



Latvian Presidency
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1. Inspiring Europe: STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK AND PRESIDENCY PRIORITIES

A EUROPE FOR ITS PEOPLE

In the first half of 2015 Latvia will assume the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. It is a time when the European Union continues to face both long-term and immediate challenges to meet the needs of its citizens. The European Union must work for the best interests of its people, to promote their **well-being and safety**.

It is our collective task to develop a Union built on the shared **values** of peace, freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and solidarity. Europe must be a source of inspiration not only for Europeans, but also for societies outside the EU. Latvia's commitment to strengthening the EU, its institutions and its policies is rooted in these common values, the preservation of European identity, and an acknowledgement of the EU's shared future. Latvia is determined to preside over the work of the Council professionally and honestly. Because only through a collective effort and by combining resources can Europe live up to the opportunities and challenges of the modern world.

The EU has undergone changes throughout its history, becoming ever stronger and more prosperous, providing its citizens and businesses with **a secure, predictable and just** political and economic environment. Today Europe has to act wisely to return to economic **growth**, facilitate **investment and deliver on jobs**. The EU must seize digital opportunities, promote sustainable energy and environmental policies, and strengthen the Single Market and industrial sector. Finally, Europe should work to ensure the safety of its citizens and to contribute to peace and prosperity within and beyond the EU's borders.

Therefore, as the holder of the Presidency Latvia will ensure that the Council does its part to facilitate achieving the ambitions set out in the June 2014 European Council *Strategic Agenda for the Union in Times of Change*. With respect to the Trio presidency programme, the Latvian Presidency will focus on three overarching priorities: Competitive Europe, Digital Europe and Engaged Europe.

1. Inspiring Europe: STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK AND PRESIDENCY PRIORITIES

A. COMPETITIVE EUROPE

Europe needs to enhance its entrepreneurial capacity by promoting investment in new and competitive products and services. Only by developing competitive industry and service sectors can Europe facilitate job creation, and thus also promote social cohesion. Based on Latvia's own experience we know that this is possible through efficient structural reforms and growth-stimulating investment measures. Hence, Latvia commits to fast-tracking procedures in the Council on the **Investment plan for Europe**, aimed at unlocking public and private investments in the real economy. The Presidency will also continue work on the reduction of administrative obstacles and the continued development of the Single Market in order to enhance entrepreneurial activity. This will allow Europe to truly benefit from the multiplication effect of investment.

The Presidency is fully committed to facilitating the well-coordinated and efficient conduct of the **European Semester** based on the goals of the renewed **Europe 2020 Strategy**, and will work to ensure that the Council plays its role in the multilateral process. The Presidency welcomes the Commission's ideas for a more streamlined European Semester process to secure the proper involvement of all Member States, national parliaments and stakeholders, in the discussions on Country Specific Recommendations.

The Presidency will prioritise work on strengthening the **Single Market** through progress on the remaining Single Market Act II proposals while maintaining and promoting the four freedoms. The Presidency intends to launch discussions on the expected Internal Market Strategy for goods and services,

therefore contributing to enhancing the competitiveness of industry and related service sectors. The Presidency's guiding principle will be **Better Regulation** and the wider use of competitiveness proofing. More efficient and targeted regulation means focusing human and financial resources towards the main objectives – growth, jobs and competitiveness.

The need to establish an **Energy Union** has been evident for many years, and the EU must make this vision a reality. There needs to be an energy policy built on solidarity, trust and security. The EU would benefit from a better integrated energy infrastructure grid and improved governance, in particular, better exploiting regional governance across the European Union. The EU also needs solid Energy diplomacy with external suppliers, increased use of renewables, and the implementation of energy efficiency measures.

B. DIGITAL EUROPE

Rapidly growing information technologies are providing unprecedented opportunities that have the potential to boost smart, sustainable and inclusive growth for the EU. They also present challenges that need to be addressed in order to properly seize these opportunities. By trading goods and services online Europe can also benefit economically, including through job creation. The Presidency's priority is the development of a true digital Europe via devoting attention to building trust in the Digital Single Market, digitalisation of the public sector, and increasing safety and security in the digital environment. Streamlined and enhanced use of the EU's digital capacities must continue. The Presidency will seek to conclude negotiations and reach an agreement on legislative proposals currently under discussion.

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The Presidency will focus on building a stronger and more coherent **data protection** framework. Seeking agreement on the General Data Protection Regulation and Directive will be a priority. Safety in its widest sense will also be enhanced with the implementation of the EU Cyber Security Strategy and by finalising negotiations on the Network and Information Security Directive (NIS).

The Presidency is looking forward to the timely publication of the **Digital Single Market Strategy** and will devote particular attention to it by holding proper discussions in the Council, as well as informal events. The elimination of online borders and swift introduction of more favourable conditions for online services, such as payments and data management, will in turn spur cross-border digital trade.

The Presidency will also seek an overall compromise on the **Telecommunications market package**. The guiding principle will be to find a balance between high-quality services and a reasonable cost for consumers.

In order to advance the digitalisation of Europe, the EU must become **digital by default**. The Presidency will highlight discussions on digital skills and the next steps regarding the promotion of eGovernment. Attention will be also devoted to aspects of interoperability, web accessibility and the digital transformation of the public sector in order to make it efficient and innovative.

C. ENGAGED EUROPE

The European Union has the responsibility to assume a full and active role on the global stage. With conflict on EU's doorstep, the situation in our neighbourhood is as challenging as ever. Therefore, as Presidency, Latvia will fully support

the efforts of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European External Action Service (EEAS).

The **European Neighbourhood Policy** (ENP), with its Eastern and Southern dimensions, is a policy of continuous engagement and is a priority of the EU's external relations. The ENP should be strengthened through a comprehensive forthcoming review process. During the Riga Eastern Partnership Summit, a strong signal reaffirming long-term EU strategic support for the ENP should be sent. The review process should allow the EU to develop more flexible and inclusive approaches to all its partner countries based on differentiation and an emphasis on joint ownership.

The EU's external engagement also includes a commitment towards strengthening the **transatlantic partnership**, notably by making all efforts to conclude negotiations on an ambitious, comprehensive and mutually beneficial Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) agreement by the end of 2015, and enhancing relations towards other strategic partners. The Presidency looks forward to the conclusion of the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, and the advancement of the EU-Japan Free Trade Agreement negotiations, as well as proceeding with the implementation of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs) with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

Latvia also looks forward to the review of the **EU-Central Asia Strategy**. EU engagement with the region can be enhanced by discussions on security, border management, energy supply, and educational exchange, while keeping civil society interests and human rights on the table.

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The year 2015 offers a unique opportunity for the EU and its Member States to promote an ambitious, transformative and inclusive post-2015 development agenda. The EU is now entering a new intergovernmental negotiations phase on a follow-up of **Sustainable Development Goals and financing for development**. Gender equality and women's empowerment will be highlighted as a thematic issue for development cooperation.

The Presidency will remain committed to an EU enlargement policy that continues to contribute to the mutual benefits of peace, democracy, security and prosperity in Europe. Citizens expect improvements in what the EU is doing. To meet their expectations, the Presidency is fully committed to strengthening the decision-making process within the EU and to improving inter-institutional cooperation within the existing treaties.

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A. General Affairs

The EU has multiple challenges in reacting to current domestic political, economic and international developments. An economic recovery should go hand in hand with increased competitiveness and more jobs in the whole EU. To this end it will be of utmost importance to start implementing cohesion policy instruments in 2015 as the main drivers for investment and for strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion in Europe. The European Semester, the Europe 2020 Strategy, and macro-regional strategies are important tools in the post-crisis economic revival. The Presidency will ensure that the EU enlargement policy continues to contribute to political stability and economic prosperity in Europe. The Presidency will work to ensure cybersecurity for maintaining safe and open information networks that allow for a thriving digital environment in Europe.

The Presidency is committed to making every effort to take a path towards boosting jobs and growth and remain ambitious in achieving the **Europe 2020 Strategy** targets. There is a clear need to bridge the implementation gap and this will require efforts from everyone involved. The **European Semester** will have its fifth cycle during the Latvian Presidency. It has proven its importance in enhancing economic and fiscal policy coordination in the EU. The Presidency has presented a roadmap that covers both the European Semester and the Europe 2020 mid-term review. Hence, the Presidency will act to facilitate the well-organised conduct of the European Semester and make sure the Council plays its role in the multilateral process. Achieving the targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy – which aim to build a smart, sustainable, and inclusive economy – and consolidating policies is essential to overcome the economic and financial crisis and boost the Union's growth, to strengthen the Union's capacity to deliver more jobs and to seize digital opportunities, to safeguard fundamental rights, and to fully play its role in a rapidly changing world. To this end the Presidency will continue working towards a review of the strategy that is to be decided by the European Council in March on the basis of proposals made by the Commission, which are expected early in 2015.

Recognising the importance of the **cohesion policy** in reducing social and economic disparities and contributing to growth and employment, it will be one of Presidency's priorities to ensure that all the preconditions are there to pave the way for the smooth start of new operational programmes. The Presidency will also have follow up discussions and stock-taking on the latest outcomes of programming for 2014-2020. The mid-term review of the European Union's **Territorial Agenda 2020** will serve as the framework for the agenda in the area of territorial policy. The Presidency will pay particular attention to strengthening the role of small- and medium-sized urban areas in the framework of an EU Urban Agenda. The debate will be organised on the basis of an integrated approach to addressing specific challenges and actions in order to progress towards the objectives set by the Europe 2020 Strategy.

Recognising the added value that **macro-regional strategies** can provide, the Presidency is committed to continuing work on the macro-regional strategy initiatives. The VI Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region will be held in Jūrmala in Latvia in June 2015, with an emphasis on

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digital interconnectivity, culture, health, spatial planning, and energy efficiency in the Baltic Sea region. Implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region will also be followed, while a proposal from the European Commission on EU Strategy for the Alpine Region is expected by June 2015.

The EU's **institutional** transition was successfully completed in 2014. The new legislative cycle is being implemented. Now the Presidency will work actively to promote constructive cooperation between the institutions within the existing treaty framework. The Presidency, in close cooperation with the new High Representative and the European External Action Service (EEAS), will closely follow the implementation of reforms that have been identified within the EEAS review process. The Presidency will also continue work towards completing the process of the EU's accession to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights, as well as do its utmost to advance the Reform of the General Court of the European Union, aimed at speeding up court proceedings and reducing the backlog of pending cases.

While noting the strategic importance of the **enlargement** policy in promoting political stability and economic prosperity in Europe, the Presidency is committed to moving forward with the ongoing accession negotiations with Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey with a view to achieving further sustained progress. The Presidency will pursue an enlargement policy that is based on principle of conditionality and the countries' own merits in meeting the set criteria. This principle will also guide the Presidency's work in advancing the European perspective of other Western

Balkan countries according to the respective stages of their integration, with European Union membership as the ultimate goal.

The Presidency will work on strengthening relations with the **European Economic Area (EEA)/ European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries** in areas of common interest, and in ensuring the homogeneity of the internal market. Discussions will proceed on the future financial contributions of Norway, Iceland, and Lichtenstein, which are aimed at reducing social and economic disparities in the European Economic Area. In close cooperation with the EEAS, particular attention will be given to EU-Switzerland relations. Furthermore, discussions on EU relations with Andorra, Monaco and San Marino will advance, notably on negotiations over one or several Association agreements.

Cybersecurity is critical for maintaining safe and open information networks that allow for a thriving digital environment in Europe. The lack of sufficient and integrated efforts to protect data, information and networks undermines trust in online activities, hinders the evolution of the Digital Single Market, and increases threats to critical infrastructure. Common efforts to combat cybercrime and preserve the privacy of citizens should be reinforced by individual responsibility in building a safe and secure cyberspace. The Presidency will seek to strengthen European cross-border cooperation to protect the public and private sectors from intrusion and fraud by pursuing the goals of the EU Strategy on Cybersecurity.

While recognising the importance of **radiation protection and nuclear safety**, the Presidency will support initiatives and actions towards strengthening these

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measures at an international and European level. The Presidency will dedicate efforts to the elaboration of the EU position for the Diplomatic Conference of the Convention on Nuclear Safety, and the 5th Review Meeting of the Joint Convention on the Safety of

Spent Fuel Management, and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management. Lessons learned from the Fukushima nuclear accident and the findings of the stress tests performed on European nuclear power plants will be taken into account in this work.

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B. Foreign Affairs

The Presidency will fully support the High Representative in her role as President of the Foreign Affairs Council and in her function of conducting the Common Foreign and Security Policy and coordinating the EU's external action. The Presidency will continue to support all efforts to further strengthen cooperation between the EU and its strategic partners, particularly the United States and other like-minded countries, both in trade and security matters. It will contribute in particular to enhancing EU cooperation with the Eastern Partnership and Central Asian countries, and will work on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

The **European Neighbourhood Policy** will remain a key EU policy when it comes to framing its relationship with neighbouring countries. Ongoing conflicts and instability in the broader neighbourhood are a cause for great concern. More than ever before the 'neighbourhood' countries need EU attention and support. Latvia will support the High Representative in the efforts of the EU and its member states to enhance the effectiveness of the EU policy in addressing political and security challenges in the Eastern and Southern neighbourhood. Latvia will support a comprehensive review of the ENP which should enable the ENP to be more effective, putting an increased emphasis on differentiation in approaching the partner countries.

In close cooperation with its partners, Latvia will continue to contribute to the strengthening of the **Eastern Partnership** as an inclusive platform and to promoting a more individual and differentiated approach in cooperation with each of the Eastern Partnership countries in accordance with their own ambitions. As appropriate, ties will be strengthened by ensuring closer political association, economic integration, enhanced trade, improved mobility, people-to-people contacts, better education, and engagement with civil societies. In cooperation with the President of the European Council and other EU institutions, Latvia will host the 4th Eastern

Partnership Summit in Riga on 21–22 May 2015. The summit will provide an opportunity to review the progress that has been achieved since the Vilnius Summit and set the way ahead for the partnership. Latvia will support the EEAS in further developing the relationship with the Southern Neighbourhood region, thereby contributing to the stability and security of the region based on the principles of democracy, human rights, freedom of speech, and the rule of law.

Latvia will also support the High Representative's efforts in strengthening EU engagement in **Central Asia**, as it sees a need to increase EU visibility in the region. Latvia will contribute to all plans to help to further promote the EU-Central Asia dialogue and cooperation in those areas that are of high importance: energy, transport, sustainable development, the rule of law, and education. In this regard the revision of the EU-Central Asia Strategy in early 2015 will be of the utmost importance. The scaling-down of the international security presence in Afghanistan in 2015 also requires greater EU attention towards Central Asia in meeting common challenges such as terrorism, border security and drug trafficking. The implementation of regional cooperation programmes (the Border Management Programme in Central Asia and also the Central Asia Drug Action Programme) will be crucial in this respect.

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Latvia will support efforts to increase the effectiveness and visibility of the **Common Security and Defence Policy** (CSDP). Tackling global factors that directly or indirectly affect international peace and security and the stability of states has become an even more pressing priority. Latvia will contribute to the preparations for the European Council of June 2015 and will underline the importance of continued progress on security and defence issues. In this regard, Latvia deems it important to move forward the work towards better, more efficient civilian and military capabilities, including the EU Battlegroups, and better civil-military cooperation in addressing the Union's maritime security risks and threats, and will also support enhanced civil-military cooperation when it comes to improving cyber defence awareness and protection. Latvia will also draw attention to the challenges faced by and opportunities that are open to the European defence industry.

Latvia will highlight the crucial nature of cooperation with partners and organisations, particularly the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United Nations and the United States (US). Close cooperation with NATO in areas such as capability development, military rapid response, and training and exercises in a way that is both coordinated and complementary requires particular attention. Latvia will emphasise the strengthening of the partnership and promote cooperation on emerging security challenges between the EU and the US. Latvia will also call attention to the dialogue and cooperation with the Eastern Partners in the context of the CSDP.

Regarding external aspects of **counter-terrorism**, the Presidency will particularly engage in addressing the issues of foreign

fighters, the financing of terrorism, radicalisation, and recruitment for terrorism.

Open and fair **external trade** is a key instrument when it comes to stimulating economic growth, competitiveness and employment. Greater market openness, as well as increasing trade and investment flows, are all essential for promoting growth and economic recovery across the whole of the EU, in line with the needs of industrial and other EU policies. In full support of a strong, rules-based multilateral trading system, the Presidency will contribute to achieving further progress on the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) multilateral negotiations. In order to strengthen the multilateral trading system, the Presidency will provide continuous support to make progress on the Doha Development Agenda (DDA). It will pursue a swift implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement and other Bali decisions, as well as promote discussions on post-Bali deliverables. In order to widen the multilateral trading system, the Presidency will encourage the ongoing WTO accession negotiations, including but not limited to Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, and Serbia. It will support the preparations for the upcoming WTO Ministerial Conference (MC10) in 2015. In addition to the WTO's multilateral negotiations, the Presidency favours the conclusion of the Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA), the Environmental Goods Agreement, and the finalisation of the Ministerial Declaration on Information Technology Agreement (ITA).

The Presidency will continue to support the ongoing work on bilateral trade agreements that have the potential to further open external markets and provide new opportunities for European businesses. Latvia considers TTIP and Free Trade Agreement negotiations with

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Japan and Vietnam as the top priorities for its Presidency in the area of the EU's bilateral trade. It will also be important to proceed with the implementation of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs) with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, and to support the necessary procedures regarding approval of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement with Canada (CETA) and the Bilateral Trade Agreement with Singapore. The Presidency will continue to monitor the efficient implementation of the EU Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP), in particular with regard to the GSP+. The Presidency considers that EU trade policy should continue to ensure the enforcement of the EU's rights under existing rules and promote enhanced access to world markets. Therefore, as regards legislative initiatives, the Presidency will work for the benefit of all EU stakeholders.

The year 2015 will be crucial when it comes to arriving at a universal post-2015 agenda for sustainable **development** and the eradication of poverty. The Presidency will work to advance a comprehensive EU contribution to the international negotiations that will lead up to the UN Summit in September 2015, facilitating the adoption of a new framework, including a set of globally-applicable Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which will succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Presidency sees gender equality and women's empowerment, good governance, the rule of law, human rights,

and inclusive, sustainable growth to be of particular importance, including in relation to the European Year for Development 2015 (EYD 2015). The Presidency will also contribute to preparations that lead to a united EU position for the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in July 2015. The Partnership Agreement between **the group of African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP)** and the EU also is due to expire in 2020. Therefore, the Presidency will work with the EEAS and the Commission to advance EU reflection on future relations with the ACP countries against the background of the EU's role as a global player.

Together with the EEAS and the Commission, the Presidency will closely monitor ongoing and emerging humanitarian crises that have been caused by natural and man-made disasters, as well as disease outbreaks, of which addressing the Ebola epidemic will be of paramount importance. The Presidency will help to further improve the efficiency and effectiveness of **EU humanitarian aid** and to advance EU humanitarian advocacy vis-à-vis third countries and international organisations. The Presidency will support the necessary follow-up for preparations for the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. It will seek to follow up on the implementation of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, the EU resilience agenda, as well as the EU comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises.

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C. Economic and Financial Affairs

The Presidency is committed to working towards promoting economic recovery, investment and growth enhancing initiatives, therefore it will spare no effort to facilitate the implementation of December 2014 European Council decisions on an Investment Plan for Europe, including the adoption of respective legislative acts. As macroeconomic stability is a precondition for attracting investment and achieving growth, the emphasis on the implementation of structural reforms and sound fiscal policies will guide Economic and Financial Affairs Council work during the Presidency. Furthermore, the Presidency will continue discussions and foster follow-up on the Economic Governance Review. While the Presidency welcomes the Commission's proposals to improve the European Semester, the Presidency will endeavour to implement the current cycle effectively. Following the guidance from the December 2014 European Council, the Presidency is looking forward to proposals on deepening the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). The Presidency will also continue the work on financial sector regulation and on tackling tax fraud and evasion.

Following the initiative of the President of the European Commission to mobilise up to 315 billion euros of additional financing for the European economy and the task given by the December European Council, the Presidency is looking forward to the timely publication of the legislative proposal by the Commission on setting up a European Fund for Strategic Investment. The Presidency stands ready to launch and take forward the discussions on the proposal, with the aim to reach an agreement by June 2015. In order to ensure more comprehensive discussions on investment in the Council, a regular exchange of views on the broader aspects of the **Investment plan for Europe** will be held at a political level.

The Presidency will implement the streamlined **European Semester**. It has proven its importance in terms of enhancing economic and fiscal policy coordination in the EU and stimulating structural reforms. The Presidency will take stock of the implementation of the economic and fiscal policy framework and intends to enhance the policy debate through the facilitation of horizontal discussions on key structural reforms, challenges in their implementation, and best practices. Subject

to the Commission's proposal, the Presidency will ensure the renewal of the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines.

Regarding **Economic and fiscal governance legislation**, the 'Six-Pack' and 'Two-Pack' entered into force on 13 December 2011 and 30 May 2013, respectively. The new framework has helped to better address the problems of high debt and deficit in Member States, as well as foster a structural reform agenda. After the publication of the Economic governance review by the Commission and the first exchange of views among Member States thereafter, the Presidency will ensure the continuation of thorough political discussions with the view to adopt Council conclusions. Following the proposals from the European Commission, the Presidency will also ensure the implementation of the **Stability and Growth Pact** and the **Macroeconomic Imbalances Procedure**. Recognising the importance of stronger **economic governance within the Economic and Monetary Union**, the Presidency will support the ongoing work on better economic governance in the euro area, ensuring appropriate follow-up to the issue at the Council level.

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Anticipating the submission of a contribution from the Commission towards the **Capital Market Union** later in the year, the Presidency is ready to ensure a broad exchange of views on the issue. The Presidency will continue the work that is taking place on the financial sector regulatory reform in order to improve the resilience, transparency and supervision of the financial sector. The proper and timely implementation of requisite measures, both legal and political, that are aimed at ensuring the smooth functioning of newly operational **Banking Union** mechanisms will be among the Presidency's priorities. With the assistance of supranational institutions and the Commission, the Presidency will monitor developments and facilitate political discussions where these are appropriate.

Regarding the **Banking Structural Reform**, as a matter of priority the Presidency will further the discussion on the reform of the banking structures, which is aimed at fostering financial stability and resolving problems that are associated with the biggest and most complex banks. The Presidency believes that strengthening the resilience of the EU's banking sector should be achieved through the appropriate calibration of proposed measures while ensuring that banks continue to finance economic activities and growth. The Presidency will strive for substantial progress as regards the legislative work on this reform. The accompanying measures that are aimed at increasing the transparency of certain transactions, which complement the overarching reforms that have already been undertaken in order to strengthen the EU financial sector, will also be addressed.

In order to allow businesses, consumers and undertakings the enjoyment of the full range of benefits of the EU internal market,

including e-commerce, and in line with the Europe 2020 and the Digital Agenda, as well as to restore confidence in **financial markets**, the Presidency will work towards the finalisation of discussions on the revised Payments Services Directive (PSD2). The successful adoption of this proposal will improve the payments framework so that it better serves the needs of an effective European payments market, fully contributing to a payments environment that facilitates stronger competition, innovation and security to the benefit of all stakeholders, and consumers in particular. The Presidency aims at finalising discussions and reaching agreement with the European Parliament on the Benchmarks regulation, thereby restoring confidence in the integrity of benchmarks. It is crucial to find the right approach to the regulation in order to enhance the reliability of benchmarks and indexes, to facilitate the prevention and detection of their manipulation, and to clarify responsibility and the supervision of benchmarks by the authorities.

In the area of **insurance**, the Presidency will take forward the work on the Insurance Distribution Directive, aiming to reach an agreement with the European Parliament. The new rules on insurance distribution will enhance transparency, improve the information provided to the insurance policy holder and further clarify passporting rules and easier market access for insurance distributors in the EU. The Directive will also aim to ensure consistency with other financial services files, especially as regards the sale of those insurance products that have an investment element.

Regarding the **EU budget**, the Presidency's priorities include the budgetary discharge

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procedure for 2013, the adoption of budget guidelines for 2016, and the revision of the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF), following the late adoption of new rules or programmes under shared management. Due attention will be given to MFF revision and Investment plan-related amendments to the EU budget for 2015, with the view to strive for the timely adoption of both. The Presidency will also continue work on the revision of the financial regulation to align it with the new public procurement Directive. The Presidency will follow the progress and the first assessment carried out by the High Level Group on EU 'Own Resources' (HLGOR). It will also aim to make progress on the expected Commission's proposal to amend Council regulation on methods and the procedure for making available the traditional, VAT and GNI-based own resources, and on the measures to meet cash requirements.

With the aim of establishing effective rules, which complement other actions in respect to the **fight against crime, corruption and tax evasion**, the main priority of the Presidency will be the finalisation of negotiations with the European Parliament on the new legislative framework that is designed to protect the financial system against money laundering and terrorist financing (AMLD/AMLR). The importance of this work has been recognised by the European Council and is crucial in order to ensure that the EU remains at the forefront of international efforts to combat the laundering of the proceeds of crime.

In the area of **direct taxation**, the Presidency is ready to proceed with the proposal that has been made to amend the Interest/Royalties Directive. The Presidency will also continue work on the proposal for a Council Directive on a Common Consolidated Corpo-

rate Tax Base (CCCTB). Taking into account recent international developments, the Presidency will take the necessary steps in order to initiate discussions to commence the work on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) issues in the EU dimension (including the expected Commission's proposal on the automatic exchange of information on tax rulings in the EU).

As regards **indirect taxation**, the Presidency will seek progress on the rules that govern VAT treatment on vouchers, and will continue to work on a proposal aimed at reducing the administrative burden and increasing tax compliance in the form of the Standardised VAT Return. The Presidency will support the work on the proposal for a Council Directive that will implement enhanced cooperation in the area of financial transaction tax (FTT).

In the field of **statistics**, the Presidency will continue to focus on economic governance and quality issues in the area of statistics. The Presidency will open discussions on a proposal on harmonised indices of consumer prices regulation. It will strive to achieve progress in the balance of payments, international trade in services, and foreign direct investment regulation, and will also align the legal framework to the new institutional context.

In the context of **climate financing**, the Presidency will facilitate the preparations for a 2015 agreement on a climate change regime for the post-2020 period, to be concluded in Paris at the 21st Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

In December 2014, Turkey assumed the Presidency of the **G-20**. The Latvian Presidency for its part will do its utmost to ensure the

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appropriate representation of EU interests at the G-20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors meetings, as well as meetings involving their deputies. The Presidency will contribute to the coordination and presentation

of the EU position on developments in the global economy, investment and growth, financial market regulation, the reform of the International Monetary System, and on other relevant issues.

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D. Justice and Home Affairs

The Presidency will focus on the implementation of the Strategic Guidelines in the area of freedom, security and justice as adopted in June 2014 by the European Council, as well as on the respective follow-up initiatives. Whilst addressing security concerns, the Presidency will also dedicate particular attention to increased competitiveness in Europe by making progress with measures and initiatives that contribute to the Justice for Growth agenda, to a well-managed migration policy, and to internal security. In addition, the Presidency will focus on a data protection package, thereby contributing to trust building in the Digital Single Market. The Presidency will also pursue efforts towards strengthening dialogue and practical cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries, especially regarding visa dialogues.

In the field of fundamental rights, the **data protection** package, which is aimed at reinforcing the rights of citizens regarding the processing of personal data in the rapidly changing world, will be pursued as a high priority for the Presidency. In light of the completion of the Digital Single Market by 2015, the Presidency will actively be seeking agreement on proposals for a regulation for data protection and a Directive for the protection of personal data by competent authorities for the purposes of the prevention, investigation, detection or prosecution of criminal offences, or the execution of criminal penalties.

The Presidency will also focus on the protection of the EU's financial interests by enhancing certain institutional and operational aspects. In this regard, the Presidency will work on making further progress on a draft regulation for the establishment of the **European Public Prosecutor's Office**. Moreover, an agreement will actively be sought on the Directive on the fight against **fraud to the Union's financial interests** by means of criminal law (PIF), as well as on a regulation in relation to Eurojust.

In the context of **justice for growth**, the Presidency will dedicate particular attention to concluding the review of the European

small claims procedure regulation, aiming at enhancing the efficiency of this field. The Presidency will also focus on reaching an agreement in the Council on the proposal for a regulation that aims to simplify the acceptance of certain public documents in the EU and abolishes the authentication requirements that are related to these documents.

In the field of **criminal law**, the Presidency will focus on strengthening procedural rights in criminal proceedings. In this regard, and with a view to adoption, the Presidency will pursue negotiations on the draft Directives for procedural safeguards for children who are under suspicion or who are accused in criminal proceedings, on the presumption of innocence and on the provision of legal aid.

As regards the better functioning of the **Schengen area**, the Presidency will continue work on the Smart Borders Package. The Presidency will also work towards an agreement on the revised Visa Code, which is aimed at simplifying the procedure for short stays, taking into account the economic dimension of the visa policy. In addition, the Presidency will promote ongoing visa dialogues with third countries. Work will also continue towards the successful enlargement of the Schengen area.

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In the context of an efficient and well-managed **migration, asylum and border policy**, the Presidency will work on making further progress with measures and initiatives that are aimed at optimising the benefits of legal migration and offer protection to those who are in need, whilst tackling irregular migration and managing the EU's external border efficiently. Regarding these issues, the Presidency's work will be guided by the principle of solidarity and taking up a fair share of responsibility. Well-managed migration, while addressing the root causes of irregular migration flows, is an essential part of EU migration policy and, simultaneously, can be used as a significant tool for an increase in competitiveness. In this light, the Presidency will continue negotiations on the proposal where it relates to the conditions of entry and residence for researchers, students and other categories of third country nationals. Amendments in the Dublin regulation related to unaccompanied minors will be dealt with properly. The Presidency will also work on the external dimension of migration by pursuing further work in the different processes and dialogues in line with the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility. Particular attention will be dedicated to further strengthening

practical cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries.

The Presidency will continue work on enhancing cooperation in the area of **internal security**, including through the review and updating of the new Internal Security Strategy. The EU policy cycle will continue to serve as the main basis for coordinating operational cooperation between the Member States in the area of serious and organised crime. The fight against terrorism and action that should be taken to address the phenomenon of foreign fighters will also be one of the Presidency priorities. In this regard, the Presidency emphasizes the need to make progress on the European Passenger Name Record (PNR) system. An especial effort will be devoted to advancing work on the new legal basis both for Europol and for CEPOL.

In addition, the Presidency will make an effort to seek an agreement in the Council in terms of the new legislation for the control of **new psychoactive substances**. The Presidency will also strive towards the timely preparation of the EU and Member States' position for the 2016 UN General Assembly Special Session on Drugs.

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E. Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs

Inclusive growth must allow everyone to take up employment, education or training, ensuring that everyone has an equal opportunity to benefit from efficient and effective social protection systems that provide both adequacy and sustainability. The Presidency will emphasise inclusive and sustainable labour market participation, with increased attention being paid to job quality and long-term unemployment, and will also highlight the situation of persons with disabilities, as well as the fundamental value of a healthy lifestyle. This can be facilitated by the improved competitiveness of the EU, as, in a knowledge economy, the position of competitiveness is driven to a large extent by the quality of human resources.

Emphasis will be placed on the ongoing mid-term review of **the Europe 2020 Strategy** with particular attention being devoted to the implementation of structural reforms that are embedded in the country-specific recommendations and ensuring progress towards the achievement of employment and social targets. The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) and its preparatory committees – the Employment Committee (EMCO) and the Social Protection Committee (SPC) – will play a crucial role in the European Semester by supporting smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and by emphasising the role of social dialogue.

The Presidency will place emphasis on **inclusive and sustainable labour market participation** and will pay attention to the situation of the long-term unemployed, along with that of young people and persons with disabilities. Furthermore, the Presidency will invite the EMCO and SPC to devote part of their efforts to exploring in greater depth some of the features inherent in inclusive labour markets and related support systems, therefore contributing to the preparation of Council conclusions on inclusive labour markets in the EU. The renewed Employment

guidelines will play an important role in the stepped-up efforts to implement the Europe 2020 Strategy. The Presidency will continue work with ongoing initiatives to improve the situation of youth employment. The first results of the Youth Guarantee and the enhanced co-operation of public employment services will be on the Presidency's agenda. The board of the Network of Public Employment Services will hold a meeting in Riga in June 2015 focusing on the delivery of employment services.

As regards strengthening **the social dimension of the EMU**, the Presidency will emphasise the role of social dialogue. The involvement of social partners, while taking into account the national circumstances in this regard, is important for the successful and smooth implementation of reforms.

Regarding **labour legislation**, the Presidency will attach priority to the proposal on the Undeclared Work platform and aims to reach a first reading agreement with the European Parliament. The Presidency will seek progress with a view to reaching an agreement with the European Parliament on the EURES regulation and intends to look into the potential side effects of enhanced mobility. The Presidency also will continue work on the seafarers'

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Directive with a view to launch negotiations with the European Parliament, seeking an agreement.

The Presidency stresses the need to improve **health and safety at work** and to reduce the number of accidents in the workplace, emphasising the necessity of implementing the new EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work (2014-2020). The Presidency will prepare Council conclusions in this respect. To strengthen the efforts of Member States, the Presidency will organise a conference on health and safety at work in April 2015 and a meeting of the Senior Labour Inspectors Committee in May 2015.

Attention will also be paid to the monitoring and development of **social protection policies** and the issue of deinstitutionalisation in the EU Member States. Building upon previous discussions at the EU level on high-quality social services and social inclusion, a conference on deinstitutionalisation practices and the further development of the social care policy in Europe will be organised in Riga in June 2015. A meeting of the EU's Mutual Information System on Social Protection will take place in Riga in May 2015.

In the area of **equal treatment**, the Presidency will pay attention to challenges raised in regard to the approach to disability – from the medical model to the social model. A high-level meeting on disability with its main focus on the rights of children with disabilities and labour market participation will take place in Riga in May 2015, thereby contributing to the implementation of the EU Disability Strategy (2010-2020). The Presidency will continue the examination of the proposal for a Directive on equal treatment, irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation.

As regards **equality between men and women**, female labour market participation is of particular importance in order to face the challenges of ageing societies and old-age poverty, to tackle gender inequalities, and to achieve the employment and social targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy. Combined with the global issues of gender equality, it will be on the agenda of the high-level group on gender mainstreaming that will take place in Riga in January 2015. Taking into account the Commission's work on a report on old-age pension adequacy, the Presidency will prepare Council conclusions on the gender gap in pensions. The Presidency will also continue working on the Commission's proposal for a Directive to improve the gender balance on company boards.

As regards the **external dimension**, the Presidency will ensure the EU's presence and position at the 59th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which is scheduled to take place in New York in March 2015. The Presidency will also coordinate the positions of Member States during the International Labour Conference, which is scheduled to take place in Geneva in June 2015, and will work on the guidelines for the G-20 Labour and Employment Ministers Meeting. The Presidency will also advance the work on a set of proposals for Council decisions on the EU's position to be taken in Association Councils with regard to the coordination of social security systems.

In regard to **pharmaceuticals and medical devices**, the Presidency will seek a Council mandate in order to negotiate and reach an agreement with the European Parliament on the proposal for medical devices and *in vitro* medical devices. A robust, transparent and sustainable regulatory framework to support

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innovation and the competitiveness of the medical device industry and to allow rapid and cost-efficient market access for innovative medical devices is necessary for the benefit of patients and healthcare professionals alike.

In the area of **health**, the Presidency plans to focus on the individual by highlighting a healthy lifestyle in childhood and empowering each individual to take responsibility for their own health, and paying attention to patient-centred health care when coming to the treatment phase. The Presidency plans to continue discussions on a healthy lifestyle during the high level conference in Riga in February 2015 and other informal events, including the role of healthy nutrition, physical activity and sport in reducing childhood obesity, the importance of school meals and an enabling environment in health promotion, as well as the role of modern technologies and innovative approaches in the education of children and adolescents. The Presidency will follow the work of the Committee on National Alcohol Policy and Action, and is in the process of developing a scoping paper on the vision of future actions to be taken in the area of an alcohol policy in the EU. The Presidency will put in the effort required to bring the attention of EU health ministers to issues regarding alcohol and nutrition during the informal meeting of health ministers.

As regards patient-centred health care, the Presidency will pay attention to this issue during the Chief Medical Officers, Chief Medi-

cal Nurses and Chief Dental Officers' joint meeting. Particular attention will be given to health at work, the integration of health care and public care services as well as to cancer screening programmes within the EU.

A focus on the individual along with patient-centred health care will also be promoted during the annual eHealth Week in Riga in May 2015. Rapidly growing information technologies provide both opportunities that boost smart, sustainable and inclusive growth for the EU and challenges that need to be addressed in a timely manner in order to seize opportunities for the EU health sector. Therefore, the Presidency will attach importance to the empowerment of patients, using technologies to improve the quality of healthcare, innovations in eHealth/mHealth, the cross-border exchange of health data, and patient data protection.

Issues related to the risks of tuberculosis spreading and, in particular, multi-drug resistant tuberculosis will be among the Presidency's priorities in the health area. The Presidency intends to organise the 1st Eastern Partnership ministerial conference on tuberculosis and its multi-drug resistance in Riga in March 2015, paying particular attention to tuberculosis as a significant public health issue in Europe and its neighbouring countries. During the conference, the sustainability of the systems and their ability to respond to global threats, as well as a multi-sector approach, will be especially highlighted.

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F. Competitiveness

Competitiveness is the driving force for the EU's economic growth and development, and the main source for new workplaces. In order to ensure long-term economic development, the Presidency's efforts will be dedicated towards those policy areas which have a significant impact on the EU's competitiveness: strengthening the Single Market, fostering industrial competitiveness and better regulation of and support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Research and innovation are of pivotal importance for European competitiveness and employment as providers for new sources for growth. These policy issues also go hand-in-hand with the review of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the European Semester process, where EU competitiveness and growth are in the spotlight. The Presidency will advocate measures that facilitate trust and confidence in the Digital Single Market and in cross-border electronic activities.

Within the Council, the Presidency will hold a discussion and seek the adoption of the Council conclusions drawing up further directions and priorities for the **EU Single Market policy**. In this regard, ensuring a Single Market-friendly regulatory framework and the better functioning of the principle of mutual recognition, the further development of the Single Market for goods and services, the Digital Single Market, and also Single Market governance issues will be addressed. In the context of ongoing work on the Digital Single Market Strategy, the Presidency is planning to hold a political discussion on Digital Single Market issues. The Presidency will also prioritise work on the pending proposals under the Single Market Act II. The Presidency will keep a focus on further enhancing the Single Market of services, including possible discussions on services at the High-Level Group for Competitiveness and Growth. The Presidency will encourage the use of competitiveness-proofing, making it possible for policy-makers to see the well-grounded impact of the proposal on business competitiveness and allowing it to take further decisions. The Presidency has attached significance to the **governance of the Single Market**. Particular focus will be devoted to the adoption of purposeful and high-quality EU legislation, to

quality and timely transposition, as well as to the rigorous and uniform enforcement of EU harmonisation legislation on the ground.

Industrial policy will play an important role in enhancing European competitiveness in building on the identified strengths and upgrading the competitiveness of European industry. Fostering industrial competitiveness will be at the centre of the Presidency's activities, including the ensuring of a further integration of the Single Market, the development of industrial cooperation, and improving the overall business environment for European companies. The Presidency will work on the development of a proactive and integrated industrial policy in Europe which aims at responding to the needs of the changing economic situation and strengthening a coordinated approach for industrial competitiveness through all relevant EU policies. Work will be carried out in the industrial policy area in the context of the activities planned within the Commission Work Programme 2015. In this regard, the Presidency will particularly emphasise the digitalisation aspects of EU industry.

Regarding the general framework for **SMEs**, the Presidency will continue to monitor the actions

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carried out during the review of the Small Business Act (SBA). Access to funding is one of the major problems that SMEs have faced in recent years and it is one that they are still facing. The narrow set of financing resources that are typically available to SMEs makes them more vulnerable to the changing conditions in credit markets. Therefore the Presidency acknowledges that EU instruments such as COSME and Horizon 2020 should operate in conjunction in facilitating and improving access to finance for SMEs. Emphasising the topical nature of access to funding for SMEs, for the first time the Presidency plans to organise 'Innovative Enterprise Week', which will serve to raise awareness of the available financial instruments, facilities, and accompanying measures that were launched under Horizon 2020 to enhance access to finance for research, innovation, and SMEs.

A more competitive Europe will be the guiding principle in the context of the **Europe 2020 Strategy mid-term review**. The Presidency will seek to ensure the role of the Competitiveness Council in reacting to the Commission's proposals and facilitating discussions to refocus policies that foster growth and competitiveness.

In the field of **consumer protection**, the Presidency will seek to reach an agreement with the European Parliament on the Package Travel Directive, which aims at strengthening consumer protection in the tourism sector. The Presidency will also seek progress in terms of reaching an agreement in the Council and entering into negotiations with the European Parliament on the Product Safety and Market Surveillance Package, which aims to improve the functioning of the Single Market through simplified, more uniform and efficient safety rules.

Improved legal instruments in the field of **intellectual property** are essential for a positive business environment, the promotion of creativity and safeguarding European cultural diversity. The Presidency will focus on finalising negotiations with the European Parliament on the trade mark package, aimed at making the trademark system in Europe more efficient and coherent. The Presidency will also work towards reaching an agreement with the European Parliament on the Trade Secret Directive, aimed at boosting technological cooperation and the exchange of know-how across national borders. Upon the publication of a legislation proposal on the revision of the EU copyright framework, the Presidency will initiate discussions seeking to facilitate creativity, innovation and the completion of the Digital Single Market. The Presidency will also contribute to advancing the ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for persons who are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled.

In the area of **the harmonisation of technical specifications** for motor vehicles, in order to make the internal market function better whilst maintaining a high level of safety and environmental protection, the Presidency will continue work on the proposal relating to emission limits and type-approval for non-road machinery, and additionally the Presidency will start to examine the proposal for a review of the Framework Directive on the approval type of motor vehicles and their components. In addition, the Presidency will resume the examination of the proposal for the simplification of the transfer of motor vehicles that have been registered in another Member State.

The Presidency will also seek to close negotiations with the European Parliament on the proposal for Cableways, which aims

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to promote the internal market for safety equipment and subsystems while increasing safety requirements, the proposal for Gas Appliances, which addresses issues that are related to the reliability of equipment during its cycle of use, as well as the proposal for Personal Protective Equipment, which will increase the level of equipment safety in order to reduce the number of accidents in the workplace and increase productivity.

The Presidency will continue work on the **company law** and corporate governance package. As regards the revision of the Shareholders' Rights Directive, aimed at enhancing shareholder's rights over companies, the Presidency will seek a Council mandate to engage in trilogues with the European Parliament. The Presidency will work towards reaching a compromise in the Council also on the Single-Member Company Directive, designed to tackle obstacles that hamper the economic activities of companies (SMEs in particular) within the Single Market.

The Presidency will support the initiatives undertaken by the trio in view of further enhancing the functioning of the **Customs Union**, including in the field of governance of the customs-related Council Working Parties. With regard to the legislative proposals, due consideration will be given to the thematic examination of the Union legal framework for customs infringements and sanctions, and, once issued, to the pending proposal on the implementation of the FCTC Protocol. The Presidency will highlight matters relating to the management of the EU external border. Namely, with regard to international affairs, special attention will be devoted to relations with EU neighbouring countries, major trading partners and the coordination of the EU position to be taken in bilateral and multilateral fora.

In order to provide a contribution to the Europe 2020 Strategy, there is a need to bridge **research and innovation** through fostering networks without barriers and the full exploitation of the potential of national research and innovation systems. In this context, building strong links between the Innovation Union and the European Research Area is essential. The Presidency will place an emphasis on the enhancement of the European Research Area (ERA) through the ERA Roadmap and improved ERA governance. In this regard, the Presidency will focus on ERA implementation aspects, EU added value and the optimal use of public investments in research. The Presidency will facilitate the implementation of the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) Roadmap and the European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC) instrument, and will contribute to a better consistency between these instruments and smart specialisation strategies as well as regional and macro-regional policies.

The Presidency will work to unlock the EU's digital potential towards achieving a thriving **data-driven economy**. Recognising that data is at the centre of the future knowledge economy and society, the Presidency will work on raising awareness of the importance of framework conditions, including fostering the open data policies and e-infrastructure that encompass the needs of research and innovation communities. The Presidency will explore ways of achieving faster and wider innovation through open, networked and data-intensive research.

Global societal challenges require responsible and reliable **science** which is aligned with values and needs of the European society. The Presidency will therefore raise

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awareness of the concept of Open Science (Science 2.0) with an aim of contributing to the wider debate on fostering the quality and excellence of European science, including through the digital dimension. The Presidency will advance the dossiers on scientific and technological research in specific regions, notably in the Baltic Sea Area with a particular reference to joint research programmes that have been undertaken by several Member States, whilst taking into account the forthcoming evaluation of the Baltic Sea Research and Development Programme (BONUS). The Presidency will also facilitate work on the final evaluation of the Seventh Framework Programme and will closely monitor the results of the initial phase of the framework programme, Horizon 2020, to ensure the exploitation of the full potential of the programme in terms of the scientific, industrial and social growth of the EU, including the appropriate synergies with the European Structural and Investment Funds.

In the field of **space policy**, the Presidency will follow the evolution of discussions in the Council on future relations between the EU and the European Space Agency (ESA), and

possible lines of action on the way forward. The Presidency will also welcome broader discussions on the future development of an integrated and comprehensive EU Space Strategy, bringing together the efforts of individual Member States and EU policy instruments. The Presidency recalls that the Galileo and Copernicus Programmes are expected to create substantial market opportunities for European industry and SMEs through the development of downstream services and applications, which require continuous and sustained access to data. Therefore, a further discussion is needed regarding high resolution Earth observation satellite data (HRSD) in order to facilitate fair and reliable access and free circulation of data throughout the EU. The Presidency will follow the implementation of the Horizon 2020 part on space research with an objective to foster a cost-effective competitive and innovative space industry, including SMEs. The Presidency acknowledges the importance of the development of Space Surveillance and Tracking (SST) capability at the European level to exploit existing national and European civil and military assets, with the aim to tackle the problem of space debris.

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G. Transport, Telecommunications and Energy

A forward-looking development of infrastructure and networks is fundamental for enhanced European competitiveness and the well-functioning of a single market. Safe, sustainable and user-orientated transport, telecommunications and energy connections across European borders are necessary to encourage EU citizens and goods to travel, connect, and benefit from the Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council (TTE) three sectors. EU economic growth will gain from the TTE Council's continuous focus on strengthening the Internal Energy Market and energy security aspects, enhancing trust in the Digital Single Market, and the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy in the context of its mid-term review. Connecting up the transport, energy and digital networks in an efficient and sustainable manner requires concerted European efforts in stimulating and mobilising investments.

The **land transport** policy objectives are to promote efficient, safe and secure travel for passengers and goods, an area in which citizens and enterprises participate in facilitating these goals. Strengthening the European railway network will be a distinctive part of the Presidency. Progress on the Fourth Railway Package is instrumental for the development of the single EU transport area, which contributes to a more competitive and modern public transport infrastructure across the EU. The Presidency will continue the discussions on all parts of the package. The Presidency will work to finalise negotiations with the European Parliament on the technical pillar based on substantial progress that has been achieved during previous presidencies. In order to achieve further progress on the remaining elements of the package, discussions started by the Italian Presidency will be continued. To maintain high levels of road safety, the Presidency will ensure that the final adoption of the Cross-Border Enforcement Directive is ensured within the time limits that have been set out by the Court of Justice. The Presidency will also formalise the agreement reached on the weights and dimensions proposal. A policy debate on the planned interim review of the Road Safety Policy

Orientations may be envisaged, allowing the Member States to give their input in this crucial subject. In order to highlight the importance of the common Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) and the established corridors, the Presidency intends to enable a ministerial discussion that would focus on the development, implementation and financing of the TEN-T transport network infrastructure. This will be also an opportunity to look at the practical implementation of the Investment plan for Europe in the field of transport. In this context, the next TEN-T Days will take place in Riga at the end of June. Furthermore, given the high priority the Presidency attaches to the development of efficient Asia-Europe transport corridors, the Third ASEM Transport Ministers' Meeting will be held in Riga on 29-30 April 2015.

The **aviation** sector, which smoothly connects the EU both internally and with the rest of the world, is a prerequisite for a competitive and prosperous Europe. Europe is experiencing sustained air traffic growth that calls for a reform of air traffic management in Europe in order to conduct operations under the safest, most cost-efficient, flight-efficient, and passenger-orientated conditions. Therefore, the Presidency will be open to continue the

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work on the SES II+ package as well as the slots proposal, provided that there is a solution on the bilateral issue among the Member States concerned. Moreover, the Presidency would be ready to seek progress in the Council on the proposal concerning the minimum rights for air passengers. The Presidency believes that it is the right time to start a political discussion on Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS). Therefore, the Presidency intends to devote attention to this rapidly developing area during the Aviation Conference in Riga.

Maritime transport is and will be an important long-term contributor to Europe's economy and the quality of life of the European people. The Presidency will strive to secure the right international environment for maritime transport and intends to promote all the initiatives facilitating growth and enhancing competitive European shipping. As regards the ports sector, once the European Parliament has adopted its first reading position, the Presidency may seek further progress on the Commission's proposal to establish a framework for market access to port services and the financial transparency of ports.

The EU's **inland waterway transport sector** is an important catalyst for the future development of the EU internal market and a more sustainable and effective transport network. With this in mind, the Presidency will endeavour to start work on the revised proposal laying down technical requirements for inland waterway vessels.

Telecommunications is one of the fastest-evolving sectors globally, and one in which the Digital Single Market provides a substantial growth potential for Europe. Communication networks and technologies should become a driving force for the economy and for

innovation in Europe. Through the process of seizing and preserving these opportunities, the EU must ensure that Europe's citizens and businesses are getting the most out of digital technologies. Improving cybersecurity is a pre-condition for the functioning of our societies and economies. We see the Network and Information Security Directive (NIS) as an important tool for improving the quality of cybersecurity, both on a national and EU level, and for facilitating international cooperation. Acknowledging that the NIS Directive proposal has entered its final phase, the Presidency will work towards reaching an agreement with the European Parliament.

In view of making further progress in strengthening the Digital Single Market and in evolving the legal framework, the Presidency will seek an overall compromise on the proposal for a regulation laying down measures concerning the European single market for electronic communications and to achieve a Connected Continent (TSM). The guiding principle will be to find a balance between a high quality of services and a reasonable cost for European citizens. The Presidency also intends to make an effort to finalise the work on the Web Accessibility Directive, which aims to improve the accessibility of public sector bodies' websites to all users, in particular people with functional limitations. The Presidency aims to make significant progress regarding the Decision establishing a programme on interoperability solutions for European public administrations, businesses and citizens (ISA²) in order to support cross-border and cross-sector interaction for European public administrations, enterprises and citizens.

The Presidency will facilitate the discussions among the Member States regarding the

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Europe 2020 mid-term review and the Annual Growth Survey in relevant Council formations, where special attention will be paid to digital aspects. The Presidency is planning also to organise and host the Digital Assembly in Riga in June 2015 to discuss emerging challenges related to the building of a vibrant digital economy and society in Europe.

To address additional efforts needed to advance the establishment of the **Digital Single Market**, which would increase European competitiveness and respond to existing challenges, the Presidency plans to hold political discussions on the anticipated Digital Single Market Strategy. In order to advance further digitalisation, the Presidency in general will attach great importance to the principle of 'digital by default' – the Presidency will highlight discussions on digital skills and the next steps regarding the promotion of eGovernment. Attention will be also devoted to the aspects of interoperability, web accessibility and the digital transformation of the public sector in order to make it efficient and innovative.

In connection to the **external digital agenda**, the main issue for the Presidency will be internet governance. The Presidency will closely monitor, and if necessary, act upon, the developments in this field, especially taking into account the approaching announced transition of the stewardship of the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) function and enhancing the accountability of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN).

Within the **energy policy** sector, the Presidency will focus on the development of the Energy Union concept, recognising five pillars identified by the Commission and

following an open dialogue with the Member States. The Presidency will devote its efforts to ensuring that the discussions on the Energy Union concept are launched in early February and the main principles are defined within the first quarter of 2015. Following the establishment of the Energy Union process, the Presidency would work on the implementation plan. The Presidency intends to continue discussions on the completion and further development of the internal energy market. First of all, it will pay attention to energy infrastructure, inter alia to the aim of ending Member States' isolation from European networks by 2015, and to the 10% interconnection target. The Presidency will invite the Commission to provide monitoring data on recently adopted projects of common interest (PCIs), and will follow the process of creation of the second list of PCIs. Secondly, the Presidency will pay attention to such crucial elements of the internal energy market as the regulatory framework (especially network codes for electricity and gas) and accompanying measures on the retail markets.

Energy security is an important part of the Presidency's work programme. Taking into account the October 2014 European Council conclusions, the Presidency will continue to follow the implementation of European Energy Security Strategy. Assessment of the implemented short term measures would provide significant input for further discussions. The Presidency is also committed to contribute towards medium and long term actions.

Regarding the 2030 Framework for Climate and Energy Policy, following the decisions of the European Council in October 2014 the Presidency will work on a coherent governance model. Complying with this

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task, as well as respecting future outcomes of the Paris Conference, the first elements of the governance structure will be developed. In this context the central issue would be the assessment of the benefits that regional cooperation could provide.

The Presidency will continue the efforts of previous Presidencies towards the development of a sustainable energy policy and, in particular, will aim to reach a second reading agreement with the European Parliament on the Indirect Land Use Change (ILUC) proposal. The Presidency will continue

moving towards a more energy efficient Europe. Moreover, the Presidency will support and facilitate work that is aimed at the improvement of the Energy Labelling Directive and the Eco-Design regulations for respective groups of products.

The Presidency will pay due attention to ongoing negotiations on energy issues within international fora, including within the European neighbourhood, and will further explore the modernisation of several multilateral cooperation formats, such as the Energy Community and the Energy Charter.

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H. Agriculture and Fisheries

The basic function of agriculture and fisheries is to provide consumers with safe and healthy food, while preserving the environment and ensuring the vitality of rural areas. The Presidency will drive forward measures that help areas to be competitive when it comes to job creation, qualitative and sustainable agriculture, the food industry, and the forestry and fisheries sectors. In order to enhance the competitiveness of European agricultural production, the Presidency will continue to promote the development of sustainable, innovative and environmentally friendly agricultural, food, and fisheries sectors throughout the EU. The Presidency will also continue to support all the efforts towards ensuring that animal and plant health and food safety standards are strengthened and enforced in the whole of the agri-food chain.

Simplification is one of the main cornerstones of the reformed **Common Agricultural Policy**. Therefore, the Presidency will pay particular attention to this issue. The Presidency will explore the possibilities to advance work on the Commission proposals to revise the aid schemes for the supply of fruit, vegetables and milk to schools, thus improving healthy eating habits amongst school children. The simplification of the **administrative procedures** and the safeguarding of quality will be considered whilst examining the Commission's proposal for a review of the regulation regarding organic farming, therefore also contributing to the efficiency of checks and balances, a more reliable import regime, and also fraud prevention.

To provide simple but effective **veterinary** legislation and to assure a high level of human and animal health protection, the Presidency intends to work towards reaching an agreement with the European Parliament on the legislative proposal on animal health, which sets out a clear and single legal framework for the prevention and control of animal diseases that are transmissible between animals and to humans. As the proposal introduces the principle of biosecurity as one of the key tools for the prevention of transmissible diseases that

can be spread within the animal population, the Presidency will organise an international seminar in Riga during spring 2015 which will focus on the need for increased biosecurity.

In order to establish the basis for a more integrated and horizontal approach on **official controls** in the whole agri-food chain, the Presidency will continue work towards a compromise among the Member States and intends to launch negotiations with the European Parliament aiming to reach an agreement on the regulation for official controls along the food chain. The Presidency will continue to work also on the legislative proposal for a regulation on the zoo-technical and genealogical conditions for trade in and imports into the Union of breeding animals and their germinal products, as well as regulations regarding the placement on the market of veterinary medicines and medicated feed.

Particular efforts will be devoted to the **food safety** area. In this regard the Presidency will strive to finalise work on the legislation on novel food and reach an agreement with the European Parliament on caseins and caseinates. This will contribute to ensuring food safety and good public health, and will secure the functioning of the internal market,

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whilst also supporting food sector innovations, providing more uniform conditions for business operators and aligning the EU requirements to the relevant international standards.

When taking into account the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and high-level EU **phytosanitary standards** in health and environmental policies, the Presidency will continue discussions on the compromise text on a harmonised approach to protective measures against pests on plants as part of a package of legislation reviews that are related to the health of plants. The Presidency will also start the examination of the fertilisers regulation and will continue representing the interests of the EU and its Member States under the International Plant Protection Convention, which aims to incorporate and strengthen these interests in the area of phytosanitary matters, on an international basis in accordance with the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM) 9 agenda.

The Presidency will target common efforts in order to achieve a balanced and efficient EU approach towards the implementation

of the EU Forestry Strategy. With the aim of ensuring sustainable and responsible **forest management**, the Presidency will continue to promote the European model of forest management globally. An endeavour will be dedicated also to the elaboration of the EU position and representation of the EU model at the United Nations Forum on Forests in New York, in May 2015.

In order to ensure the sustainable management of **fisheries** and the goal to achieve Maximum Sustainable Yield for all stocks, the Presidency will work to ensure progress on the multi-annual management plans. A new framework of technical measures will be regarded as an essential element of this effort. The work on aligning various existing regulations with the Lisbon Treaty will be continued accordingly. A special effort will be devoted to the appropriate representation and coordination of the EU's position in the negotiations on fisheries partnership agreements with third world countries and to meetings that are planned within multilateral organisations and with the coastal countries on fisheries issues.

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I. Environment

Action that can be taken to protect the environment and to promote the sustainable management of natural resources covers a wide range of areas, including biodiversity, ecosystems, air quality, waste management, water issues, and the sound management of chemicals. Based on the progress achieved by the end of 2014, the Presidency will continue to work on those issues that are related to the 2030 Framework for Climate and Energy Policy as necessary. As a priority issue, the Presidency will lead the preparation of the EU contribution to international climate negotiations with a view to reaching a new legally-binding agreement on the global climate change regime in Paris at the end of 2015. The Presidency will pursue ongoing efforts towards a reduction of environmental pressures and will facilitate policy processes towards improving the quality of life for EU citizens, including the improvement of air quality.

In the area of **climate change**, while taking into account decisions made by the October 2014 European Council, the Presidency will move forward with the legislative proposal on the Market Stability Reserve to strengthen the EU Emissions Trading System as a market-based mechanism and to improve the operation of the carbon market. The year 2015 will be a crucial year for international climate change negotiations. One of the most important items on the Presidency's agenda will be the preparations for a global agreement on a climate change regime for the post-2020 period, to be concluded in Paris at the 21st Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The preparation, submission, and representation of the EU position at the UNFCCC meetings will be crucial in advancing the negotiations towards reaching an agreement. The political debate within the Environmental Council and the exchange of views during informal meetings of Environment Ministers will provide further guidance.

Concerning the **resource efficiency and green growth** agenda, the Presidency will organise a debate of the Environment Ministers in March on the further integration of environment aspects in the European

Semester process and in the Europe 2020 Strategy, in particular with regard to resource efficiency. The Presidency will also follow closely the initiatives to promote a circular economy and efficient waste management. In the field of air quality, the Presidency will continue to work towards achieving better air quality throughout Europe, in particular by seeking a deal on the proposal for the Directive for Medium-sized Combustion Plants. With a view to the Biodiversity Strategy mid-term review, the Presidency will organise discussions during the informal Environment Ministers meeting as well as expert discussions to provide input.

The Presidency aims to provide input into numerous **international environmental processes**. These processes range from the sound management of chemicals to waste, from biodiversity and species protection to biosafety, and will require intensive and detailed preparations within the Council and a coordination of the EU positions for international meetings. The Presidency will coordinate the EU's position and participation at the back-to-back meetings held by the Conference of the Parties (COP) for the three UN Chemicals and Waste Conventions (the Rotterdam, Stockholm and Basel Conventions),

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which will be held under the leitmotif, 'From science to action' and which will be one of the major international environmental events held during the Presidency. Therefore, the Presidency will facilitate, as necessary, the EU's input in the preparation for the entering into force of the Minamata Convention on Mercury. Equal importance will be given to the preparation for the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat, known as the Ramsar Convention. In the context of the Working Group of the Parties on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment under

the Espoo Convention and the Working Group of the Parties under the Aarhus Convention on the international agenda, the Presidency will facilitate the preparation of EU contributions as appropriate for the respective Convention Working Groups. The year 2015 in international fora will be crucial when it comes to arriving at a universal post-2015 framework for sustainable development and poverty eradication. The Presidency will place a strong emphasis on shaping a comprehensive EU contribution to international negotiations on sustainable development objectives and sustainable development goals leading up to the UN Summit in September 2015.

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J. Education, Youth, Culture and Sport

In the framework of the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council, the Presidency will pay particular attention to developing a closer link with the broader economic and social challenges that the EU is facing, and to the EU growth and jobs strategy in particular. The Presidency is committed to enhance social well-being and the quality of life of European citizens by ensuring the full use of the potential of new digital technologies in education, culture, and the audio-visual sector. New technologies need to be employed to a greater extent when tackling the e-skills gap and maintaining the intrinsic values and principles of European citizens. A focus on strengthening communities at the grassroots level, specifically addressing various issues to boost child and youth empowerment, is essential for the further improvement of the EU's competitiveness and the EU's global role.

The Presidency intends to strengthen the important role of **education and training** in promoting economic growth, investments and well-being. In this regard the Presidency will focus on providing a new impetus for strengthening the education agenda in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy and achieving the objectives that have been set. This should be done through developing a closer link between the Europe 2020 Strategy and the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020). The 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of 'Education and Training 2020' will not only assess the overall progress of the Strategic Framework in the form of an interim evaluation, but will have a much more forward-looking approach by seeking to establish priority areas and fields for cooperation during the next work cycle. The Presidency will facilitate discussions, therefore contributing to the preparation of the Joint Report 2015.

The Presidency will continue working on enhanced cooperation in **vocational education and training**, having regard to both previous achievements and current and future challenges, and will facilitate

discussions on the future of vocational education and training. It aims to strengthen cooperation in this sector among the EU Member States, candidate countries, EEA member countries, and social partners in order to ensure that education systems are able to provide people with the skills and competences they need in order to be able to succeed in the labour market.

The Presidency intends to further support the internationalisation of higher education. This will be achieved by strengthening **international co-operation in education** between European and Asian countries when holding the 5th ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting in Riga. The discussions will highlight the results and outcome of the ASEM Education Process since the 4th ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME4). The ministers will also discuss the priorities and activities for the next years in order to ensure closer cooperation among ASEM countries and to improve comparability between different education systems in both regions. Furthermore, an evaluation of the Bologna process is expected in the field of higher education with a view to preparing for the Bologna Ministerial Conference to be held in Yerevan, Armenia.

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Recognising the pre-school and primary school age as being of key importance for a child's personal and intellectual development, the Presidency intends to address the role of early childhood education and **primary education** in fostering creativity, innovation and digital skills. The Presidency will strive for the adoption of the Council conclusions on this issue. Having in mind that the EU Member States are comprised of regions and territories that require different financial solutions in regard to ensuring access to education and the uniformity of its levels of quality, the Presidency intends to hold discussions on the accessibility of education and effectiveness of investments. Last, but not least, the Presidency intends to facilitate discussions on issues related to transparency and the recognition of skills and qualifications for mobility and employability and the way forward for EU policies.

The Presidency will work on the implementation of the EU Work Plan for **Youth** 2014–2015, focusing on the development and role of the cross-sector approach to policy-making, especially with regard to effectively addressing the socioeconomic challenges of young people. The Presidency will seek to further advance the contribution of the youth sector when it comes to achieving the relevant Europe 2020 Strategy objectives. The Presidency plans to propose the adoption of the Council conclusions on this topic and it will organise the EU Youth Conference, which will focus on how to empower young people in political participation in democratic life in Europe, and will discuss the results of the structured dialogue with young people. To further strengthen cooperation with young people in the Eastern Partnership countries, the Presidency will host the second Eastern Partnership Youth Forum.

Culture and creativity are at the heart of smart, sustainable and inclusive development and growth. The Presidency will follow the work on the Europe 2020 Strategy mid-term review process from the cultural and creative sector's perspective. One of the Presidency's objectives will be to highlight culture not only as a means and an instrument for growth, but also as a development goal. The Presidency will seek ways to further enhance cultural accessibility and participation in the digital age to strengthen Europe as a creative and innovative Union in order to address the challenges of the 21st century. The Presidency will organise two conferences within the framework of the annual Creativity Week in Latvia in order to spark debate and raise awareness on the positive contribution and impact of cultural and creative crossovers to other sectors. This will encourage the development of policies for more targeted transversal cooperation, including the dialogue between cultural heritage, contemporary architecture, and high-quality design. The Presidency will seek to adopt the Council conclusions on cultural and creative crossovers to stimulate innovation, economic sustainability and social inclusion.

The Presidency will also continue to support work that is aimed to improve evidence-based policy-making to demonstrate the social and economic impact of culture. The Presidency will also welcome a debate on reusing the digital cultural heritage in education and the creative industries during the Europeana strategy meeting.

Rapid technological and market developments have predetermined the need to rethink Europe's approach to **audiovisual** content in the digital era. The Presidency will follow the progress that will be made by the

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Commission during its envisaged review (refit procedure) of the Audiovisual Media Services (AVMS) Directive, and will be prepared to react to any developments. The Presidency will host an audiovisual conference that will focus on the main issues raised by the Commission's Green Paper, entitled 'Preparing for a Fully Converged Audiovisual World: Growth, Creation and Value', and the report by the High Level Group on Media Freedom and Pluralism, 'A free and pluralistic media to sustain European democracy'.

In the field of **sport**, the Presidency will work on the implementation of the EU Work Plan for Sport 2014-2017. Grassroots sport should be strengthened as an instrument for the development of European human capital, especially among young people. It contributes towards acquiring and developing transversal

skills that enhance employability and the personal and professional development of individuals. The Presidency plans to propose that Council conclusions on this topic be approved. The Presidency intends to continue discussions on strengthening a healthy lifestyle among people of all ages and encouraging lifelong participation in sports. In this regard, discussions and an exchange of experiences are planned on efficient models of cooperation between public authorities and sports movements in Member States. The Presidency will follow the progress of the finalisation of the Council of Europe Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions, and in the area of anti-doping the Presidency will continue to ensure that the EU and its Member States cooperate and coordinate effectively in order to remain a strong voice in the World Anti-Doping Agency.