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INTRODUCTION



Creating European unity, a journey that started 60 years ago, continues to be an ambitious and forward-looking endeavour. The European Union started as a dream of few and became the hope of many. The EU's four fundamental freedoms – a distant dream and goal in 1957 – are now functioning and accepted as self-evident. Europeans have been living together in peace for longer than ever before. European citizens and companies enjoy unprecedented freedoms and prosper across the globe.



As the EU is facing unprecedented challenges, both at the global and European level, Estonia as the Member State holding the Council presidency is confident that there is sufficient unity and determination in Europe to tackle all problems dynamically. While negotiating the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union in accordance with European Council guidelines and negotiating directives adopted by the Council, we also need to adapt to a union of 27 as swiftly as possible. We are confident that we will have the strength and capability to turn these challenges into opportunities, and we have reason to view the European Union and its future with great hope. European unity is expressed through both speaking with one voice and joint action. Together we are stronger than 60 years ago: hundreds of millions of Europeans benefit from living in a greater union. A union that has set aside old divisions and is willing to defend what has been achieved. A union that is determined and tenacious to resolve the current and future challenges. A union where Member States and institutions share responsibilities and take joint decisions that serve the interests of and improve life for all European citizens.





The Estonian Presidency strives for unity through balance; however, this does not mean settling for the lowest common denominator. Unity means broad-based support for the founding values of the European idea and the goals of the European Union, as well as respect for diversity – a fundamental European value – and regarding it as an asset. In building on these principles, Europe – a rather disparate political conglomeration – can succeed in striking a balance between various points of view, interests and traditions. Tenacity, unity and future-oriented thinking require the willingness to compromise from all parties and a constant balancing act between preservation and new developments. ‘One for all and all for one’ means that together we are stronger.



At the EU’s 60th anniversary summit in Rome we endorsed a declaration of intent for the next decade. Debates on the future of Europe continue. The priorities of the Estonian Presidency build on the European Council’s strategic agenda and the common goals formulated in Rome. The following are important objectives for both Estonia and the Presidency: an open and innovative European economy, a safe and secure Europe, a digital Europe and the free movement of data, and an inclusive and sustainable Europe. In pursuing those objectives, we will respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, commit to the principle of better regulation and examine opportunities for using various e-solutions.





AN OPEN AND INNOVATIVE EUROPEAN ECONOMY



An open European economy has always been able to adapt to changing circumstances. The Estonian Presidency intends to strive to make the most of transforming challenges and crises into opportunities and using them to promote a strong single market – a key driver of economic welfare for citizens. Europe must be open to innovation and promote fair competition in order to encourage businesses to develop innovative products and modern services. The European economy can only grow and weather crises if society uses the latest technologies and scientific knowledge. Excellent research is an investment in the future, which creates the capacity to cope with the rapidly developing changes and challenges in society. All Europeans should benefit from growth.

Economic recovery and job creation are supported by an attractive business environment and functioning trading partnerships

The European economy can only flourish if the business environment supports creativity and an entrepreneurial spirit and is transparent, simple and free of red tape. In order to create growth and jobs, we need to unleash the full potential of the single market in services by simplifying administrative formalities for businesses and making the most of the opportunities offered by digital technologies. Boosting the cross-border provision of services will have a direct positive impact on the economy as a whole, will support the set-up and expansion of businesses and offer greater choice and better prices for consumers. It is therefore

Estonia's objective to make significant progress in negotiations on the services package, including a services e-card, services notification procedure and the proportionality assessment of professional qualifications.



It should be easy to start a business in the European Union. By utilising the opportunities of the information society, all operators should make maximum use of digital technology in carrying out all activities related to a company, from establishment to winding down operations. Creating a better business environment and the exercise of the freedom of establishment in the European Union are facilitated by harmonised rules for cross-border mergers and divisions and for the transfer of the registered seat of a company from one Member State to another. Estonia wishes to actively proceed with discussions on developments in **company law** and is ready to start negotiations with the European Commission on the proposed reform package.



The goal of the Estonian Presidency is to ensure that the European Union continues to be an active **advocate of free trade** on the international arena. Estonia is committed to contributing to the initiation of negotiations on new free trade agreements and to the continuation and conclusion of ongoing negotiations. Estonia also

wishes to continue to promote free trade with the EU's partners within the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The Eleventh WTO Ministerial Conference, to be held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, is an important milestone in the improvement of global trade rules.

Investments, a stable banking sector and a transparent fiscal policy will enhance Europe's competitiveness

Estonia attaches importance to the level of growth of both private and public investment and will work to ensure that the **Strategic Investment Fund** mandate will be extended. The Estonian Presidency aims to create optimal conditions for sustainable economic growth and a shock-resistant euro area. While the European **Economic and Monetary Union** has been strengthened in recent years, a number of projects are still ongoing. A stable and resilient banking sector will help to prevent economic and financial crises; the further reduction of risks is a necessary step towards completing the **banking union**. Estonia wants to further develop the proposals on establishing common rules in order to reduce risk and strengthen confidence in the banking sector. This will bolster financial stability and confidence in the euro and reduce pressure on using taxpayers' money to support the sector.

A functioning banking union and capital markets union will facilitate the distribution of risks between the private and public sector in the European Union and contribute to the funding of companies and financial stability. The European Commission has prepared a midterm review of the development of the **capital markets union**, for which Estonia plans to set out new goals in close cooperation with the Member States in Council Conclusions. In building on the Commission's capital markets union mid-term review, we will set out next steps for strengthening capital markets and removing restrictions on the free movement of capital.



The European tax landscape must take into account the impact of global change and remain an attractive market for companies at a time of increasing international competition. Tax evasion, avoidance and fraud undermine the competitiveness of honest operators and may result in considerable tax losses for the Member States. Estonia intends to launch negotiations on the **definitive cross-border VAT system**. The current temporary mechanism leaves scope for tax fraud. The definitive value added tax system will be based on the principle of taxation at the place of consumption. The development of cross-border e-commerce makes it necessary to **modernise VAT for cross-border e-commerce** in order to

facilitate cross-border e-commerce for SMEs, combat VAT fraud and ensure a level playing field between EU businesses and third-country businesses. Estonia intends to make progress on the initiative on VAT for e-commerce and conclude discussions on **VAT rates for e-books and e-publications**.



Estonia is working towards agreement in the Council of the European Union on a common **EU list of non-cooperative tax jurisdictions**. We will also launch discussions on whether to impose **mandatory rules on financial intermediaries and advisers to disclose tax avoidance schemes**.

The modern energy market combines an efficient energy supply system and consumer friendliness

Guided by the principles of a European **energy union**, Estonia will strive for an open and innovative European economy by developing common energy, climate, environmental and economic policies. The responsible and sustainable use of natural resources will contribute to the European Union's target to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% below 1990 levels by 2030 and to increase the competitiveness of the European Union.

The Estonian Presidency intends to address all important aspects of the energy union. We need to create the conditions for enhancing the role of consumers on the market. Retail markets and distribution networks should be adapted to the needs of all customers, including those generating electricity. Europe's approach to the electricity markets should be based on the principle of cooperation, which has great potential for saving energy. Estonia will make a strong contribution to the EU's efforts to develop energy markets that encourage energy efficiency and investments into energy production and connections. The **integration of European energy systems and markets** is essential for ensuring an affordable and secure energy supply for consumers.

The European Union budget contributes to the achievement of common objectives

By funding common objectives and policies, the European Union and Member States can achieve more than they would individually. **The debates on the future of the European Union budget** must consider the added value offered to the Member States through joint action at the European Union level, be it scientific cooperation, cross-border infrastructure projects, reducing disparities in the economic development of various regions, providing high quality food or conserving natural resources.



In the second half of 2017, the European Commission will publish interim reports on the results and achievements of the major thematic funding programmes – **Horizon 2020, the Connecting Europe Facility, Cohesion Policy funds and the Common Agricultural Policy funds** – together with possible guidelines for the future, and discussions on how to support the achievement of European Union political objectives in the budgetary period commencing in 2021. In the context of Horizon 2020 interim evaluation, Estonia intends to initiate a discussion on how to simplify the research and innovation partnering instruments, funded from the Framework Programme, and support the participation of newcomers. Estonia also plans to lead a discussion in the context of the Connecting Europe Facility mid-term review on the future framework for the cross-border infrastructure investments. Estonia wishes to advance the political discussion on the future of the cohesion policy, taking into account the long-term development needs of the European Union as well as its regions and supporting the continuation of a strong cohesion policy. Estonia believes that agricultural policy should continue in the European Union as a common policy funded from the European Union budget. The Estonian Presidency will have the opportunity to introduce a debate on the planning of the next multi-annual financial framework.

The European Union budget for 2018 should continue to support the competitiveness of the European Union, economic growth and recovery and employment as well as address the migration and security challenges. It is important to ensure a realistic budget that meets the objectives and requirements set for it. Estonia's task is to reach an agreement to ensure that the European Union has the necessary resources in its 2018 budget to achieve its objectives and implement its policies. Estonia will continue negotiations on the simplification of the European Union Financial Regulation and the related regulations, i.e. the **'omnibus' Regulation**, in order to implement the regulations from 1 January 2018. The European Union budget must be able to respond flexibly to the changing circumstances; the rules on the use of budget funds should be clearer and simpler.

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A purposeful use of the European Union budget is in our common interest. Abuse of the budget and VAT fraud must be responded to effectively. Estonia will seek to reach an agreement on the establishment of a **European Public Prosecutor's Office**.





A SAFE AND SECURE EUROPE



Ensuring the safety and security of Europe and the well-being of its citizens is the *raison d'être* of the European Union. The European Union's ability to fulfil this goal depends on developments in the European Union, its immediate neighbourhood and beyond and on the global stage. In recognition of the intrinsic link between the internal and external aspects of security, the Presidency will work to promote and uphold the objectives of the **Security Union** and those set out in the **Global Strategy**.



A Europe without internal borders requires common solutions on security, migration, asylum and external border policies. The Presidency will produce a mid-term review of the progress of the European Union in strengthening cooperation in the area of freedom, security and justice. We will continue to work towards ensuring a safe society based on

fundamental rights by ensuring a coherent and coordinated capacity to respond to emerging threats, such as emergencies caused by nature or technology, terrorism and hybrid threats. Estonia intends to utilise the opportunities provided by modern communication and information technologies, such as the interoperability of information systems and the improved quality of data exchange in accordance with the common European Union data protection rules, to prevent and thwart various types of crime.

Modern IT solutions and databases contribute to maintaining public security in the Schengen area

Europe without borders with the free movement of goods, services and persons is one of Europe's most important achievements that

affects us every day. The Presidency will continue efforts to **enhance security in the Schengen area** by strengthening cooperation and improving compensatory measures, particularly regarding the control and surveillance of the European Union's external borders. These actions will be accompanied by practical cooperation such as a more frequent and efficient exchange of information on serious crime.



The Presidency will work towards introducing modern IT solutions to enhance the security of the external borders of the Schengen area, while maintaining smooth border crossing. In order to make the control and surveillance of the European Union's external borders more efficient and to secure more detailed information on third country nationals entering or leaving the European Union, Estonia will seek an agreement on the new **European Entry/Exit system** for registering border crossings by third country nationals. Another objective is to reach the final stage of the negotiations on the **European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS)**, which is designed to register the crossing of the external border by visa-exempt third country nationals.



Law enforcement authorities must be able to exchange more precise information on criminals. Estonia will

focus on modernising the **Schengen Information System**, which is the main tool for data and information exchange between police, border control and customs authorities. The exchange of criminal records minimises the chances of criminals being able to hide their crimes by moving from one Member State to another. The Estonian Presidency will focus on the improvement of the **European Criminal Records Information System**.



Currently, the data held by the European Union border control and security authorities is fragmented and this is hindering their work. The best way to enhance information exchange is to make the information systems **interoperable** and facilitate clearly defined and justified access by authorities to the data held in these information systems.

Cross-border cooperation should be reinforced to tackle terrorism and organised crime more effectively

Terrorism has become a global security threat, which can be effectively prevented and thwarted only through a united stance. To combat terrorism and radicalisation effectively, we need to have a common understanding of the threats involved. We intend to focus both on the prevention of **radicalisation** and on building the



rapid response capabilities of the Member States. We want to bring the internal and external aspects of the fight against terrorism closer together and to develop joint expertise capacities. The Estonian Presidency intends to focus also on **building the capacity of neighbouring countries** to combat organised crime, including through closer cooperation with Ukraine.



Estonia will direct its efforts to achieving agreements on intensifying the fight against the financing of terrorism and organised crime and on prosecuting serious cross-border crime. The European Union needs to strengthen its capacity to **counter money laundering under criminal law** to ensure that crimes related to money laundering are prosecuted in the European Union on the basis of uniform principles. The existing European Union legislative framework on **mutual recognition of criminal asset freezing and confiscation orders** also needs to be modernised. A freezing or confiscation order issued in one Member State must be quickly and efficiently recognised and applicable in other Member States.



The possibility of using e-evidence and retaining communication data is a prerequisite in the effective fight against terrorism and other types of crime. **The improved availability**

and processing of e-evidence would significantly facilitate obtaining evidence in cross-border cases. Estonia wants to launch discussions on the collection and use of e-evidence. **Communication data** is often important evidence in criminal proceedings, in terms of both apprehending criminals and tracking the location of victims. Estonia will hold a wide-based discussion in order to find a European Union level solution for the retention of communication data.

A well-managed migration policy is needed for the development and security of the European Union

Migration policy requires a systematic approach that takes into account both internal and external aspects and focuses attention on the long-term perspective of the migration policy.



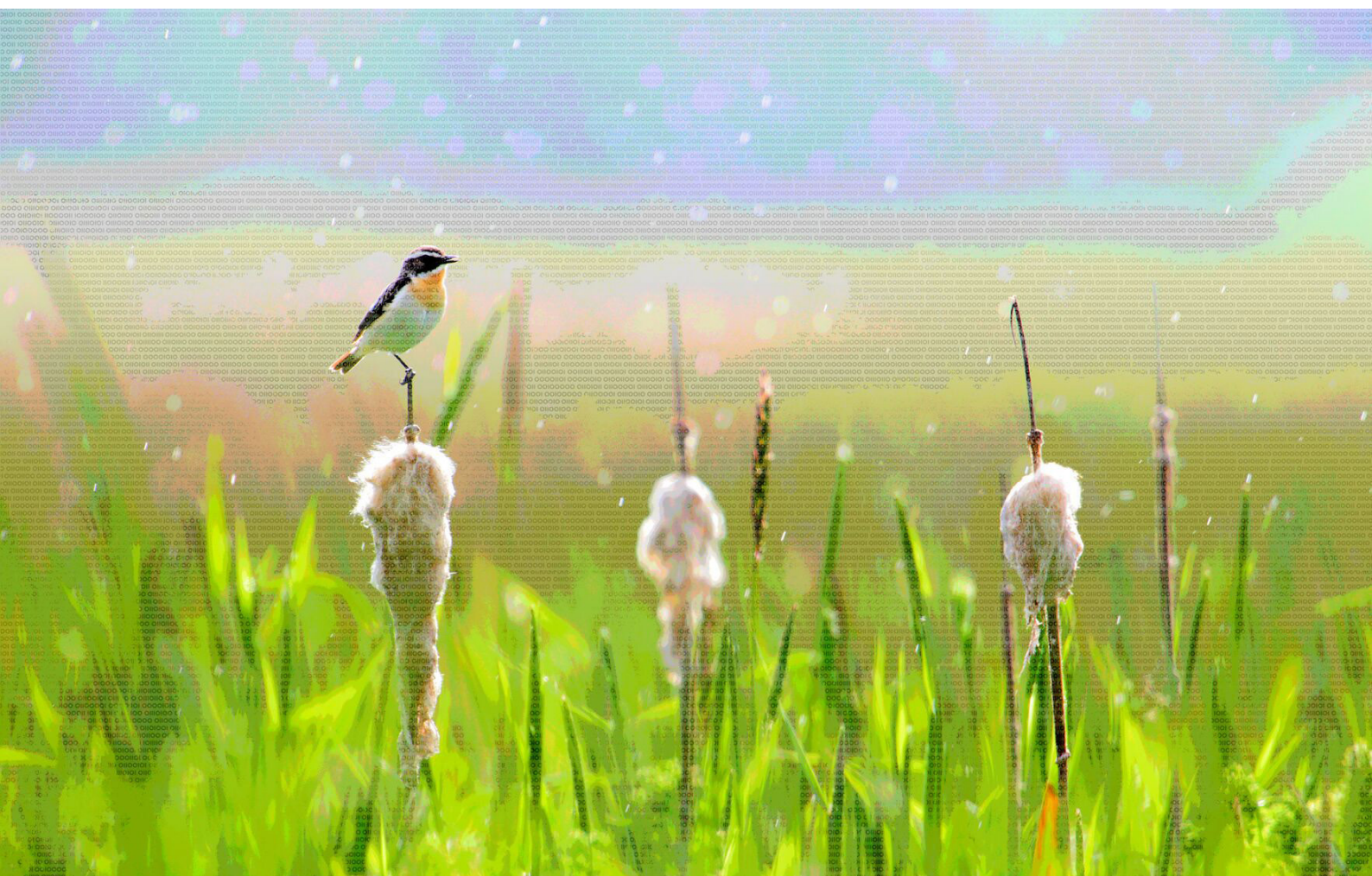
The Estonian Presidency will continue the implementation of the **partnership frameworks** between the European Union and third countries in cooperation with the main countries of origin and transit to ease migratory pressures. As a well-functioning return policy is an integral part of migration management, the EU must assist countries of origin through development cooperation

and investment, emphasising their obligation to readmit third country nationals. It is also essential to implement the **Valletta Action Plan** and the European Union Action Plan on Return together with its recommendations, which are designed to curb illegal migration. We must also monitor all actions and developments related to third countries, in order to swiftly respond to changing circumstances.

A well-managed external border is the cornerstone of an effective migration policy. Estonia will continue the efforts to reinforce the European Union's external border and draw more attention to land border management.

An effective migration policy would contribute positively to Europe's economic growth and competitiveness. Estonia wants to focus more attention on **legal migration**, and in particular to promote the legal migration of highly skilled labour and simplify internal mobility. Estonia will continue to pursue an agreement on the renewal of the European Union **Blue Card directive**.

Estonia will also continue work on modernising the **Common European Asylum System** to ensure its proper functioning and uniform conditions for people applying for and receiving asylum in Europe.



The European Union in a globalised world

In the area of external policy the Presidency supports the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy as chair of the Foreign Affairs Council in all its activities.



Ensuring security, peace and stability in **Europe's immediate neighbourhood and beyond** is an important goal for the EU. Therefore, the implementation of the objectives of the European **Neighbourhood Policy** shall be continued. Estonia strives to enhance the region's economy, democracy, human rights, rule of law and the promotion of prosperity and national resilience to cope with different types of security threats.



It is important to promote an efficient and effective **Eastern Partnership** by supporting the Eastern Partnership countries' sovereign choices, increased democracy, economic prosperity and stability. Estonia intends to contribute to the strengthening of relations between the six Eastern Partnership countries and the European Union. By enhancing dialogue and sectoral cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries and by supporting their reforms, we want to

ensure a tangible positive impact on the lives of the people in our partner countries and to enhance the resilience of these countries. Strategic communication is essential in explaining the European Union's objectives in the region and making our actions more visible and comprehensible. The November **Eastern Partnership summit** in Brussels will confirm the European Union's continued and longstanding support for the region.



With regards to the **European Union's southern neighbourhood**, Estonia intends to promote continued political dialogue and cooperation in the fields of economy and security. Besides intensifying cooperation in the security sector – conflict prevention and management; the fight against terrorism and radicalisation; and combating human trafficking – our southern neighbours need support in tackling socioeconomic challenges.



Estonia will focus on the promotion of the digital sector – eGovernment and e-services – to facilitate the implementation of better and more transparent governance in all regions.



The summits scheduled for the second half of 2017 will provide an opportunity to strengthen

partnerships with African, as well as with Latin American and Caribbean countries. A renewed EU-Africa partnership offers opportunities for various forms of cooperation, including in the fields of innovation, technology, eGovernment, youth and education. Estonia will continue the preparations for the renewal of the partnership framework between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and the Pacific countries as the ACP-EU Partnership Agreement (Cotonou Agreement) will expire in 2020.



Close **transatlantic relations** remain important. Therefore, Estonia will support continued dialogue on matters of common concern and interest, including the international fight against terrorism, cyber threats and trade.



Estonia will continue to support the implementation of the **European Union enlargement policy** within the broader framework of security, stability, democracy and rule of law in Europe. The Estonian approach is based on the understanding that countries, which respect and promote the core values of the European Union and meet the strict and fair conditionality, should be able to advance in the enlargement process.



In **development cooperation**, Estonia will continue contributing to the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals both inside and outside of the European Union. During the Presidency, the European Fund for Sustainable Development will be established under the External Investment Plan to mobilise additional resources to fund sustainable development in partner countries.



Regarding **humanitarian aid**, particular focus will be placed on protracted displacement. In the World Humanitarian Summit follow-up process, Estonia will focus on aid effectiveness and innovative solutions in humanitarian aid.

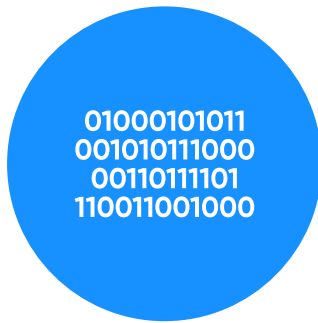
Closer defence cooperation and increased defence spending will strengthen security in Europe

In the field of European defence cooperation, Estonia will seek to enhance military capabilities of the European Union Member States, including **determining the level of defence spending and investments of the Member States** and reaching agreement on the revision of the common funding of European Union operations, notably to increase the usability of European Union

Battlegroups. Estonia supports and contributes to the discussions on **Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)**, the **Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD)** and a **European Defence Action Plan (EDAP)**. Estonia supports the Commission's initiatives, in particular in the field of defence research and development and in strengthening the European defence industrial base in order to create better opportunities for involving and funding the small and medium size enterprises operating in the sector.



In a new security environment, **identifying hybrid threats**, increasing the awareness of such threats and stepping up resilience measures have become essential to enable timely responses to threats. Estonia continues to contribute to the European Union's early warning system and to promote exchanges of experience between institutions and Member States. All the tools at the disposal of the European Union and NATO are required to tackle hybrid and cyber threats. Estonia supports **EU-NATO cooperation** through practical actions in accordance with the EU-NATO joint declaration of 2016 and contributes to the cooperation objectives in the field of **cyber defence**, including organising mutually open and coordinated exercises.



DIGITAL EUROPE AND THE FREE MOVEMENT OF DATA



A strong single market supporting growth and jobs must be connected and keep pace with both new technological developments and the increasing digitisation of society. Information and communications technology are no longer a specific sector; they are the backbone of all modern innovative economic systems. The internet and digital technologies change lives, jobs and societies, and they are integrated across all economic sectors and walks of life. However, technological progress also involves risks to our security and democracy, while at the same time offering new opportunities for defending our values.



Europe must keep pace with technological progress and fully exploit its potential. This will contribute to improving the everyday lives of citizens, businesses and Member States. Estonia's goal is to make progress

on the **Commission's Digital Single Market strategy measures**. We also want to advance discussions on the future of eGovernment, cyber security and the free movement of data, which are essential for the European Union's economy. Estonia will organise a range of events and a **digital summit** for open-minded discussions about Europe's digital future.

The free movement of data is essential for the development of a digital society

With technological progress, data has become a resource and a key driver of social development and economic growth. The European Union is in the early stages of a **data-driven economy**. The Estonian Presidency intends to stress the need to **develop a digital society in all areas of life**.





The European Union should **end the unjustified data location restrictions** of non-personal data, achieve **legal clarity on the ownership** of non-personal data and ensure the reliable storage and exchange of data based on the **'once-only' principle** in the public sector. Estonia is planning a broad debate on the free movement of data and on measures boosting the data economy.

High-speed, high-quality and widely available internet connection is the mainstay of a smart data-driven economy

Smart economy is based on the interoperability of data resources and digital technologies for the purpose of achieving economic success and the well-being of citizens. In order to promote **smart economy** in Europe, we need to focus on the initiatives that

contribute to the technology-based universal digitisation of the economy. In creating a favourable environment for new services, it is important to ensure **modern, accessible and secure electronic communications** across Europe by taking a major step forward towards a Gigabit Society, including the establishment of the **European Electronic Communications Code**.



The proposed **Single Digital Gateway** for simplifying cross-border service provision is also an important means of fostering entrepreneurship. It makes it easier for companies to enter the markets of other Member States, to navigate these markets and to obtain information about local rules and public services.



The development of e-commerce and e-services broadens the choice for Europeans

The Estonian Presidency focuses on the **development of cross-border e-commerce and e-services** for the benefit of both consumers and companies. A precondition for well-functioning e-commerce in Europe is the **protection of consumer interests** wherever they may live. In order to end unjustified geo-blocking in the European Union, an agreement must be reached on the **geo-blocking regulation**. In the absence of uniform contract law rules on the supply of digital content and internet sales is a barrier to e-commerce. Estonia seeks to move forward with negotiations on a **contract law package** to ensure legal certainty and clarity for entrepreneurs and consumers engaged in cross-border trade.



As copyright law must keep up with the development of digital solutions, Estonia seeks to move forward with the **copyright reform**. Under new market conditions, cross-border access to a wider variety of digital content protected by copyright should be further facilitated by such measures as levelling the free use regulation of protected works, while ensuring the functioning of a fair market in terms of copyright. Updating the legal area of **audiovisual media**

services contributes to ensuring the fair treatment of market participants, creates favourable conditions for the development of such services and gives consumers more choice. Estonia seeks to reach an agreement on amending the Audiovisual Media Services Directive.

Public e-services simplify also cross-border formalities

The EU eGovernment Action Plan 2016–2020 aims to develop well-functioning cross-border **digital public services** to reduce the administrative burden on businesses and citizens by making their interactions with public administrations easier and faster. Estonia wishes to ensure a sustainable and efficient implementation of the Action Plan and to accelerate the adoption of electronic identification (eID) and trust services.



Estonia intends to give attention to the application of the eGovernment principles in the initiatives launched in all sectors. The Presidency intends to launch a forward-looking debate culminating in the **Tallinn declaration on eGovernment** – a common understanding of Member States on how to achieve an efficient eGovernment in the European Union, also in a cross-border context. Estonia strives for an eGovernment supporting the single market and built on the important



principles of a well-functioning digital society: the 'digital by default', 'once-only' and 'no-legacy' principles and the free movement of data.



We also want to launch a discussion to promote **cooperation and coordination on e-health** in order to create the necessary preconditions for a wider use and cross-border movement of health data for the purposes of treatment, research and innovation and to promote data-based innovation in healthcare. To this end, we want to focus European Union cooperation on practical solutions that give people electronic access to and greater control over the use of their health data as well as enable them to consent to securely share their health data for the purposes of e-services.



Today, information technology is widely used in judicial procedures and in providing European Union citizens with better access to justice. As all people have the right of access to effective justice, the Estonian Presidency wants to contribute to the development of and to ensuring the sustainability of **e-justice**.



Estonia will also contribute to the uptake of digital solutions and technologies outside the European Union by horizontally and system-

atically promoting the use of digital solutions as a lever of development within the European Union **development policy**.

Trust and security are crucial for the development of a digital society

The development of a digital society has opened up many new opportunities, while making us more vulnerable, creating new risks and exacerbating existing risks, such as the malicious use of technology. In cyberspace, Europe must also stand by its values and protect its security.



Estonia promotes European Union wide cooperation in the field of cybersecurity, acknowledging the field as a source of opportunity rather than an obstacle. To that end, it is essential to update the **European Union cybersecurity strategy** and the mandate of the European Union Agency for Network and Information Security (ENISA). Bringing **eprivacy** legislation in line with today's needs and the objectives of the data protection reform will contribute to increasing the level of trust. Estonia wants to move forward with the negotiations on the **ePrivacy Regulation**.





INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE EUROPE



People's quality of life is affected by the environment around them. Sustainable development can only be achieved if all economic, social and environmental issues are addressed in a coordinated and integrated manner. In line with the **United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, Europe must ensure a clean and caring environment for present and future generations. This requires the sustainable and efficient management of natural resources and a social order that offers sustainable solutions. An inclusive and sustainable Europe helps its citizens adapt to change and supports equal opportunities for all to stay active as long as possible and to live a long and healthy life. The primary responsibility for reducing social gaps continues to lie with each Member State.

An inclusive Europe supports equal opportunities for all

In order to ensure society's sustainability and Europe's economic and social prosperity in the context of an ageing and declining population, everyone across Europe must have equal opportunities for the development of skills, high-quality education, employment and access to services. An evolving society and technological progress have **changed the nature of work** and led to **new forms of work**. This entails the redefining of the roles of the employer and the employee and the need to adapt working conditions, skills and social security systems accordingly.



Estonia wants to focus on the modernisation of education and the labour market to ensure that knowledge and skills, including digital skills, are

keeping up with these changes. In order to strengthen Europe's competitiveness, it is essential to invest in the **development of skills** and to move forward with the initiatives triggered by the New Skills Agenda and subsequent Commission initiatives on youth and education. The Estonian Presidency intends to focus on creating better links between education and the labour market. We will continue to review the **Europass Decision** to achieve a better implementation and synergy between the digital tools designed for documenting people's skills and qualifications, and to modernise these tools for the digital age.



Estonia proposes a broad discussion on the future of work and the accompanying opportunities, including national e-solutions. To ensure an inclusive Europe, Estonia will contribute to creating better opportunities for people with special needs to participate in societal life. To that end, we need to achieve a speedy agreement on the **Accessibility Act**, to which the Estonian Presidency will significantly contribute.



An increasing need for qualified labour and ensuring high-quality working life requires further promotion of gender equality, including support for the **work-life balance**. The unequal division of labour in caring for

children, the elderly and other dependent family members affects the participation of women in the labour market and the participation of men in family life. Estonia intends to continue the debate on the reconciliation of family life to increase women's participation in the labour market and to reduce their care burden.

Opening up new opportunities for young people supports the development of a strong society

An economically sustainable and competitive Europe must open up new opportunities for young Europeans by promoting the development of competences, inclusion, active participation and **voluntary activities** in society. We want to highlight the role of **smart youth work** in achieving these objectives. During the Estonian Presidency, discussions will continue on the common ground for EU cooperation in the field of youth work and youth policy from 2019 onwards. Estonia's goal is to create more opportunities **for young people to have a say in these discussions**. The Estonian Presidency can contribute to the establishment of the **European Solidarity Corps** to create opportunities for young people to contribute, through voluntary work and professional activities, to addressing the significant challenges facing society.



The freedom of movement is a pillar of the European Union and must continue to function smoothly

The free movement of persons, workers and services in the European Union internal market and the supporting social guarantees must be properly ensured. Estonia focuses on the modernisation of **social security coordination** rules and successful negotiations on **regulating the posting of workers**, which is essential in the context of the internal market. In order to ensure quick and easy access to social benefits by people using the freedom of movement, new e-solutions should be introduced.



We also intend to work actively on the proposals of the new European Union mobility package in order to contribute to the functioning of an open and fair **road transport market**.

The implementation of the Paris Agreement and transitioning to an environmentally sustainable economy will ensure a cleaner living environment

Climate change is increasingly affecting the natural environment and people's quality of life. To achieve a better living environment, the European Union must **reduce greenhouse gas emissions** as agreed in the Paris Agreement, a landmark global agreement on

limiting climate change. First and foremost, this will entail the revision of the current EU Emissions Trading System (ETS), as well as reducing emissions from sectors falling outside the ETS, such as transport, agriculture, small-scale energy production, waste management and other sectors. In addition, the land use and forestry sector must also be integrated in the larger European greenhouse gas emissions reduction system in order to reach the targets set under the Paris Agreement. There is no doubt that attention must be paid to **energy efficiency** in order to achieve the objectives of the EU climate and energy policies. Estonia intends to continue work on the energy efficiency directives.



Our ever-intensifying economy must find solutions to challenges posed by limited resources and environmental pollution. In order to ensure sustainable growth, we must change existing production and consumption patterns, and this can best be achieved through the introduction of innovative and smart solutions with reduced environmental impacts in the spheres of manufacturing, business models, consumption as well as spatial planning and development. Europe is striving to transition to a resource-efficient **circular economy**, which focuses on the reuse, repair, and recycling of existing materials and products. Therefore, Estonia aims

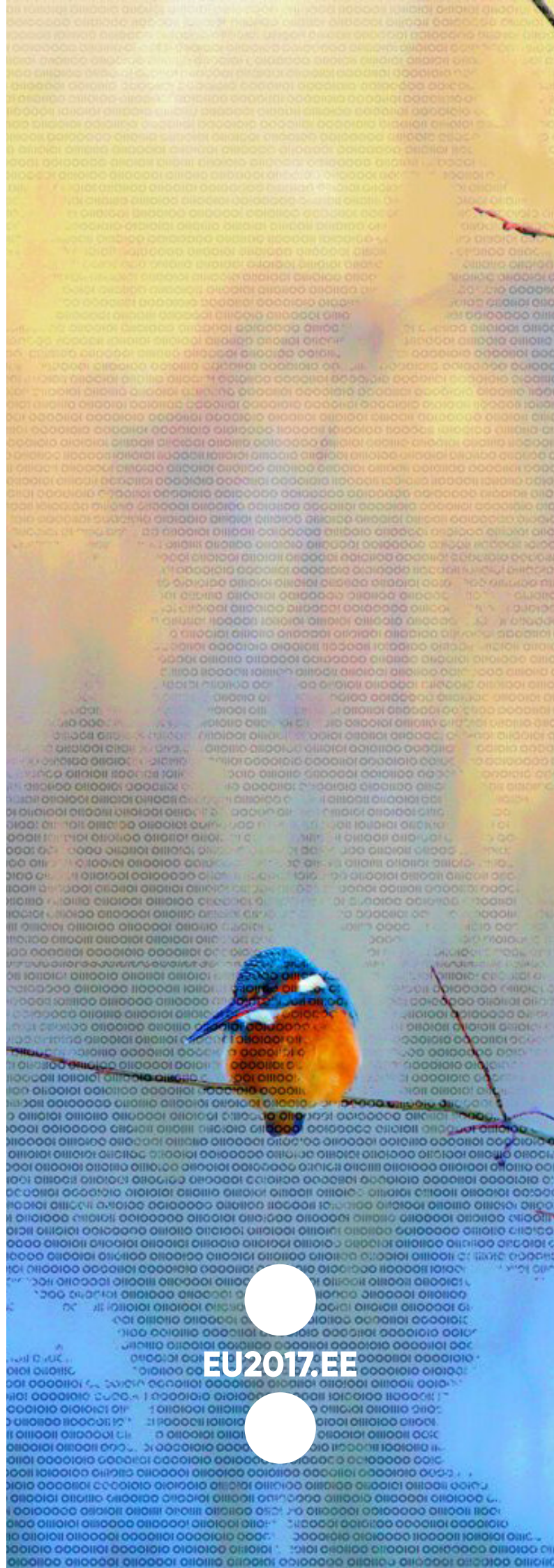
to make substantial progress with negotiations on waste legislation and to initiate discussions on promoting environmentally friendly and eco-innovative IT solutions along with new cooperation platforms in the larger framework of transitioning to circular economy and promoting environmentally-aware consumption.



In the context of circular economy, it is also important to promote the wider use of innovative fertilisers and offer a more diverse range of fertilisers to agricultural producers in order to make food production more cost-effective and resource-efficient. To attain this goal, it is essential to reach agreement on the **Fertilising Products Regulation**, to which the Estonian Presidency will contribute.



One of the goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the restoration of degraded land and soil. The European Union has both the need and potential for a more effective protection of soils as a resource, as the current policy only contributes to this goal indirectly. Estonia is planning to launch a broad-based discussion on the protection of agricultural soil and its importance in sustainable food production. In this regard, Estonia emphasises the **importance of the greater use of digital soil data at the European Union level.**



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