Continuation and conclusion of the negotiations on the EU-Japan Free Trade Agreement
- Conclusion of the negotiations on the Vietnam Free Trade Agreement

- Continuation and conclusion, as appropriate, of other negotiations for bilateral and/or regional free trade agreements such as with ASEAN countries, India, MERCOSUR and Southern neighbourhood countries. Preparations for negotiations on modernisation of free trade agreements with Mexico and Chile and on new free trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand
- Conclusion of EU-China negotiations for an investment agreement
- Work towards developing a successful trade dimension of the EU's Eastern and Southern neighbours and discussing possibilities of further cooperation
- Consideration of modernising the Customs Union with Turkey
- EU efforts to include BRIC countries into export credit disciplines

EMU

Further to the "Five Presidents report" presented at the June 2015 European Council the three Presidencies will take forward discussions on completing the architecture of the EMU. The three Presidencies will pursue efforts in favour of an enhanced cycle of economic policy coordination taking into account the proposals presented on 21 October 2015 on a strengthened social dimension as well as making further progress on the completion of the banking union. The Council will also aim at making progress towards the establishment of a capital markets union, which, while respecting the principle of proportionality, will ensure better access to capital for companies. The Council Presidencies will actively engage in the consultation process ahead of the Commission White Paper on Stage 2 proposals for completing the EMU, including the envisaged High Level Expert Group.

The priority area includes the following:

- Follow up to Five Presidents' Report
- Reinforcement of the Social dimension of the EMU
- New approach to Europe's growth and sustainability taking into account the Europe 2020 Strategy Review and the implementation of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
- Revamped European Semester

- Preparation of G20 meetings
- Directive on Institutions for Occupational Retirement Provisions
- Money Market Funds Regulation
- Banking Structural Reform Regulation
- Single Resolution Mechanism implementation
- Upcoming proposal on the Resolution of Central Counterparties ("non-bank resolution")
- Review of funding and governance of structures of European Supervisory Authorities
- European Deposit Insurance Scheme
- Capital Markets Union Action Plan, including a reduction of capital charges for infrastructure investments
- Securitisation proposal
- Review of the Prospectus Directive

2. A UNION THAT EMPOWERS AND PROTECTS ALL ITS CITIZENS

Our societies are still living with the consequences of the crisis and this has led to significant challenges to the Union's social fabric. The three Presidencies will work on preserving Europe's social model in its various expressions, investing in human capital to equip our societies for the future, fighting poverty and social exclusion and protecting all Europe's citizens, in full respect of national competences and subsidiarity.

The three Presidencies will pursue equal treatment including gender equality, and economic independence. Measures will be taken rapidly to modernise educational systems and facilitate training and jobs for young people as well as develop life-long learning. The Presidencies will also focus on the role of inclusive high quality education for all in promoting social equity, social inclusion, citizenship and shared European values.

Social protection systems which provide adequate levels of protection, while contributing effectively to social and labour market inclusion, will be a priority. Current demographic trends require a coordinated response in order to make our welfare systems and labour markets better equipped to face major social changes.

The protection of the health of EU citizens remains a key objective. The three Presidencies will take forward discussions on ways to improve the health status of the EU population, by fighting non-communicable diseases, the availability of and access to innovative and affordable medicines for patients as well as cooperation between Member States' health systems. Proper attention will be paid to health security and EU preparedness in the event of cross-border health threats as well as to antimicrobial resistance. Work will be taken forward on proposals related to health and safety at work and environmental quality.

The wider goal of ensuring social fairness also applies to the area of taxation, where work will be continued. Within this context, every effort will be made as necessary to tackle tax fraud and tax evasion and avoidance, to guard against the erosion of the tax base and profit shifting, and to improve information exchange.

This priority area includes the following:

- Directive on improving the Gender balance on company boards
- Directive on implementing the principle of Equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation
- EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014-2020 and amendments to related legislation, including on carcinogens
- Upcoming initiatives to address the challenges of work-life balance for working families and support women's participation in the labour market
- Improved access to goods and services by people with disabilities
- New Skills Agenda for Europe, including the mutual recognition of qualifications, and possible other initiatives on modernisation of higher education

- Mid-term review of Erasmus+ Programme
- Implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field to enable all young people to engage in a diverse, connected and inclusive Europe
- Capitalising on good governance, social inclusion and education in and through sport with specific attention to international major sport events, sport diplomacy and voluntary activities
- Medical devices and *In-vitro* medical devices package
- Novel foods Regulation
- Preparation of EU positions for WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control COP 7 and the implementation of the Tobacco Products Directive
- Revised proposal for a Council Directive for a Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base
- Follow-up to the Corporate tax package including the implementation of the Council conclusions in relation to OECD work on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS)
- Revision of the Interest-Royalty directive
- Reporting to the European Council on tax issues
- Code of Conduct (Business taxation) - reporting to the ECOFIN Council
- An Action Plan for an efficient and fraud-proof definitive regime for Value-Added Tax (VAT)

3. TOWARDS AN ENERGY UNION WITH A FORWARD-LOOKING CLIMATE POLICY

Pursuing work towards an Energy Union with a forward-looking climate policy, as stated in the Strategic Agenda, will be one of the key priorities of the three Presidencies. Work will be taken forward in line with the Energy Union Framework Strategy and the Europe 2020 Strategy, which acknowledges that transition towards a green, low carbon, energy and resource-efficient economy, through the creation of new "green" jobs and world-class technological knowhow, is essential to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

A complete and fully functioning internal energy market remains a major goal of the Union for the coming period. The Presidencies will take forward work on the interconnection of energy infrastructures, in accordance with the targets set by the European Council, including by strengthening regional cooperation and international cooperation in the field of energy. Increasing energy security through diversification of suppliers, sources and routes remains a key objective. Work will continue on the design of the governance system of the Energy Union. Energy efficiency, energy prices and renewable energy will also be addressed as important issues in relation to competitiveness.

On climate, the three Presidencies will ensure an appropriate follow-up of the outcome of the UN Climate Change Convention COP-21 in December 2015 in Paris. The implementation of the 2030 energy and climate package, including the proposal on the Emission Trading Scheme (ETS) and the expected proposal on emission reduction in other sectors ("non-ETS"), will be given proper attention. The three Presidencies aim at making significant progress on the negotiations during their term.

The three Presidencies will explore innovative working methods and further sharing of knowledge and best practices. They will pursue work on better regulation to ensure greater consistency between EU Directives, integration, better enforcement and modernisation of EU policy. The three Presidencies will also work on an Energy Union Governance system encompassing all the above-mentioned efforts in the field of energy and climate policy. In order to improve the efficiency of the preparations for international meetings, the Presidencies will set up joint teams for the entire period of the three Presidencies, where this is considered practical.

This priority area includes the following:

- Review of the energy efficiency framework for products (Energy Labelling Directive)
- Revision of the Regulations on the security of electricity supply and security of gas supply
- Review of Decision 994/2012 on exchange of information on intergovernmental agreements in the field of energy
- Renewable Energy package, including sustainability criteria for biomass
- Energy Efficiency package, including the review of the Buildings directive
- Electricity market design package, including proposals on the redesign of the electricity market, ACER review and regional cooperation
- Empowering consumers notably through deploying demand side response and using smart technology
- External dimension (Energy Community, Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation on energy, Energy Charter, Energy Diplomacy Action Plan,...)
- Liquefied Natural Gas and Storage Strategy
- Completion of energy infrastructures and measures to reach the 15% interconnection target for 2030, inter alia through the implementation of the TEN-E programme
- Energy prices and costs
- Integrated strategy for Energy Union Research, Innovation and Competitiveness
- 2nd State of the Energy Union Report
- Energy Union Governance
- National Emission Ceilings Directive
- Review of the ETS Directive
- Non-ETS (effort sharing) Decision

- Other implementing legislation of the 2030 package, as, for example, the inclusion of the land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) into the 2030 Package
- review of regulations setting emission performance standards targets for cars and vans for post-2020
- Follow-up to UNFCCC COP-21 and preparation and follow-up of COP-22
- ETS Directive on Aviation: follow-up to the 2016 Assembly of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO)

4. A UNION OF FREEDOM, SECURITY AND JUSTICE

The area of freedom, security and justice will be developed on the basis of the Strategic Guidelines set out by the European Council in June 2014. The focus during the period will be on implementation, in a spirit of mutual trust, and ensuring coherence between all relevant policies and instruments, including the external aspects.

The topics of irregular migration flows and international protection remain high on the agenda and call for solidarity and responsibility from all Member States. The Presidencies will aim at identifying gaps and explore new ways of addressing them. Particular attention will be devoted to the "smart borders" package and the implementation of the actions identified in the Commission's Communication on a European Agenda on migration of May 2015 and in the June and October 2015 EC conclusions, including work on the future development of the Common European Asylum System, efforts on relocation and resettlement, return and readmission, border management, stepping up the fight against human smuggling, and taking forward work in relation to legal migration. Furthermore, the three Presidencies will work to ensure a better link between migration, security and external policy. The three Presidencies aim to make progress in the on-going legislative work concerning new management of external borders and the new Visa code.

In the field of security, further to the Commission's Communication on a European Agenda on Security, the implementation of the Renewed EU Internal Security Strategy, is paramount. The three Presidencies aim to have a comprehensive and integrated approach to cyber-security and cybercrime, corruption, serious and organized crime and trafficking in human beings, including for labour exploitation. The fight against terrorism remains high on the agenda of the Council.

Concerning the area of justice, the emphasis will be on consolidation and effectiveness of existing instruments in practice. The three presidencies will promote improvement of the quality of legislation, taking into account the needs of citizens, authorities and legal practitioners. The three Presidencies will focus on progress on procedural rights in criminal proceedings as well as the continued the fight against fraud to the financial interest of the Union, including the work on the European Public Prosecutor's Office. As regards civil justice, work will focus on family law. The three Presidencies will boost e-justice solutions. Protection of human rights will be a general objective and the three Presidencies will try to take work forward on the accession of the EU to the European Convention on Human rights. Progress on the Data Protection package will be one of the priorities².

This priority area includes the following:

- European Agenda on Migration, including:
 - * the Review of the Blue Card Directive and a new approach to Legal Migration
 - * Evaluation of and possible amendments to the Dublin Regulation
 - * work on an EU relocation mechanism
 - * Further efforts to enhance resettlement opportunities
 - * Proposals for strengthening the role of the European Asylum Support Office
 - * Effectiveness of the Schengen area
 - * Proposal to amend the Asylum Procedure Directive (Directive 2013/32/EU) to strengthen 'Safe Country of Origin' provisions
 - * Work related to irregular immigration, including return and readmission
 - * Work emanating from the Action Plan on migrant smuggling
 - * proposals for enhanced protection schemes in the proximity of the EU
 - * Migration Action Plan with Turkey
- Reinforcement of Frontex, including in the context of discussions over the development of a European Border and Coast Guard System

² Subject to work currently ongoing.

- Smart Borders proposals, including the Entry/Exit system and Registered Traveller Programme
- Implementation of the Common European Asylum System, including regulation on the international protection of unaccompanied minors
- A simplified Union Visa Code and Touring visa regulations
- Visa facilitation and liberalisation agreements
- Enlargement of the Schengen area

- Europol Regulation
- Passenger Name Records directive and agreements
- Operational cooperation between law enforcement authorities
- Legislative proposal on firearms
- Peer evaluation regarding cybercrime
- The EU Agenda on Security, including
 - * Follow-up to the Renewed EU Internal Security Strategy, including upcoming Commission initiatives on the revision of the framework decision on terrorism, improved rules on firearms, extension of ECRIS to third country nationals and fraud on non-cash payments
 - * Renewed EU strategy on trafficking in human beings
 - * Reviewing obstacles to criminal investigations on cybercrime, notably on issues of competent jurisdiction and rules on access to evidence and information
 - * New EU policy cycle for organised and serious international crime
- Supporting the establishment of a European Victims' Rights Network

- Data Protection Package
- EU-US Data Protection Umbrella Agreement
- Eurojust Regulation

- European Public Prosecutor's Office Regulation
- Roadmap on strengthening procedural rights for suspects and accused persons in criminal proceedings, including notably the proposals on procedural safeguards for children and legal aid in European arrest warrant proceedings
- EU accession to the European Convention on Human Rights
- Family law: matrimonial property regime and property consequences of registered partnerships
- e-Justice
- Regulation promoting the free movement of citizens and businesses by simplifying the acceptance of public documents
- Rule of Law dialogue
- Revision of the "Brussels II" Regulation on the Jurisdiction, recognition and enforcement of judgments in matrimonial matters and matters of parental responsibility
- Mutual recognition of confiscation orders

5. THE UNION AS A STRONG GLOBAL ACTOR

The EU's strategic environment has changed due to globalisation and growing instabilities surrounding the EU, threatening our European values and security. Greater connectivity, competition and complexity in our global environment confront the EU with both challenges and opportunities. The EU will need to address this uncertain outlook, in which threats, challenges and opportunities coexist and EU internal and external security are increasingly intertwined. In particular, in the EU's neighbourhood, inherent instability has brought heightened risk. To the east, disregard for the principles of international law has undermined the European security order and led to geopolitical tension. To the south, conflicts and human rights violations are predominant features, and have created long-lasting security, humanitarian and socio-economic challenges. Against the background of this volatility in the broader neighbourhood, the credibility of the enlargement process and effective progress of the Western Balkans region towards the EU remains strategically important.

An "arc of instability", stretching from Eastern Europe to the Sahel, affects the EU's own security and threatens to undermine EU shared values and interests. The EU must deal with emerging threats such as hybrid threats, terrorist groups with massive resources at their disposal such as ISIL/Da'esh and cyber-attacks; as well as perennial ones such as proliferation, piracy, extremism and terrorism. Greater human mobility has led to challenges from irregular migration, human trafficking and smuggling. Universal human rights and democratic values are under attack by hostile ideologies and propaganda.

Migration will most certainly remain high on the international agenda. The implementation of The European Agenda on Migration, the European Council Conclusions of April, June and October 2015, the outcome of the Meeting of Heads of State or Government of September 2015, and the outcome of the Valletta-summit of 11-12 November 2015 as well as the High-level Conference on the Eastern Mediterranean/Western Balkans route of 8 October 2015, will be at the core of the Trio agenda with regard to the external aspects of migration. The agreed measures on migration will have to be implemented and assessed in 2016 and 2017 as some of them need a medium to long-term approach, particularly those aimed at stemming the flow of irregular migration and on tackling the root causes by reinforcing cooperation with countries of origin and transit in an integrated manner.

On counter-terrorism the ambitious conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council of February 2015 will need to be further implemented, in particular with regard to the EU's external counter-terrorism work, including enhanced counter-terrorism political dialogues, the action plans and capacity building projects with the countries of the Middle East and North Africa.

The EU response will need to include an outward looking and joined-up approach to security and diplomacy. Relevant EU policies and instruments will need to be deployed in a more strategic way, aiming at protecting and promoting EU values and interests. In this regard, the forthcoming EU global strategy on foreign and security policy will play a crucial role in defining our political ambitions, objectives and instruments to achieve them. The review of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the mid-term review of European Neighbourhood Instrument will be central to defining a new approach to our neighbourhood. Differentiation will be key, ensuring that the EU's approaches take account of partner countries' specific situations. Effective and coherent application of EU policies relating to external action is essential, working on the basis of a comprehensive approach that links, inter alia, diplomacy, trade, energy, development, migration, human rights, and security and defence.

This will include the further development of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) as CSDP missions and operations continue to make a significant contribution to international peace and stability. EU civilian and military capabilities need to be strengthened and the CSDP better tailored to present and future challenges, including human rights considerations. In accordance with the European Council conclusions of June 2015, the EU should further enhance cooperation, including internationally, in the field of security and defence, in close coordination with international parties such as the UN and NATO as well with the European defence industry. A facilitating role for the European Defence Agency is foreseen. Increased cooperation with partner organisations, greater complementarity and mutual exchange of information is key, in particular with the UN, the OSCE, NATO and the African Union in areas such as hybrid threats, maritime security, rapid reaction and cyber security. Contributions by partners to the CSDP will continue to be encouraged. Implementation of capacity building in support of security and development with a flexible geographic scope, as well as the development of an EU-wide strategic framework for Security Sector Reform, shared by CSDP and development cooperation policy, are also foreseen.

Beyond the Neighbourhood, bolstering partnerships is key – in particular with likeminded actors, but also with partners of rising global and regional influence, as well as with multilateral organisations and other fora. In order to bring sufficient weight to bear, the EU must be united in defending European values and interests, human rights remaining a core value of the EU that guides and drives actions of the EU, both internal and external.

The Americas present opportunities that need to be fully tapped. Overall, the EU has much to enable it to engage and influence in a positive way. A close and effective strategic relationship with the United States allows for close cooperation on many foreign and security policy issues. The EU will strive to strengthen mutual cooperation on trade, energy security, CSDP and data protection.

In Asia there are tensions among regional players jostling for influence. The EU has a genuine strategic interest in promoting stability in Asia and will seek to convey a strong message of its commitment to Asia and its regional integration, including at the 11th ASEM summit to be held in July 2016. The EU will remain engaged with the countries of Central Asia, implementing the EU-Central Asia Strategy reviewed in June 2015.

In close cooperation with African Countries, the EU will continue to work on the implementation of the EU-Africa Roadmap adopted at the 2014 summit and prepare for the next summit. Continued EU engagement will aim to prevent and address crisis situations, contribute to peace and stability and contain the growing flow of irregular migration and fight terrorism, in close cooperation with the African Union, regional organisations and international partners. The EU will continue to implement the regional strategies and accompanying action plans to contribute to the security and development of the Sahel, Gulf of Guinea and the Horn of Africa regions.

Adapting EU relations with African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP) after 2020 (post-Cotonou) to these new global realities and challenges will be part of these political reflections.

Global challenges will continue to feature prominently on international agenda in 2016 and 2017. It is the EU's aim to reach an ambitious and binding climate protection agreement at the UN Framework Climate Change Convention (COP 21) in Paris, which will have to be implemented by both the EU and its partners. The preparation of a second climate diplomacy action plan will have to be explored in the light of the international implications of the Paris agreement. Regarding the promotion of EU's energy security it will be important to assess the implementation of the external elements of the Energy Union communication endorsed by the **European Council** in March 2015, in particular regarding the support of EU's diversification efforts with Foreign Policy instruments.

Development policy and cooperation remain central elements of the EU's external action. The EU will continue its work to make its development assistance more effective and targeted. In pursuing this, the EU will also strengthen the efforts to link up the development cooperation programmes of the EU and Member States through Joint Programming. The EU and its Member States will also continue its efforts to better link up its external relations tools and instruments in line with the principles of the EU's comprehensive approach.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development agreed in New York will provide a new global framework for sustainable development efforts. Consequently, the focus of the Trio Programme will be the implementation of this agenda, including on the internal EU implementation in the appropriate fora.

The EU's policies will need to be looked upon in line with the new Sustainable Development Goals, through a multi-stakeholder approach. Equally, fostering Policy Coherence for Development remains important to the implementation of the EU's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ambitions. In this context, the reviews of the development instruments as well as the discussions on EU-ACP relations after 2020 (post-Cotonou) are also important.

In a context of multiple and protracted crises, with unprecedented numbers of displaced persons, the EU will continue to contribute to the efficient delivery of humanitarian aid to those affected by conflict, instability and natural disasters. The first World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016 will create momentum for innovative approaches and reinvigorating the collective responsibility of the international community in this regard.

The Netherlands, Slovakia and Malta will work together in the Council of the European Union on a shared commitment focusing on the countries with a membership perspective, the Neighbourhood, as well as its adjacent regions, as well as the EU's strategic partners, in support of the actions of the High Representative and the Commission.
