

Results of the first three months of the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

COMPETITIVE EUROPE

➤ *Agreement in the Council on the European Fund for Strategic Investments*

The Presidency was able to reach agreement at the Council on one of the main initiatives for promoting EU competitiveness – the European Fund for Strategic Investments. Negotiations will be launched with the European Parliament in order to achieve a political agreement so that the Fund could become operational as soon as possible, promoting the attraction 315 billion euros worth of investment to the EU economy for the development of infrastructure, education, research and energy sectors and providing support for small and medium-sized enterprises. The projects will be selected on the basis of their additionality and alignment to EU policy, and their economic and technical feasibility, as well as their potential for attracting private investment. The Fund will make it possible to carry out a number of projects thus facilitating investment into European Union economy in the longer term.

➤ *Process commenced for the establishment of an Energy Union*

The High Level Conference in Riga on 6 February launched the process for the formation of an Energy Union. The Energy Union is a response to the current geopolitical situation in Europe and is expected to strengthen the EU's energy independence. The Union is expected to address five dimensions of energy policy that are linked together: energy security and solidarity; a fully integrated internal energy market; energy efficiency as a contribution to the moderation of energy demand; decarbonisation of the economy; and research, innovation and competitiveness.

➤ *Agreement achieved on the European Union's contribution to the new global climate agreement*

In advance of the Climate Conference in Paris, the Presidency has been working actively to prepare a common EU opinion and has presented it at the Geneva Climate Change Talks. EU Ministers for Environment have reached an agreement on EU commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which is the EU contribution to the new global climate agreement after 2020. The EU has set a target achieve at least 40% domestic reduction in greenhouse gas emissions compared to 1990 levels by 2030.

➤ *Agreement achieved on measures supporting a fully functional Single Market*

An agreement has been achieved on priority measures to remove barriers and gaps to the full functioning of the EU Single Market (conclusions of the Competitiveness Council of 2 March). Amongst these, a focus should be placed on the implementation and enforcement in EU Member States of legislation regulating the Single Market – the Commission has pledged readiness to devote attention to this issue. The Commission and EU Member States will have to devote increased attention to the application of the mutual recognition principle ensuring that a product lawfully

marketed in one Member State should be allowed to be marketed in any other Member State. The European Commission is expected to propose an EU wide action plan in 2016.

➤ *The first phase of the European Semester has been concluded*

In the Council, the Presidency organised political discussions and contributions to the Annual Growth Survey, summarising those in a single Synthesis Report. The discussions addressed the current political initiatives – the Investment Plan for Europe, the Energy Union – and the upcoming initiatives – the Digital Single Market strategy and the Internal Market Strategy for goods and services – as well as highlighting the importance of transport infrastructure. The Synthesis Report draws attention to the limited progress with the implementation of country-specific recommendations and underscores one of the Latvian Presidency priorities – the digitalisation of European economies. The second phase of the European Semester will focus on the examination of country-specific recommendations within committees and approval at the Council.

DIGITAL EUROPE

➤ *Progress achieved with important legislation in the digital sector*

Reduced mobile phone roaming fees

With the new approach to roaming proposed by the Latvian Presidency, impetus was given to the work on Telecommunications Single Market proposal. On 4 March, the Member States agreed on a mandate for the Presidency to start negotiations with the European Parliament on new rules to reduce mobile phone roaming fees and EU-wide rules on open internet/net neutrality. The Council's agreement envisages a considerable reduction in roaming prices as of the middle of 2016. This will ensure a basic roaming allowance for calls, text-messaging and data essential when travelling at domestic prices without any additional charges.

Data protection

At the March meeting, the Justice and Home Affairs Council reached a partial general approach on several provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation. The rules will strengthen the ability of an individual to protect their privacy in the public space and ensure a one-stop-shopping mechanism in cases of cross-border data protection violations. The new legal framework will ensure harmonised data processing rules for companies across the EU.

Network and information security standards

The Member States agreed on a mandate for the Presidency to continue negotiations with the European Parliament on the proposal for the Network and Information Security Directive. This will be the first piece of legislation to set out a basis for network and information security standards in the European Union. The proposal will lay down a common approach to reporting by operators of critical infrastructure (such as energy, transport and banking) and public administration of incidents that concern cyber-security in one or more Member States.

ENGAGED EUROPE

➤ *Agreement on measures for strengthening EU internal security*

The informal meeting of the Ministers of Justice and Home Affairs in Riga on 29-30 January adopted the Riga Joint Statement on countering the threat of terrorism. Building on what had been started in Riga, the Justice and Home Affairs Council agreed on specific Counter-Terrorism measures on which progress should be made by June. These include systematic checks of travel documents and persons at the EU's external borders, preventing use of Internet for purpose of terrorism and radicalisation, and fighting illicit trafficking of firearms. A decision has been made to conclude an agreement by the end of the year on one of the main instruments for the fight against terrorism – the EU Passenger Name Record.

➤ *European external security-related issues are highlighted*

The Presidency has facilitated the review of the European Security Strategy. By the end of April, the EU High Representative, Federica Mogherini, is planning to produce a report on the global role of the EU in a changing international environment. The Presidency expects that, based on this report, the Foreign Affairs Council in May and the June European Council will propose a revision of the European Security Strategy.

The Presidency emphasised the need to develop capabilities that would increase EU resilience against hybrid threat (propaganda, cyber-attacks, foreign fighters, infrastructure security, the security of the EU's external border and other elements). We consider that the June European Council should set the development of capabilities and the promotion of cooperation in fighting the hybrid threat as a task in the further development of the Common Security and Defence Policy, and that this should also be reflected in the European Security Strategy.

The European Council on 19-20 March supported this initiative of the Presidency and invited the High Representative, in cooperation with Member States and EU institutions, to prepare by June an action plan on strategic communication.

➤ *In preparation for the Eastern Partnership Summit, events have taken place to promote cooperation in various areas with Eastern Partnership countries*

On Thursday 29 January, the second joint EU and Eastern Partnership Justice and Home Affairs Ministerial Meeting took place in Riga, confirming the importance of cooperation in the justice and home affairs sector. The Ministers discussed progress in the judiciary and law enforcement.

On 10-11 February, Riga hosted the second Eastern Partnership Youth Forum, which addressed questions of education and youth employment.

To promote the shaping a common perspective of EU Member States on the Eastern Partnership and the European Neighbourhood Policy, and contributing to further efforts on the preparation of a European Neighbourhood Policy Review and the Eastern Partnership Summit, an informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers took place on 6-7 March in Riga.

With the aim of strengthening cooperation with Eastern Partnership countries regarding the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the Latvian Presidency held a seminar for Eastern Partnership countries in Brussels on 19 March.

The Eastern Partnership Ministerial Conference entitled "Tuberculosis and Multi-Drug Resistance" on 30-31 March, brought together ministers, officials from EU Member States, EU candidate countries and potential member states, the European Economic Area and the Eastern Partnership countries as well as representatives from international organisations and NGOs. Discussions at the conference addressed the treatment and prevention of tuberculosis through development of a long term approach in health care systems.

➤ ***Decisions have been made on support for Ukraine***

In February, the Council agreed to issue an extra EUR 1.8 billion of micro-financial assistance to Ukraine, which, in addition to the earlier aid programme of EUR 1.6 billion implemented in 2014 and the beginning of 2015, amounts to the largest allotment of financial aid ever allocated by the EU to a third country.

The search for solutions to the conflict in the east of Ukraine was continued through a set of measures agreed in the Normandy format for the implementation of agreements signed in Minsk. It is noteworthy that the European Council in March confirmed the connection between full implementation of the Minsk agreements and restrictive measures against Russia remaining in force.

On 29 January, the extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council made a decision to extend until September 2015, the first package of sanctions (adopted in March 2014) that imposed travel restrictions on a number of Russian government officials.

➤ ***A contribution is made to advancement of negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership***

The 8th round of negotiations took place in February. The EU and the United States negotiators have agreed on an intensive schedule for the coming months, and the next round of talks will be held in Washington D.C. from 20 to 24 April. The informal Trade Council on 25 March in Riga engaged in a discussion on solutions for introducing reforms to the investor-to-state dispute resolution mechanism.

➤ ***A contribution is made to international negotiations on the new post-2015 sustainable development goals***

On 9 January, Latvia as the country presiding over the EU Council hosted the launch of the first European year devoted to foreign policy issues, namely, development cooperation. The Latvian Presidency coincides with the most active stage in the UN's intergovernmental negotiations on new Sustainable Development Goals and their funding and implementation which will underpin the advancement of growth and prosperity on a global scale. On 12 March, the informal Meeting of Development Ministers in Brussels held the first policy debate on the EU position concerning the funding of the new goals. On 2 March, Riga hosted a conference on women's economic empowerment. The conference conclusions will contribute to the process of formulation of the new development goals.