



PROGRAMME OF THE SLOVAK PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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The Slovak Presidency comes at a time when the European Union finds itself in an unprecedented situation. The negative outcome of the referendum on the UK's membership of the EU has presented us with a **new challenge; for the first time in history, we are required to concern ourselves with the practicalities and political ramifications of a Member State leaving the EU**. At this juncture, it is vital that the EU engage in self-reflection. Its aim should be to restore citizens' confidence in the common European project, develop its tangible benefits and defend the results of the integration process on our continent. We need a coherent, better and more comprehensible Europe.

However, many other challenges persist. The **migration and refugee crisis** has tested our ability to manage external borders, maintain the integrity of the Schengen area and seek common solutions. The **terrorist attacks** have reminded us that there is still much to improve in terms of mutual cooperation in the field of internal security. The continuing **consequences of the financial and economic crisis** and the current global uncertainty are contributing to a very slow economic recovery and high unemployment.

The Union finds itself at a crossroads. The path it chooses will determine whether it continues to fragment or whether it can mobilise itself towards greater cohesion and sustainable solutions which are more comprehensible to its citizens.

The priorities of the Presidency are a reflection of the ambition to **increase the EU's unity and coherence and its resilience** to external and internal challenges and to **restore citizens' confidence** in the European project. The Presidency's vision is therefore based on two pillars:

• Positive agenda

The Slovak Presidency aims to specifically focus on the development of a positive agenda. Maximum effort will be devoted to projects that build on the good experience gained with the internal market and extend it to new pillars. Removing barriers between Member States leads to real benefits for the economy and citizens.

• Sustainable solutions

The Slovak Presidency wishes to promote solutions which, in addition to the immediate response, take into account the long-term perspective. This approach is essential for the EU to move away from mere crisis management towards a systematic fulfilment of its strategic vision.





The EU agenda will be dominated in the coming months by the practical and political consequences of the referendum in the United Kingdom. The Union faces difficult negotiations on the future configuration of relations with the United Kingdom, the framework for which is provided for by Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union.

At this time of self-reflection, the Slovak Presidency aims to produce tangible results for citizens in **four priority areas**: an economically strong Europe, the modernisation of the single market, a sustainable migration and asylum policy and a globally engaged Europe.

The European economy needs a significant investment incentive that will support sustainable economic growth and the creation of new job opportunities. Making full use of and multiplying investment instruments, pursuing structural reforms and promoting a responsible approach to public finances are at the heart of **an economically strong Europe**. Progress in building the Capital Markets Union and in completing the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) will also contribute to the improved performance and stability of the European economy.

Despite the success of the single market, there are still shortcomings and barriers preventing it from realising its full potential. **Modernisation of the single market** also requires continuous technological development and new

opportunities. The Energy Union can contribute to secure supplies of clean energy at affordable prices for industry and households. The digital single market, including e-commerce, has the unique potential to remove barriers and create new opportunities for businesses and citizens.

The protection of external borders and efficient cooperation with third countries are important elements of the efforts to manage migration effectively. **A sustainable migration and asylum policy** will make it possible for the EU to return to a fully functioning Schengen area and to consolidate Member States' asylum systems. The use of modern technology at the external borders and closer cooperation between Member States in the field of **internal security** contribute to making the Union more resilient to current security threats.

Strengthening **external relations** will reinforce the global role of the Union. Strong trade links with key global economies are an integral part of active engagement on the global scene. It is also important to promote stability, prosperity and democracy in our neighbourhood. A credible enlargement policy remains an effective tool of political and economic transformation in Europe.

The Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU is confident that achieving progress in these priority areas will contribute to the coherence of the EU and will help restore the trust of citizens in the Union.

The programme of the Slovak Presidency is an expression of its determination to act as **a fair and honest broker** in fulfilling the strategic priorities of the European Union. The Presidency's mission is to achieve such solutions as are acceptable to all Member States and beneficial to the EU as a whole. For Slovakia this is a unique opportunity to contribute, more than ever in its history, to the functioning of the Union, with a sense of ownership over the EU's direction.

The themes which will be at the forefront of the Presidency are driven by three interconnected principles:

- **Achieving tangible results**

The aim of the Slovak Presidency is to demonstrate to citizens that joint European projects have a practical impact on improving their quality of life. The Presidency will

keep a pragmatic focus on areas in which it can achieve tangible results.

- **Overcoming fragmentation**

The Union needs to make significant progress in a number of areas where barriers still exist between Member States. The Presidency will also seek to contribute to connecting Member States more closely in the single market.

- **Focusing on the citizen**

The ability to deliver concrete results and overcome fragmentation is the key to bringing the EU closer to its citizens. The central role of citizens is also reflected in the social dimension, which is a high priority for the Presidency.





Economically strong Europe

The Slovak Presidency will prioritise an economically strong Europe based on investments which contribute to economic growth and the creation of new jobs. To achieve this objective, the Union must make full use of, and strengthen, the available instruments, in particular the European Fund for Strategic Investments, the Capital Markets Union and the EU budget. Promoting an economy in which small and medium-sized enterprises can flourish is a prerequisite for the availability of investment capital and the sustainability of public finances. A favourable economic and investment environment in Europe must be built on a well-functioning Economic and Monetary Union with a high level of social and territorial cohesion and economic stability. However, these efforts must be supported by the necessary structural reforms at both EU and national level in all Member States.

The economic crisis has shown that to ensure financial and economic stability it is necessary to adopt systemic measures that will enable the Union to better deal with economic shocks that have negative social consequences. However, **the Economic and Monetary Union** remains incomplete. Therefore, in the follow-up to the Five Presidents' Report of June 2015, the Slovak Presidency will support the implementation of actions that will give positive momentum to its completion. The future of the European economy will greatly depend also on the outcome of the debate on long-term measures to deepen the Economic and Monetary Union. The Presidency will focus on building the EMU's fiscal pillar and will examine the possibility of setting up common macroeconomic stabilisation tools, which can help mitigate the negative effects of economic fluctuations.

The Union must continue to pursue efforts to boost private investment, which is still below pre-crisis levels. The **European Fund for Strategic Investments**, as an additional instrument to the existing investment programmes, plays an important role in this area. Based on past experience of its functioning, the Presidency will strive to increase the investment potential of the Fund to maximise the benefits of its positive effects. The investment incentive must also be accompanied by continued structural reforms and measures to improve the investment environment in Europe.

The **Capital Markets Union** aims to open up alternative sources of finance for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which currently rely mainly on bank loans. The main result will be the gradual elimination of the remaining barriers to cross-border flows of capital, which will reduce the fragmentation of financial markets in Europe. The Slovak

Presidency aims to make progress on this project and also to focus on innovative means of financing for businesses.

The EU budget, as our main investment tool, must take into account the Union's current priorities and have the necessary capacity to handle unexpected challenges. It is with this ambition in mind that the Slovak Presidency will make every effort to adopt the **EU budget for 2017**. As part of the debate on the **mid-term review of the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework**, the Presidency will endeavour to create conditions for sufficient budget flexibility and greater added value for investments by simplifying the rules of the main policies financed from the EU budget.

Economic growth in Europe cannot be achieved without targeted investments in the convergence of all EU regions, which is the main role of the **European Structural and Investment Funds**. The aim of the Slovak Presidency is to take into account the recent reform of

the EU cohesion policy, to evaluate the benefits of new elements and to discuss the opportunities for increasing the added value of this instrument after 2020.

The competition and transparent investment environment must be based on **tax measures** that lead to fair and effective taxation in the EU. Combatting corporate tax avoidance is an important part of this effort. The increased number of cross-border e-commerce transactions also highlights the need to modernise the current EU VAT system and keep pace with the new digital economy dynamics.

The completion of the **Banking Union** is an important tool for the stabilisation of the banking sector. The Presidency will pursue discussions on the European deposit insurance scheme, which it sees as essential for improving the protection of depositors and for financial stability. At the same time, it will be necessary to focus on further risk reduction measures in the banking sector.





Modern single market

The single market is considered the greatest achievement of the European Union. The free movement of goods, persons, services and capital has brought new opportunities for European businesses and greater choice for consumers. In order to make maximum use of its potential, it must be adapted to the new reality requiring its extension to energy and the digital space. The Presidency's vision is to further develop projects such as the Energy Union and the digital single market, which will underpin the competitiveness and innovative potential of our economies, and consumer confidence in the single market.

The EU currently imports up to 53% of its energy, which makes it the largest energy importer in the world. The Slovak Presidency hopes to contribute to the creation of a resilient and competitive **Energy Union** with a forward-looking climate policy. The key objective must be secure and clean energy supplies at affordable consumer prices. To fulfil this ambition, the European Union needs an integrated energy market open to greater competition. Security of supply plays an important role in achieving energy resilience for Europe. Therefore, the Presidency will support efforts to improve the security of gas supply by tapping the potential of cross-border and regional cooperation and applying the principle of solidarity.

Ambitious policy in the area of climate change is an integral part of the **Energy Union**. The 2015 Paris Agreement confirmed a trend towards a low-carbon economy. It is therefore important for the EU to correctly set up the emissions trading system, which should operate as a cost-effective tool to promote investments in low-carbon technologies, while taking into account the existing differences in energy mix and economic structure within the EU.

Digitisation has changed the way we live and work. The **digital single market** will allow individuals and businesses to use electronic services easily, carry out cross-border online activities in accordance with the rules of fair competition, and benefit from a high standard of consumer protection, irrespective of their nationality or place of residence. One of its key objectives is to give citizens and businesses the possibility of free movement in the digital area, while also allowing free movement of data across the EU's internal market as a fifth freedom.

Promoting sustainable growth in the single market also requires a significant improvement of natural resources governance. The Slovak Presidency will promote the development of measures directed towards the **circular economy**. Its essential purpose is to reduce waste production and protect the environment, but also to transform how the economy functions, from production and consumption to waste management and the secondary materials market. Increased attention should be paid to the issue of the efficient use of water as a natural resource, the availability of which may be affected by climate change.

Sustainable migration and asylum policies

Migration is a long-term historical phenomenon. Since last year, however, Europe has been facing unprecedented migratory flows which are putting extra pressure on the EU's external borders and the asylum systems of the Member States. The Presidency intends to encourage sustainable EU migration and asylum policies, which will be based on the protection of external borders, restoration of the Schengen area, cooperation with third countries and solidarity. In terms of internal security, the challenge for Europe is to make the fight against terrorism more effective through a common coordinated approach by the Member States.

Over the past few years, several measures have been taken, many of which are already operational and are beginning to yield results. However, a number of additional tasks need to be carried out to move Europe away from crisis management and towards sustainable migration management. The risks associated with the different migratory routes are still present.

The **Schengen area** is one of the greatest benefits of European integration for EU citizens. However, due to temporary controls introduced along some internal borders, the Schengen area is not currently fulfilling its essential role, which is to ensure the free movement of citizens and goods. The Slovak Presidency regards the return to a fully functioning Schengen area as our main common goal. This objective cannot be achieved without the implementation of measures that will enable us to regain control over our external borders.

The **protection of the external borders** is a key priority. Fully functioning external borders are the only way to manage migration more effectively, improve the internal security of the European Union and preserve the free movement of persons. The Slovak Presidency will actively contribute to the deployment

of the European Border Guard, which can help significantly improve the management of the external borders and the implementation of returns of irregular migrants.

There is also a need to make greater use of modern information technology on the external borders. Europe must move towards **smart borders**. Their implementation will facilitate the handling of passengers, contribute to the fight against irregular migration and strengthen the internal security of the European Union, enabling it to better deal with the current threats.

Cooperation with **third countries**, especially with migrants' countries of transit and origin, forms an integral part of a comprehensive approach to migration. Active and committed partnership, in particular with countries neighbouring the EU, should focus on eliminating causes of migration. Effective cooperation in the field of returns and readmissions, for example cooperation between the EU and Turkey, is also crucial. It led to a significant drop in migration flows in the Aegean and the stabilisation of the situation on the Western Balkans migration route.

At the same time, the migration and refugee crisis has led to reflections





on the future of the **joint European asylum system**. The Slovak Presidency feels a strong responsibility for further developments in this debate, and wishes it to move forward in those areas where there is agreement among the Member States. Consensus building will allow us to move the EU away from crisis management and towards a strategic discussion on the systemic changes.

The security threats that the EU is facing have significantly increased due to the instability in the EU's immediate neighbourhood as well as to the new forms of radicalisation and terrorism. Although the Member

States bear the primary responsibility for internal security, an efficient and coordinated response at European level has become a necessity. The **internal security** of the European Union is the joint responsibility of the Member States and the EU institutions and, therefore, must not suffer because of fragmentation. The Presidency will encourage an ambitious approach to internal security, the prerequisites of which are improved information exchange, increased operational cooperation and mutual coordination between the police and judicial authorities of the Member States.

Globally engaged Europe

Significant changes in the geopolitical reality have made increased global commitment and political unity within the EU an indispensable element in promoting peace and stability throughout the world. It is the EU's common goal to protect international order based on compliance with international norms and standards, including human rights, to strengthen security, and to contribute to the prevention and resolution of crises. Europe needs an active Common Foreign and Security Policy, based on the EU Global Strategy that strengthens its position in the world, helps it to face complex challenges and contributes to stabilising its neighbourhood.

The Slovak Presidency will promote a comprehensive approach to the EU's engagement by improving both the coherence of the EU's external policies and the coordination of the external and internal security tools. One of the pillars of the foreign policy is the **EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy**, the implementation and development of which will be the main focus of the EU in the next period.

Stability in the eastern and southern neighbourhoods of the EU has been significantly weakened in recent years. The Slovak Presidency will therefore promote an effective **European neighbourhood policy**, with the objective of stabilising the neighbourhood and developing relationships with partners based on common interests and needs, with due regard for the principle of enhanced differentiation. In terms of the Eastern Partnership, particular emphasis will be put on supporting the stabilisation of countries in the political and security field, continuing with reforms, implementing the Association Agreements and making progress on visa liberalisation. In terms of the Southern Neighbourhood, the Presidency will foster the development of dialogue and cooperation, and will promote the stabilisation of partner countries in the political, economic and security fields, including by providing assistance in solving long-standing crises based on the diplomatic efforts of the international community.

The Slovak Presidency will put great emphasis on the **enlargement policy**,

which is of crucial importance for the consolidation of political and economic stability in Europe. The enlargement policy is an effective means of ensuring a democratic transition for the Enlargement countries. With a view to strengthening the policy's credibility, the Presidency will seek to maintain the momentum of the accession process and to achieve concrete progress in the candidate countries.

In addition to the long-term EU priorities defined in the strategic neighbourhood programme, the Presidency will actively engage in **strengthening transatlantic ties** and developing relations with other strategic partners of the EU. It will also emphasise the need to deepen the EU's cooperation with international organisations, including by strengthening relations between the EU and NATO.

Free, fair and balanced trade based on reciprocity and mutual benefits is of key importance for the internal and external stability of the EU. The Slovak Presidency will focus primarily on bilateral free trade agreements with third countries, particularly negotiations in the transatlantic relationship.

In terms of **development cooperation**, the Slovak Presidency will focus on the progress in the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and in the debate on the future of relations with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of states. The focus will be on improving the coherence of the development policies in order to comprehensively address the crises, including the migration crisis.





General Affairs Council (GAC)

Following the adoption of the Interinstitutional agreement on better law-making, the Slovak Presidency will see the implementation of its key parts, particularly the calibration of the coordination of legislative planning between the EU institutions and the involvement of the Council in the preparation of the Commission's work programme for 2017. The Presidency will also focus on the mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014–2020 and will conduct the first evaluation of the implementation of the rule of law mechanism. As is usually the case, the December General Affairs Council will be devoted to Council conclusions on enlargement. With respect to the Council's agenda regarding EU cohesion policy, the Slovak Presidency will, first and foremost, reflect on the recent reform of the policy, paying particular attention to issues such as flexibility, simplification and results orientation, including with a view to the policy's future perspectives.

The new **Interinstitutional agreement on better law-making** has brought new elements to the process of annual and multiannual programming. The Slovak Presidency will hold discussions within the Council on the European Commission's annual work programme for 2017, as well as on the subsequent joint declaration on annual programming between the Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament. The Slovak Presidency will aim to reach agreement on the strategic priorities of the Council for the next programming period so that they can be taken into consideration in the planning documents of the other institutional partners.

The European Commission is to submit, no later than by the end of 2016, a **mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014–2020**. Further to a proposal by the European Commission, the Slovak Presidency will lead a discussion focusing on the functioning of and possible improvements to the current Multiannual Financial Framework.

Based on the conclusions of the Council and the Member States from December 2014, the Member States are holding a dialogue in the General Affairs Council on the **promotion and protection of the rule of law**. The Council is to assess the experience gained from this dialogue by the end of 2016. The ambition of the Slovak Presidency is to organise further discussion, assess the rounds of the dialogue so far and summarise the experience gained.

Enlargement policy is an effective tool for strengthening security, stability and democratic transformation in Europe. The Slovak Presidency will promote consistent and fair implementation of the principles of an individual approach to each country. The Presidency aims to adopt Council conclusions on Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process, with the objective of taking stock of the progress of each country in its integration process and encouraging them to carry out the necessary internal reforms.

In the area of EU cohesion policy, the Slovak Presidency intends to lead a discussion on European Commission proposals and also adopt Council conclusions that will assess the benefits of the new components of the reformed EU cohesion policy and, on the basis of initial experience, outline areas to further simplify and streamline the policy, including with a view to its future perspectives..

During its Presidency, Slovakia, which forms part of the Danube macro-region, will continue to work on activities designed to support **macro-regional cooperation of the EU** through the development of existing macro-regional strategies.

The Slovak Presidency will aim to reach agreement among the Member States on the issue of building **cyber resilience and safety in industry** via the adoption of Council conclusions.





Foreign Affairs Council (FAC)

The EU has always been a symbol of stability, security and prosperity and despite the current challenging times, we have the responsibility to make every effort to enlarge this unique environment by promoting our European values and principles and be more active and coherent in the help and support we provide in order to shape our neighbourhood and wider region in a positive way. The Slovak Presidency will support the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy as chair of the Foreign Affairs Council in pursuing a coherent external policy. Its focus will be on the follow-up of the European Union Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy which offers a vision and opportunity for the EU's global engagement and action. We will put special emphasis on strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy, a credible Enlargement Policy, an effective Common Security and Defence Policy, responsible external action on migration, an engaged Development Policy and further development of trade relations with third countries.

Foreign affairs and defence

The Slovak Presidency is committed to strengthening the **Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)**, including the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The current challenges we are facing vary from migration to security and hybrid threats and terrorism. These challenges are interlinked and cross cutting and so should be the EU's response. There is a need for the EU to take a stronger strategic and comprehensive approach to these challenges as well as a need to use EU's instruments more effectively in a coordinated and complementary manner in order to achieve solutions and sustainable results. In this context, the Presidency will focus on strengthening the links between internal and external security as well as between security and development policies.

The ongoing **migration crisis** requires focused attention and a comprehensive, coordinated and inventive approach by the EU and Member States. Migration issues have to be firmly embedded in all elements of our external relations and cooperation with third countries. The

Slovak Presidency, not losing sight of operational aspects (mainly successful implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, control of the Central Mediterranean route, and effective use of Trust Funds established in this context), will support all efforts to tackle the root causes of migration and will thus facilitate the elaboration of a medium- to long-term external targeted strategy (complete with adequate financial resources) on how – in mutually enriching contacts with the states in question – to address the mass movement of people. The Presidency will seek to work on global migration governance and contribute to restoring the general trust in the EU's capability to handle this challenge.

The new **EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS)** presented to the European Council in June 2016 is based on principles of EU engagement, responsibility, unity and partnership. The Slovak Presidency will support transforming EUGS political ambitions and priorities into a credible follow-up. This may include elaboration of further documents in the area of security and defence aimed to strengthen civil and military

capabilities and defence cooperation, development of crisis management capabilities and CSDP missions and operations as a unique part of overall EU engagement in third countries.

On the basis of the adopted Joint Framework on **countering hybrid threats**, the Slovak Presidency will support the implementation of the tasks identified therein. It will also support the adoption and implementation of a new wider EU strategic framework for a reform of the security sector.

The Slovak Presidency will provide all possible assistance to the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Commission in implementation of the **European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)**. A strong political impetus will be given to the Eastern Partnership Policy and the implementation of the commitments from the Riga Summit 2015. The Presidency will promote deepening relations and political dialogue with neighbouring countries with a particular focus on securing their stability. It will assist in advancing political association and economic integration of Ukraine, Republic of Moldova and Georgia. Within the Southern neighbourhood the Presidency will seek to further develop relations and to provide assistance to individual states in the region in their political, economic and security stabilisation. The Presidency will also endeavour to ensure the implementation of the reviewed EU – Central Asia Strategy.

The Western Balkans remains an important region in the immediate neighbourhood of the EU. Its stability and prosperity is closely linked with that of the Union. The Presidency fully supports the region's European perspective and is ready to further strengthen it through widening of

mutual relations and through close co-operation.

The Slovak Presidency believes that **European defence cooperation** can be further strengthened. The Presidency welcomes the work of the European Commission on European Defence Action Plan which should stimulate the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB), Defence Research and capabilities. It will support activities towards small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as they are an important part of the EU defence industrial sector.

Since all the challenges we are facing now are global, there is need to strengthen EU cooperation with all other relevant international partners ranging from the UN to the OSCE and in particular with NATO. Our joint goal with NATO is to build and strengthen our own and our partners' resilience against external threats. The Slovak Presidency will seek to deepen the **strategic EU-NATO partnership** and cooperation. The EU and NATO will adopt a Joint Declaration in this regard ahead of the Warsaw NATO Summit in July 2016.





Trade

In bilateral, multilateral and plurilateral negotiations, as well as in the legislative area, the Slovak Presidency will foster a **balanced trade policy** based on reciprocity and mutual benefit. The main focus will be on bilateral talks about free trade agreements with third countries. Negotiations between the EU and the USA on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership represent one of the major challenges for the EU's trade policy. In this context, the Slovak Presidency will have the task to create scope for an internal discussion in the Council and the Commission on the status of the negotiations and the prospects for their successful conclusion with the aim of reaching a comprehensive, ambitious and balanced agreement. The Presidency will also pay close attention to approval processes concerning the signing, application and adoption of an agreement with Canada, as well as concerning negotiations on a free trade agreement with Japan.

The EU's long term strategic goal is the **strengthening of the multilateral trading system**. In the context of multilateral negotiations, discussion will continue on the future and the role of the World Trade Organisation as the guarantor of a transparent and predictable world trading system. A possible conclusion of negotiations on plurilateral agreements on trade in services and on trade in environmental goods will also be high on the agenda.

The question of recognising the market economy status for the People's Republic of China will present a major challenge in the legislative area. Further discussion on a more effective joint action against unfair commercial practices will be no less sensitive and complex.

Development

During the second half of 2016, we expect a strategic discussion on the Sustainable Development Goals and **Agenda 2030 implementation** with an emphasis on a strong link between its external and internal dimensions. Following the adoption of the Agenda 2030 and the need to adapt EU development policy, it is expected that a revision of the European Consensus on Development will be launched during the Slovak Presidency. In this context, the Slovak Presidency will stress the principle of policy coherence for development. Attention will be given to the role of energy in EU development policy. We will focus on reaching progress in promoting the EU's comprehensive approach by linking security and development policies. In the implementation of the goals of the Agenda 2030, increased attention will need to be paid to the issues of financing for development in the spirit of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. Equal attention will be given to the fulfilment of obligations and opportunities arising from the Paris Agreement.

During the Slovak Presidency, discussion in the Council will continue on the need for a more flexible and targeted response to challenges brought by the **migration** and refugee crisis and on the need for addressing its causes. In April 2016, a Commission communication on linking development and forced displacement was released, which will be followed by further steps related to linking humanitarian assistance and development cooperation.

One of the ambitions of the Slovak Presidency will be the adoption of Council conclusions on implementing obligations arising out of the **World Humanitarian**

Summit. On the basis of the conclusions reached in Istanbul, the Slovak Presidency will propose possible improvements to the system of provision of EU humanitarian aid that would adequately address the needs of people affected by armed conflicts and natural disasters.

In view of the expiry of the Cotonou Agreement in 2020, the Slovak Presidency will continue

preparations for launching formal negotiations – on the **future framework for cooperation with ACP countries**, due to start in 2018 at the latest. The Slovak Presidency will promote an open and informed discussion on the future framework with ACP countries.





Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN)

Within the agenda of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council the Slovak Presidency will pay particular attention to the measures necessary to complete the Economic and Monetary Union following the Five Presidents' Report, to combat tax fraud and evasion and to increase tax transparency. In the field of completing the Economic and Monetary Union, the Presidency will seek to intensify the debate on long-term measures to strengthen the fiscal pillar of the Economic and Monetary Union. In order to support investment in the EU, the Slovak Presidency will strive to make maximum use of and strengthen the potential of the European Fund for Strategic Investments. We will pursue discussions on the measures necessary to create the Capital Markets Union, to complete the Banking Union with particular emphasis on its second and third pillar and to simplify the rules of the Stability and Growth Pact. In terms of the fight against terrorist financing and tax evasion, the Presidency will aim to make progress in the search for common European solutions. The Presidency will also strive for an agreement between the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament on the EU budget for 2017.

The Economic and Monetary Union can be stable, prosperous and resilient only if all its pillars, i.e. economic, financial, fiscal and political, work. The Slovak Presidency will therefore focus on discussions about deepening the Economic and Monetary Union following the Five Presidents' Report. As regards the planned establishment of a European Fiscal Board, the Slovak Presidency will concentrate on making the Stability and Growth Pact simpler and more transparent and on striking the right balance between objectives of macroeconomic stabilisation and fiscal sustainability. The Slovak Presidency will seek to encourage and sustain the debate on long-term measures to complete the Economic and Monetary Union. We will place emphasis on establishing common macroeconomic stabilisation tools as part of the fiscal pillar. This will include discussions on common European unemployment insurance. The Presidency welcomes the establishment of an expert group to examine long-term proposals for deepening the Economic and Monetary Union and will seek opportunities for

cooperation between that group and the Council. The Slovak Presidency will actively participate in the consultation process for the European Commission's white paper on the second phase of deepening the Economic and Monetary Union, which is due to be published in the spring 2017.

In recent years, the European Commission has introduced a number of positive changes to improve the efficiency of the **European Semester**. The Slovak Presidency will evaluate the 2016 European Semester process and will continue discussions on how to improve it further, including by better implementation of specific recommendations to Member States and the euro area. In this context, the Presidency stands ready to start discussions with the European Parliament on the establishment of a programme to support structural reforms for the 2017–2020 period.

The **European Fund for Strategic Investments** is proving to be an effective and efficient tool for

increasing the rate of investment in the EU. After the first year of its functioning it is expected that the Fund will have mobilised at least one third of the EUR 315 billion target amount for investment. The Slovak Presidency will pursue the evaluation of the Fund's functioning at the Council meeting and will seek to ensure that the Fund's maximum investment potential is delivered.

The Presidency considers building the **Capital Markets Union** to be an essential part of the agenda for deepening the Economic and Monetary Union. The Presidency will therefore put an emphasis on creating the structures necessary to stabilise and improve the efficiency of financial markets, emphasising the positive agenda. The Slovak Presidency will support efforts to help European SMEs access co-financing through capital markets, including on a cross-border basis. The Presidency will also make active efforts to advance in the negotiations on venture capital schemes. At the same time, the Presidency will aim to reach a political agreement with the European Parliament on money market funds, revision of the prospectus regime and securitisation.

Completion of the **Banking Union** is one of the prerequisites for long-term economic, financial and social stability of the EU. The Slovak Presidency intends to continue the work on completing the second pillar of the Banking Union. The Presidency will seek to make progress in the negotiations on the European deposit insurance scheme. An important part of the work will also be identification of specific measures to reduce risk in the European banking sector.

The Slovak Presidency aims to take forward the search for common European solutions to be translated into effective measures to **combat the financing of terrorism**.

Taxation

In the area of taxation, the Slovak Presidency will focus on the **fight against tax fraud** and evasion. We see this as one of possible instruments for achieving the EU's objectives on growth, competitiveness and strengthening of the single market. The Presidency stands ready to continue to promote fair and efficient corporate taxation.

The **common system of value added tax (VAT)** is an important part of the internal market. Current VAT rules should be upgraded as soon as possible in order to promote the internal market, to facilitate cross-border trade and to keep pace with today's digital economy. The action plan on VAT from April 2016 lays down how to modernise the existing EU system and make it simpler, more secure against fraud and more favourable to businesses. The aim of the Slovak Presidency in this area is to obtain clear political guidelines from all Member States.





Following the package of measures against **tax avoidance** practices, published by the European Commission in January 2016, the Slovak Presidency will take the necessary steps to achieve the maximum possible progress on individual elements of the package. If concrete proposals are submitted, the Slovak Presidency will endeavour to move forward on the issue of how best to resolve disputes arising from cross-border double taxation faced by companies operating in several Member States.

In accordance with the European Commission Action Plan on fairer and more effective corporate taxation in the EU, we expect a renewed initiative in the field of a **common consolidated tax base for corporate income tax** to be presented during the Slovak Presidency. The Presidency is ready to conduct a constructive debate on this topic.

EU budget

The Slovak Presidency will systematically work towards a political agreement between the Council of the EU and the European Parliament on the **EU budget for 2017**. The final compromise should represent a responsible budget that ensures a balance between supporting the EU budgetary priorities focused on growth, employment, competitiveness and cohesion on the one hand and providing enhanced flexibility to address new and unexpected challenges on the other hand.

Justice and Home Affairs Council (JHA)

The current migration crisis is one of the biggest challenges facing the EU. The Slovak Presidency aims to contribute to the further development of EU policies, in particular in the fields of migration, asylum, border control and visas. Although these are sensitive issues, the Slovak Presidency sees scope for a positive agenda in this area. Our intention is to build on the work of previous presidencies and to advance efforts to ensure better links between migration, security and external policy. As regards the Schengen area, our objective is to maintain its integrity and to contribute to the re-establishment of its smooth functioning. The Presidency will also pay attention to the fight against terrorism and the issue of foreign fighters. In the 'Justice' configuration, the Presidency will focus on the proposals with added value for the EU and its citizens, particularly on the continuing fight against fraud affecting the Union's financial interests and on the development of the digital single market.

The **migration crisis** is one of the biggest current challenges for the Union. The Slovak Presidency will build on the work of previous presidencies in efforts to manage the migration crisis. We will prioritise in particular the return to respect for international and European law.

A significant part of the Slovak Presidency's tasks will be the work on a new generation of European law on **asylum**. Building on the work of the Dutch Presidency, we will pursue the ongoing negotiations on individual legislative proposals to overcome the division in the Council on certain points and to achieve as much progress as possible.

On integration of third-country nationals, the Slovak Presidency will respond to the needs of other EU Member States following a newly adopted **Action Plan on the Integration of Third-Country Nationals**. The Slovak Presidency has an ambition to adopt Council conclusions on this action plan.

In the field of legal migration, the Slovak Presidency will continue negotiations on the draft of the "EU **Blue Card**" Directive, which is designed to facilitate the employment of highly

qualified third-country nationals, and will seek to achieve a partial general approach.

On the functioning of the **Schengen area**, the Slovak Presidency aims to support solutions and initiatives for its improvement. We intend to preserve the integrity of the Schengen area and to contribute to the re-establishment of its proper functioning.

Another priority of the Slovak Presidency is to **protect external borders**. We expect to witness the start of functioning of the European Border Guard, which will really contribute to the protection of the EU's external borders. We also aim to successfully conclude the legislative work on proposals related to the Smart Borders package. This should make it possible to keep more accurate and more complete records of people crossing the EU's external borders and to create a basis for modern management of mobility across borders in the future.

Regarding the **fight against terrorism**, the Slovak Presidency will focus on the implementation of the European Council conclusions of February 2015 and the Council conclusions of





November 2015 which, in response to terrorist attacks, have created a basic framework for EU action in this field. The Presidency will put emphasis on the exchange of information between Member States' competent authorities, the fight against terrorist financing and the issue of foreign fighters. The ambition of the Slovak Presidency is also to conclude discussions on the draft Directive on the exchange of information about third-country nationals within the European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS), which will be an important contribution from the field of justice to improvement of safety in the EU. A separate issue in the context of counter-terrorism measures is the prevention of radicalisation.

The Slovak Presidency will build on the work done by previous presidencies on the proposal for a revision of the Visa Code and other proposals on **visas**. One particularly significant challenge lies in proposals for a visa waiver for four countries in the EU's neighbourhood, which collectively constitute the most significant wave of visa liberalisation in the EU's history.

In the 'Justice' configuration, the Slovak Presidency will follow up on the work done by previous presidencies in terms of negotiations on the proposal for a Regulation establishing the **European Public Prosecutor's Office** and on related

proposals concerning the protection of the EU's financial interests and the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust).

The Slovak Presidency will continue with negotiations on the legislative proposals in the field of civil law, particularly on proposals for directives on the **supply of digital content** and the **online sale of goods**. The Presidency will also devote attention to the proposal to revise the regulation concerning jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgments in matrimonial matters and the matters of parental responsibility (the so-called '**Brussels IIa**') and the proposal on the accession on the part of the EU to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

The Presidency will also seek to make progress in the Council discussions focused on **more efficient cross-border judicial cooperation and the fight against cybercrime**, with particular emphasis on the use of e-justice, since it has the potential to contribute to the acceleration of cross-border litigation, and thus bring a clear European added value.

Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO)

In the area of employment and social affairs, the Slovak Presidency will work to advance the negotiations on the rules concerning free movement of workers, coordination of social security systems and posting of workers. The Presidency will also aim to improve the functioning of the internal market while improving the quality of life of people with disabilities and improving health protection for workers. Through the evaluation of the existing European framework, the Slovak Presidency will endeavour to promote youth employment and to support the implementation of measures for Roma integration. In the health sector, the Presidency will continue negotiations on the draft Regulations on medical devices and on Community procedures for the authorisation of medicinal products for human use and for veterinary use. In the non-legislative area, it is the ambition of the Slovak Presidency to prepare the EU position for the 7th Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

In the social policy and employment sector, the Slovak Presidency will focus on discussions on **legislative changes in the internal market** as regards the free movement of workers, the coordination of social security systems and the revision of the Directive on the posting of workers. The Slovak Presidency hopes to make progress in the negotiations in the Council. The Slovak Presidency will continue negotiations on the European Accessibility Act, which is meant to improve the functioning of the internal market as regards accessibility for selected products and services and facilitating their accessibility for persons with disabilities.

The goal of the Slovak Presidency will be to achieve progress in the negotiations on the revision of legislation aimed at **improving the protection of workers** from the risks related to carcinogens or mutagens.

As far as the **employment sector** is concerned, the Slovak Presidency will prepare draft Council conclusions with the aim of evaluating the effectiveness and results of the Youth Guarantee.

The Slovak Presidency will also focus on the **European pillar of social rights**. The aim of the pillar is to define the basic principles to promote fair and well-functioning labour markets and social protection systems, and promote social convergence.

One of the objectives of the **Commission's package on skills**, which is primarily the responsibility of the Council of Ministers for Education, is to harmonise the changing skills requirements of the labour markets. The package will therefore be subject to political debate during the Slovak Presidency of the Council of Ministers for Employment.

Following the evaluation of the implementation of the Council Recommendation on effective measures concerning **Roma integration** in the Member States, the Presidency will prepare draft Council conclusions.





In the **health sector**, the Presidency will continue negotiations in the Council on the revision of the current regulatory framework for medical devices and on Community procedures for the authorisation of medicinal products for human use and for veterinary use. The Slovak Presidency intends to build on the work done by the Netherlands Presidency on the availability of medicinal products in the context of high prices of innovative medicines, cuts in production and parallel exports of medicinal products.

The Slovak Presidency aims to prepare a joint EU position on the negotiation topics of the 7th Conference of the Parties to the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Framework Convention on **Tobacco Control**, to be held in India in November 2016.

Following the priorities of the Netherlands Presidency, the Slovak Presidency intends to continue the political debate in the Council on **antimicrobial resistance**, which is related to high consumption of antibiotics in human medicine and in animal production. The Slovak Presidency will also lead the political debate in the Council regarding the issue of tuberculosis in Europe, in terms of treatment, multidrug resistance and vaccination.

As far as **chronic non-communicable diseases** are concerned, the goal of the Slovak Presidency is to underline the importance of prevention of chronic non-communicable diseases by promoting healthy lifestyles. The Presidency will follow up on EU action on improving food quality, with a view to learning about and evaluating the best practices of Member States in this area.

Competitiveness Council (COMPET)

Building the single market, modernising industry and better regulation will be the key topics on the agenda of the Slovak Presidency within the Competitiveness Council. The Presidency's ambition is, in particular, to promote the further development of the single market, which we consider one of the biggest achievements of European integration. We consider the systematic removal of obstacles to the free movement of goods and services and making the internal market accessible to all the citizens of the European Union to be core EU policies. A stable industrial base in the EU is equally important. The Slovak Presidency will therefore promote the introduction of the smart industry concept, as well as the creation of high-quality framework conditions for the prosperity of European industry. In addition, the Presidency will support the efforts of high-quality lawmaking, which will ensure a simple and predictable regulatory framework for EU businesses and citizens.

As far as the **internal market** is concerned, the Slovak Presidency aims to take forward negotiations on legislative proposals submitted on the basis of the Internal Market Strategy and the Digital Single Market Strategy. During the Presidency we will strive to reach a general approach on the proposal for a Regulation on addressing unjustified geo-blocking and other forms of discrimination on the grounds of place of residence or establishment, or nationality within the single market. We also expect the launch of a debate on two proposals – the 'Services Passport' and the reform of the notification procedure for the Services Directive.

The revision of the **Consumer Protection Cooperation Regulation** will step up market surveillance in cross-border sales and thereby encourage the development of cross-border trade in the internal market of the EU. The Slovak Presidency will continue negotiations on the proposal in the Council with the aim of reaching a general approach.

In the context of **industrial policy**, the Slovak Presidency will promote the creation of appropriate framework conditions for boosting the competitiveness of industry. From this perspective, it is particularly crucial to harmonise all the relevant policies to promote a stable industrial base in the EU. In addition, the Presidency will pursue the implementation of the smart industry concept, which represents a comprehensive approach to adapting industry to new trends and new business models.

The right **regulatory environment** is a precondition for boosting economic growth and improving the competitiveness of enterprises. During the Slovak Presidency we will continue the debate on the efficient use of better regulation tools and on removing regulatory barriers to innovation. The Presidency will seek to create space for the exchange of good practices in this area and will also focus on the Regulatory Fitness and Performance Programme (REFIT), as well as on other issues arising from the application of the interinstitutional agreement on better law-making.





The Slovak Presidency will also address **copyright reform**. The first proposal in the context of the reform is a proposal for a Regulation on ensuring the cross-border portability of online content services in the internal market. The Slovak Presidency intends to start the trilogues with the European Parliament. Following the Commission's submission of the second package of legislative proposals on copyright reform, the Presidency will chair the initial discussions in the Council.

One of the main topics of the Slovak Presidency in the field of **research** is support for young researchers. The Presidency aims to adopt Council conclusions on measures to support young researchers with a focus on increasing the attractiveness of scientific careers, encouraging mobility and investing in human potential in the field of research and development.

Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council (TTE)

Within the agenda of the Council in the format of ministers responsible for transport, it is the ambition of the Slovak Presidency to take forward the debate on the proposals in different transport areas, aiming to contribute to the realisation of the single European transport market. In the Council of energy ministers, the Slovak Presidency will focus on building the Energy Union, with the emphasis on increasing energy security and competitiveness. The Presidency will pursue discussions on proposals on security of gas supply, intergovernmental agreements in the field of energy and energy labelling of products, aiming to reach an overall agreement regarding the proposals. As part of the agenda of ministers for telecommunication, it is the ambition of the Presidency to make some progress in the negotiations on elimination of roaming charges by 2017 and to move towards a political agreement with the European Parliament on the harmonisation of the 700 MHz frequency band for the purposes of high-speed mobile internet. The Slovak Presidency also aims to adopt Council conclusions on the EU Action Plan on eGovernment.

Transport

As far as **air transport** is concerned, the ambition of the Slovak Presidency is to help improve the safety and competitiveness of civil aviation and to facilitate innovation, for example in the field of drone production (remotely piloted aircraft), through a revision of the Regulation on the European Aviation Safety Agency. The Presidency's objective is to reach a common position on this proposal in the Council. Another important topic is the preparation of mandates for the Commission to open negotiations on air transport agreements with third countries in order to improve market access and introduce measures to prevent unfair competition. The Presidency will try to build on previous achievements in this area. In preparation for the 39th session of the General Assembly of the International Civil Aviation Organisation in autumn 2016, the Slovak Presidency will coordinate the process of adopting a common EU position on the individual proposals, particularly on the proposal for a global market-based mechanism for emissions trading in aviation.

In the field of **inland waterway transport**, the Presidency will focus on a proposal for a Directive on the mutual recognition of qualifications of workers. The Slovak Presidency intends to lead trilogues with the European Parliament regarding this proposal.

As part of the global strategy for **maritime transport**, the Slovak Presidency intends to adopt a Council decision concerning the proceedings of the International Maritime Organisation's committees on improving safety and reducing emissions from maritime transport. The Slovak Presidency will conduct an initial discussion on the package of proposals on passenger ship safety. The Slovak Presidency hopes to conclude the negotiations on the revision of the Regulation on the European Maritime Safety Agency, which is part of a package of measures to strengthen cooperation regarding the protection of the EU's external borders.

In **rail transport**, the Slovak Presidency will approve the EU's position by means of a Council decision on the





preparation of a new Convention of the Organisation for Cooperation between Railways.

Energy

The aim of the revision of the **Security of Gas Supply** Regulation is to enhance the principle of solidarity, further encourage regional cooperation and increase the transparency of gas contracts. The intention of the Slovak Presidency is to reach a compromise in the negotiations on the proposal for revision of the Regulation, which will make it possible to achieve an agreement in the negotiations with the European Parliament.

A revision of the decision establishing an information exchange mechanism with regard to **intergovernmental agreements in the field of energy** will raise the transparency of intergovernmental agreements. The ambition of the Slovak Presidency is to build on the compromise and reach an agreement with the European Parliament.

The revision of the Regulation on the framework for **energy efficiency labelling of products** is intended to provide EU consumers with objective information about the most energy efficient products and ensure compliance with the rules set by producers and retailers. The Slovak Presidency aims to conclude the negotiations with the European Parliament.

Following the expected submission of proposals to revise the Directives on **energy efficiency** and on **energy performance of buildings** by the European Commission, the Slovak Presidency plans to organise a ministerial policy debate.

In the second half of the Slovak Presidency, the European Commission is expected to submit proposals for revision of Regulations of the Council and the Commission in accordance with Article 41 of the Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community. The Regulations establish the **rules for notification of investment projects of natural and legal persons in the field of nuclear energy** and their revision will build on the European energy security strategy. The Slovak Presidency's ambition is to initiate a debate and discussion on the proposed revision of those Regulations.

Telecommunications, information society, postal services and a joint European navigation system

As part of public sector efforts to modernise and optimise its output by introducing digital services for citizens and businesses, the building of eGovernment is a key initiative. The Slovak Presidency aims to adopt Council conclusions on the **Action Plan for eGovernment for 2016-2020** issued by the European Commission in April 2016.

A proposal to revise the **wholesale charges for international roaming** is a condition for the elimination of roaming by 2017. This is an important topic embodying the internal market and removal of internal borders in the EU. The aim of the Slovak Presidency is to reach a general approach on this proposal, or to initiate trilogues with the European Parliament.

The Slovak Presidency will build on the work of the Netherlands Presidency in the negotiations on the **harmonisation of the 700 MHz band in the Union**. The purpose is to harmonise the use of frequencies for mobile internet, which will create the necessary conditions for extending broadband coverage across the Union and pave the way for innovative mobile services. The Slovak Presidency will lead the trilogues with the European Parliament with a view to concluding the discussion on the proposal.

During the Slovak Presidency, the submission of a proposal for revision of the **regulatory framework for electronic communications** is expected. The aims of the proposal will be to adapt the rules to rapidly changing conditions in the telecommunications sector, eliminate regulatory fragmentation across national markets and encourage investment in high speed networks and innovative services. The Slovak Presidency will schedule a debate on the main policy issues involved at the December meeting of the Council.

In the field of postal services, it is the ambition of the Slovak Presidency to make some progress in the negotiations on the proposal of the Member States for **cross-border parcel delivery**, which will contribute to the development of e-commerce in the Union through increased transparency and reduced prices for service.

There is a need to coordinate effectively between several Council formations on the legislative and non-legislative initiatives in the **Digital Single Market Strategy**. With this in mind and, in particular, with the ambition to achieve consistency on cross-cutting issues arising in these proposals, the Presidency will create room for a presentation of the progress made and of the planned next steps.





Agriculture and Fisheries Council (AGRIFISH)

Within the Agriculture and Fisheries Council, the Slovak Presidency will look at ways to strengthen the position of farmers in the food supply chain, with the intention of adopting Council conclusions on this issue. Owing to the protracted crisis in the agricultural markets, especially in the dairy and pigmeat sectors, it plans to monitor the situation on the agricultural commodities market and discuss the need for measures to stabilise the markets. The Presidency will also aim to evaluate the progress made on simplifying the common agricultural policy. It will also pay attention to forests and forestry. In this context, it intends to help implement the EU Forest Strategy, in particular as regards the guiding principle of global forest responsibility.

The Slovak Presidency will look at ways to **strengthen the position of farmers in the food supply chain**. It will inform the Council about the conclusions of the international expert conference on this topic organised by the Presidency. The Slovak Presidency aims to emphasise the importance of fairness in the European food supply chain and to adopt Council conclusions on this matter.

Owing to the protracted crisis in the agricultural markets, especially in the dairy and pigmeat sectors, the Slovak Presidency plans to monitor the situation on the agricultural commodities market and include these topics on the agendas for the meetings of the Special Committee on Agriculture and the Council of Ministers. It is the Presidency's aim to evaluate the measures taken on the basis of the findings and analyses and propose further measures to stabilise the agricultural markets where appropriate.

As regards the **implementation of the EU Forest Strategy**, the key activities of the Slovak Presidency will relate in particular to the third guiding principle, that of global forest responsibility. The Presidency's ambition is to prepare and adopt common EU positions for the meetings of intergovernmental multilateral organisations. The Slovak Presidency aims to make the EU the global leader in promoting sustainable global forest management and ensure that it adopts a clear position on current developments in the international dialogue on forests.

As far as simplification of the **common agricultural policy (CAP)** is concerned, the Council, led by the Slovak Presidency, will evaluate the progress made with the aim of identifying further ways to reduce the administrative burden. The simplification of the regulatory framework for the common agricultural policy is closely linked to its post-2020 philosophy. Therefore, the Slovak Presidency will build on the work of the Netherlands Presidency and will continue the discussion on the future of the CAP pillars.

The Slovak Presidency will build on the work of the Netherlands Presidency in negotiations on the proposal for a Regulation on **organic farming and labelling of organic products** aimed at maintaining the confidence of consumers and organic operators and making it easier for farmers to switch to organic production.

In the **fisheries policy** sector, the Slovak Presidency will focus on annual fishing quotas. The Presidency's ambition is to reach a political agreement on individual regulations on the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, deep-sea species and other stocks.





Environment Council (ENV)

The Environment Council agenda under the Slovak Presidency will focus on creating conditions for a gradual transition towards a competitive, resource-efficient and low-carbon economy. In the climate change sector, the Presidency will focus on implementing the conclusions of the October 2014 European Council, where leaders took the political decision to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40 % by 2030 compared to 1990.

The Slovak Presidency will continue discussions on the proposal for the revision of the **emissions trading scheme**, with a view to agreeing a general approach within the Council. The Slovak Presidency will discuss two related legislative proposals from the European Commission, namely the proposal on the sectors not included in the emissions trading scheme and the proposal on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions related to land use, land-use change and forestry.

Following the adoption of the **Paris Agreement at the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change**, the Slovak Presidency will also address other issues related to the ratification of the Agreement by the Member States and the EU, including the ministerial debate on the ratification of the Paris Agreement. A proposal for the ratification of the Paris Agreement on the EU's behalf has already been submitted and the Slovak Presidency will seek to conclude the proposal. The Presidency will pay particular attention to the preparation and coordination of EU positions and participation in international negotiations. The EU's position for the 22nd Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change in Morocco will be approved in the form of Council conclusions.

As regards the **environment**, one of the Presidency's main objectives will be to actively contribute to the current European debate on the transition towards a green and circular economy. An event entitled 'The transition towards a green economy' will serve as a useful platform for public discussions with the EU Member States and other stakeholders. The Presidency will present the outcomes of the event at the ministerial meeting of the OECD Environment Policy Committee in Paris and at the Environment Council meeting. At the same time, the Slovak Presidency will build on the work of the Netherlands Presidency in negotiations on legislative proposals, the amendments to six important directives on waste management, the proposal for a Regulation on mercury and the proposal for a Directive on emission ceilings.

In the nature **protection and biodiversity** sector, the Presidency will focus on the results of the effectiveness evaluation of the Birds and Habitats Directives. With a view to adopting measures to ensure and protect sustainable water resources, a ministerial conference will take place in Bratislava in July. As a follow-up to the conference, the Presidency will aim to adopt Council conclusions on droughts and water scarcity in the context of climate change adaptation.

The Slovak Presidency will be closely involved in the preparation and coordination of **EU positions for international negotiations**. As regards the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, the EU position will be approved during the Slovak Presidency in the form of a Council decision. The draft Council conclusions setting out the EU's position for the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Cartagena and Nagoya Protocols will be approved during the October

Council meeting. The preparation of an extraordinary meeting of the parties to the Montreal Protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer is also of key importance. The Slovak Presidency, together with the Commission, will help to prepare these meetings with a view to reaching agreement on reducing production and use of fluorinated greenhouse gases.





Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council (EYCS)

The Slovak Presidency's main focus within the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council will be on fostering and developing talent. Fostering talent will translate into increased competitiveness, enhanced social inclusion, and the personal development of every individual. Talent is a driver for innovation and economic growth. As a follow-up to the Commission's presentation of a proposal for the revision of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, the Slovak Presidency will lead negotiations on the proposal within the Council. The Presidency's aim is to present a progress report at the November meeting of the EYCS Council.

Slovakia's priorities in the education sector follow the objectives of the New Skills Agenda for Europe, a strategic initiative of the European Commission. As regards the negotiations on a Council Recommendation on establishing a skills guarantee, the Slovak Presidency aims to increase the level of adult education, including digital, entrepreneurial and transversal skills. In the context of the revision of the Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, the Slovak Presidency will focus on developing tools and services for skills and qualifications and on improving their comparability. It will also address the modernisation of higher education and digital skills.

Further to the Commission communication on supporting the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism, the Slovak Presidency will prepare Council conclusions highlighting the role of education and youth work in preventing radicalisation and extremism. The objective of the conclusions is to respond to Commission proposals aimed at encouraging inclusive education, developing social and civic skills and promoting common European values through formal education and non-formal learning.

In the **youth** sector, the Slovak Presidency's focus will be on developing the talent and potential of young people by introducing attractive approaches in youth work. It intends to adopt Council conclusions on new approaches in youth work which are aimed at developing young people's potential and their inclusion in society.

In the sport sector, the Slovak Presidency will focus on **sports diplomacy**, which has not yet been included in discussions on formal EU policies. It intends to adopt Council conclusions on sports diplomacy with the aim of raising awareness about its role in society and proposing ways forward in this area.

As a follow-up to the Commission's presentation of a proposal for the revision of the **Audiovisual Media Services Directive**, the Slovak Presidency will lead negotiations on the proposal within the Council. The proposal is one of the key initiatives of the Digital Single Market Strategy. The Slovak Presidency intends to present a progress report at the November meeting of the EYCS Council.

In the culture sector, the Slovak Presidency will deal with the **mid-term review of the Work Plan for Culture 2015-2018**, with the aim of adopting Council conclusions on the subject, and with the proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council **declaring 2018 the European year of cultural heritage**.



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