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NOTE

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To:	Delegations
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Delegations will find attached the 18 month programme of the Council, prepared by the future Italian, Latvian and Luxembourg Presidencies and the High Representative, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Council.

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PROGRAMME OF COUNCIL ACTIVITIES
PREPARED BY THE ITALIAN, LATVIAN AND LUXEMBOURG
PRESIDENCIES

with the President of the Foreign Affairs Council
and in close cooperation with the Commission and
the President of the European Council

INTRODUCTION

This document sets out the Council's work programme as established by the future Italian, Latvian and Luxembourg Presidencies, covering the period July 2014 to December 2015. It is presented in two parts.

The first part contains the strategic framework for the programme, setting it in a wider context, and specifically within the perspective of more long-term objectives running into the subsequent three Presidencies. For this reason, in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure, the future Netherlands, Slovakian, Maltese Presidencies have been consulted on this section.

The second part constitutes the operational programme setting out the issues which are expected to be addressed during the 18 month period. In line with the Council's Rules of Procedure, this part was prepared with the President of the Foreign Affairs Council with regard to that configuration's activities during that period and in close cooperation with the Commission and the President of the European Council.

The three Presidencies will make every effort to ensure a smooth and efficient functioning of the work of the Council. This implies a very close cooperation between the three Presidencies and between them and the President of the European Council and the High Representative. They will work very closely and constructively together with the European Parliament. At the same time, the three Presidencies will rely very much on a mutually beneficial cooperation with the Commission and are looking forward to the input provided by the Commission on the basis of its respective work programmes.

PART I

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The three incoming Presidencies will take up their work in the middle of the transition from one legislative cycle to another. The newly elected European Parliament will resume work in July, the new Commission and the new High Representative should take office in November, whereas the European Council will be chaired by its new President as of 1 December 2014.

During this period the three Presidencies will make every effort to ease this transitional process wherever they can and within the remit of their competences. The three Presidencies will build up close and constructive relations with the new institutional actors in order to allow for an early return to a normal working rhythm and legislative activity.

The rapid return to the normal functioning of the Institutions and a smooth cooperation between them is vital to respond to the challenges ahead. The Union is about to consolidate the policies which enabled it to overcome the crisis. In order to take forward this consolidation process and to face the current political, economic and social challenges there is a clear need for a united, active and efficient European Union which is able to take swift and targeted decisions. The European Council provides the impulses for the further development of the Union's policies. Good cooperation with the Commission and the European Parliament are pivotal for successful decision-making.

The main objective for the next 18 months will be to fully overcome the economic and financial crisis and to boost Union's growth, to strengthen the Union's capacity to deliver more jobs and to seize digital opportunities, to safeguard fundamental rights and to fully play its role in a fast changing world.

At a time of high unemployment in Europe, in particular among young people, and an increasing number of people being exposed to the risk of poverty or social exclusion, one of the Union's priorities continues to be the **creation of jobs** and fighting poverty and exclusion. Therefore emphasis will be put on mobility, social dialogue, quality job creation, structural reform of labour markets and investment in human capital via education and vocational training. In this context focus will be put on youth empowerment and employability and on the full implementation of on-going initiatives to fight youth unemployment, in particular through the Youth Guarantee Schemes, the Youth Employment Initiative and through other ESF funding.

Attention will also be paid to monitoring **social protection** and the development of social protection policies, to the financing, effectiveness and efficiency of social protection, to the issue of long-term care and to the pension adequacy.

Against this background, priority will continue to be given to the **financial stability** of the euro area and to continued fiscal consolidation in order to provide a healthy macro-economic environment. The Council will therefore continue its work on deepening and strengthening the Economic and Monetary Union along the lines of the four pillar roadmap outlined in the Report of the four Presidents and endorsed by the Heads of State and Government in December 2012. The implementation and proper functioning of the Banking Union is of outmost importance in this context.

The strengthened economic governance framework which has been put in place in the context of the European Semester has resulted in a better coordination and convergence of the Member States' economic policies and in increased efforts to take forward and implement structural reforms. Five years after the setting up of the **Europe 2020 Strategy**, which aims at building a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy, the three Presidencies will work towards a review of the Strategy to be decided by the European Council on the basis of proposals from the Commission in 2015.

Growth and job creation remain key concerns in the European Union. No efforts will be spared to strengthen Europe's economy by enhancing the competitiveness of European businesses. Europe's industry, including SMEs that are the back-bone of the European economy, is a major driver for growth, output, jobs, innovation and export. The three Presidencies will support the definition of a framework that systematically factors in industrial competitiveness in all other policies.

Every effort will be taken for the completion of the **Single Market** in order to fully tap its potential. The Council will seize the opportunity of the new legislative cycle to prompt a new "strategic" cycle centred on the completion of the Single Market. All pending proposals under the Single Market Act II should be finalised and further actions to support a fully functioning Single Market for Services will be undertaken.

In the context of the completion of the Single market and enhancing European competitiveness the accomplishment of the **Digital agenda** is of major importance. Internet and digital communication technologies are powerful tools to modernize the economy and working environments in the EU. Following the commitment to complete the Digital Single Market by 2015 as expressed by the European Council in 2013, the Union will pursue boosting digital infrastructure and using public administration as an instrument of innovative digital services, enhancing consumer and business confidence in the digital market, facilitating digital cross-border trade and guaranteeing data protection, moving towards a real Single Market for electronic communications and on-line services, promoting long term projects such as cloud computing and open data and investing in digital skills and strengthening network security and data protection.

Research and innovation is of strategic importance for economic growth, competitiveness and employment. Therefore investment in this strategic sector needs to be boosted and the European Research Area needs to be further developed. The smooth and efficient implementation and the full use of the potential of the Research Framework Programme Horizon 2020 will contribute significantly to the endeavours in this area.

In the field of **health**, particular attention will be paid to the necessity to find responses to the demographic change, the increase of chronic diseases, the development of new healthcare technologies as well as to the changing expectations of the patients and to achieve the objective of sustainable healthcare systems. The new Public Health Programme (2014-2020) will play a major role in this regard.

The **reduction of unnecessary burden** for businesses is an important aspect of enhancing competitiveness. Therefore efforts will be pursued to ensure that EU legislation is appropriate and targeted by effectively using smart regulation tools such as impact assessments, evaluation and stakeholder consultation, particularly for SMEs and micro-enterprises.

Open and fair trade and strategic partnerships with major economies are fundamental to stimulate economic growth, competitiveness and employment. The European Union will therefore pursue and, wherever possible, finalise bilateral trade and investment negotiations with the United States, Canada, Japan and India and deepen trade and investment relations with emerging economies.

Shaping an efficient **energy policy** is of utmost importance for the economy, competitiveness, climate policy and foreign relations. Therefore the European Union will continue to treat climate, energy and industrial policies in a coherent and comprehensive manner. It is of utmost importance to build a more environment friendly, cost-effective and secure energy sector. Diversification of energy sources, supply and routes are as important as a European external energy policy focused on energy security, both with a view to reducing energy dependence. The completion of the single market for energy will also contribute to further growth and jobs, while ensuring greater efficiency by true competition in the retail market, effective interconnections of transmission grids and measures to allow investment in new technologies and prevent the risk of "carbon leakage".

The Council will continue to work on the policy framework for **climate** and energy in the period from 2020 to 2030 in order to ensure that the post-2020 EU is on track to meet its climate objectives, in particular with a view to the United Nations Climate summit in September 2014 and the UN Framework Convention on Climate (UNFCCC) Conferences of the Parties in 2014 and 2015.

More growth can also be achieved by integrating the **environmental sustainability** objectives in the wider economic governance cycle of the Union, and thus turn these objectives in concrete opportunities for long-term recovery and more green jobs.

Investment in a modern **transport infrastructure** is key to boost the EU's competitiveness and an important factor for the completion of the single market and the long-term sustainability of the Union's economy. The overall aim is to achieve a fully interconnected Europe across borders and networks and to mobilize also the private sector in this gradual building process entailing the necessity for identification of new forms of public/private partnerships including also innovative financial instruments for the pan-European infrastructure.

The **area of freedom, security and justice** will be developed in full compliance with the new Strategic Guidelines set by the European Council in June 2014. It is expected to include the improvement and strengthening of the integrated management of the external borders in full compliance with fundamental rights. In this context, the three Presidencies will address the strengthening of the Schengen acquis, the possible development of new rules on mutual recognition of asylum decisions and the idea of creating a European system of border control guards. Given the particular pressure on the national asylum systems of some Member States, the Council will continue its efforts to promote genuine solidarity at European level, while respecting the principle of responsibility of Member States. Also from this angle the development of a Common European Migratory Policy capable of contributing to the EU's Growth Agenda and matched with a strategy for advancing economic growth in the countries of origin remains a priority for the Council. Hence, particular emphasis will be put on implementing the Policy Plan on Legal Migration.

As regards internal security, the implementation of the Internal Security Strategy and its possible follow up will be a key point for the Council. Moreover, the Council will aim to finalise the new legal base for EUROPOL.

High on the agenda of the Council will be the Union's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights as well as the finalization of the data protection package.

The establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's office (EPPO) together with the reform of Eurojust will be pursued as major developments for the European judicial area.

The Council is fully committed to advancing the Justice for Growth agenda and pursuing the adoption of relevant civil law instruments.

The Union's **enlargement policy** remains of strategic importance and a fundamental tool to promote peace, democracy and security in Europe. The three Presidencies will work to further advance the accession negotiations with the Western Balkans countries and will seek to reinvigorate the on-going negotiation process with Turkey.

The three Presidencies are committed to implementing the Council Conclusions on the future prospects of macro-regional strategies.

The EU **Neighbourhood Policy** is a test-case for the effective ability of the Union to act as a global player and an important means of cooperation and support, by the Union, to economic, social and political reforms in countries to the East and to the South. The three Presidencies will ensure that such a response is consistent with the commitments taken by the EU in the wake of the Arab Spring to provide further support to countries embarking on the difficult path of transition, and with expectations of the Eastern neighbours.

In the field of **foreign relations**, the main activities of the EU will, as in previous years, be largely aimed at addressing regional and global challenges and promoting EU interests and core values, in particular human rights and democracy, in the EU's Neighbourhood and beyond. For this, the EU will work closely with its bilateral, regional and strategic partners and continue to play an active role in multilateral fora. The comprehensive approach will remain the cornerstone of EU activities, achieving consistency of action and allowing the full range of options at the EU's disposal to be utilised to best effect.

The three Presidencies will attach great importance to promoting a common EU position on the Post-2015 **Development Agenda**. The Council will closely monitor on-going and emerging humanitarian crises, and will seek to further improve the effectiveness of the EU's and the international community's response to these crises.

PART II

OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME

GENERAL AFFAIRS

Europe 2020 and European Semester

The Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth is key to the economic recovery and further development of competitiveness of the European Union. The strengthened economic governance framework which has been put in place in the context of the European Semester has resulted in a better coordination and convergence of the Member States' economic policies.

The EU needs a strong up-to-date economic strategy to come out of the crisis and return to job rich, sustainable and inclusive growth. In this regard and building on the experience of the Council with implementing the Europe 2020 strategy, the European Semester and the flagship initiatives, the three Presidencies will work towards the review of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

Reflecting the overarching nature of the Europe 2020 strategy, the three Presidencies will ensure that it is addressed in all relevant Council formations, each focusing on aspects under its competence. In the area of economic and financial affairs, the Council will focus, *inter alia*, on the contribution that a differentiated, growth-friendly fiscal strategy and the rebalancing of the economy can make towards Europe 2020 objectives as well as on the inter-linkages between economic governance and Europe 2020.

In the field of employment and social policy, the emphasis will be notably on the potential of better coordinated economic, employment and social policies in delivering on the goals of the strategy, the employment and poverty/social exclusion indicators as well as on women in the labour market. As regards competitiveness, the Council will work on growth enhancing measures in the framework of the Single Market, industrial competitiveness, research and innovation and space, with a particular focus on "new growth".

In the agricultural domain, the role of food industry in European growth will be acknowledged. In the area of transport, telecommunications and energy, the three Presidencies will concentrate on measures required to meet the relevant Europe 2020 targets, the completion of the Internal Energy Market and the Digital Single Market as well as the role of infrastructure in promoting growth. Concerning environment, the three Presidencies will put emphasis on resource efficiency and other synergies between environmental sustainability and the growth and jobs agenda.

In the field of education and youth, the economic case for education and the fight against youth unemployment through education and training will be among the focus areas. The three Presidencies will also promote the contribution of culture and cultural heritage to the achievement of the objectives of a smart, sustainable and inclusive Europe. In the field of health, special attention will be devoted to the role of research and development of innovative medicines and medical products as a contribution to the targets included in the 2020 Strategy.

Following discussions in the Council and the ongoing public consultation, the Commission is expected to present proposals for the pursuit of the Europe 2020 strategy early in 2015. The European Council will subsequently review the strategy. The three Presidencies will support the President of the European Council through targeted examination of Commission proposals within the Council.

The three Presidencies, building on the established mechanisms, will closely coordinate among themselves and the next three Presidencies in order to organise the different phases of the European semesters 2015 and 2016 in an efficient way. The annual cycle will start with the Commission's Annual Growth Survey which is the main input for discussion at the Council, while the June European Council endorses the country-specific recommendations presented by the Commission.

Enlargement process

The three Presidencies acknowledge that enlargement remains a key policy, which continues to reinforce peace, democracy and stability in Europe and allows the EU to be better positioned to address global challenges. They are therefore determined to pursue the enlargement agenda. In line with all relevant European Council and Council conclusions, they will ensure a coherent implementation of the renewed consensus on enlargement, as approved by the December 2006 European Council.

The accession negotiations with Montenegro will be pursued on the basis of the new approach, with a view to achieving further sustained progress in the negotiations, provided that Montenegro is able to comply with the requirements set in the Negotiating Framework and to meet the negotiating benchmarks.

Continued efforts will be made to advance the accession negotiations with Turkey and to sustain the momentum in the interest of both parties. The Council will seek to ensure that the EU remains the anchor for reforms in Turkey, especially in the areas of the rule of law, and fundamental rights and freedoms. The EU will encourage Turkey to advance in the fulfillment of negotiating benchmarks, meet the requirements of the Negotiating Framework, and respect its contractual obligations towards the EU and all its Member States. The positive agenda with Turkey will be further pursued, with a view to supporting the negotiation process, in line with the Negotiating Framework and the relevant Council conclusions. The EU will keep on encouraging Turkey to continue to actively support the negotiations for a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus issue, in accordance with the UN Security Council resolutions on Cyprus and in line with the principles on which the Union is founded.

Following the launch of accession negotiations with Serbia in January 2014, and on the basis of the outcome of the screening process, these negotiations will be pursued on the basis of the new approach, with a view to achieving substantial progress in the negotiations, provided that Serbia is able to comply with the requirements set in the Negotiating Framework and to meet the negotiating benchmarks.

Although the Icelandic Government has decided to put the accession negotiations with Iceland on hold, the Council stands ready to continue the negotiating process in line with the requirements of the Negotiating Framework, should Iceland decide to resume the negotiations.

Particular attention will be paid to the European perspective of the Western Balkans. The Council will apply fair and rigorous conditionality in the framework of the Copenhagen political criteria and the Stabilisation and Association Process. In line with the Thessaloniki Agenda, the Stabilisation and Association Process will remain the common framework for relations with the Western Balkans up to accession. By making solid progress in economic and political reforms and by fulfilling the necessary conditions and requirements, the potential candidates in the Western Balkans should achieve candidate status, according to their own merits, with European Union membership as the ultimate goal.

Accession negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia may be launched, depending on a decision of the Council and endorsement by the European Council. Provided Albania has been granted candidate status, the start of accession negotiations with Albania will depend on further progress in the reform process, as well as on a decision of the Council and endorsement by the European Council. Without prejudice to Member States' positions on status, negotiations for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Kosovo should be concluded in the course of 2014, and the Agreement subsequently signed. The Council will continue to support Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU perspective with a view to eventually achieving candidate status in line with the principle of fair and rigorous conditionality.

Non-EU Western Europe

The EU will further strengthen its close relations with its Western European neighbours. In particular, the Council will review, in the second half of 2014, its relations with the three EEA-EFTA States (Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein) as well as Switzerland and adopt conclusions, which will form the basis for the further development of relations with these countries in 2015. The EU will have to devote particular attention to EU-Switzerland relations, following the referendum of 9 February 2014, whose outcome has the potential to undermine the free movement of persons agreement, thus putting in question the seven "bilateral I" agreements of 2002, as well as the association of Switzerland to the Schengen and Dublin *acquis*. This will have to be done taking into account the intention of the EU to complement the current system of numerous sectorial agreements with Switzerland by an institutional framework. Furthermore, the EU intends to strengthen its relations with Andorra, Monaco and San Marino, through the negotiation of one or several association agreements.

With the three EEA-EFTA States Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, the EU intends to conclude agreements/protocols on the renewal of their financial contributions to reduce social and economic disparities in the EEA, and to open/conclude negotiations on further liberalisation of trade in agricultural products. As most of its Western European neighbours participate, fully or partially, in the internal market, the EU will continue efforts in view of ensuring a homogenous and simultaneous application and interpretation of the evolving EU *acquis* by all participants in the internal market.

Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) / Solidarity Clause

The Council will continue working on the joint proposal for a Council Decision on the arrangements for the implementation by the Union of the Solidarity Clause¹ (Art. 222 TFEU). This clause establishes that the Union and its Member States shall act jointly in a spirit of solidarity if a Member State is the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or man-made disaster. Once the Council Decision is adopted, the three Presidencies will ensure the implementation and regular review as defined therein.

In parallel, the Council will pursue the further development of the EU Integrated Political Response arrangements (IPCR), approved by the Council on 25 June 2013. Work will focus on the key IPCR supporting tools (such as the IPCR web platform) and preparedness activities with a view to developing an indicative programme, with the support of experts from the Member States, the GSC, the Commission and the EEAS. The IPCR might also need to be adapted to support the arrangements for the implementation of the Solidarity Clause once a decision is adopted.

The Friends of the Presidency group on the Integrated Political Crisis Response arrangements and the Solidarity Clause Implementation (FoP IPCR/SCI) will continue its work in handling these two files, in line with the mandate established by COREPER.

¹ Paragraph 3 of Art. 222 TFEU calls for the Council to adopt a decision defining the arrangements for the implementation by the Union of the Solidarity Clause, on the basis of a joint proposal by the Commission and the High Representative.

Regional and Territorial policy

Regional policy after its latest reform has become an increasingly strategic EU investment tool for achieving the goals of economic, social and territorial cohesion by concentrating resources on Europe 2020 Strategy objectives, creating links with economic governance and enhancing territorial elements to better harness growth potential of different territories. For the new reform to deliver the intended results better coordination and follow-up will be needed to discuss effective delivery and identify potential areas for future developments of the policy.

Work in the area of Regional and Territorial Policy will focus on five strands: the assessment of the results of 2007-2013 and of the launching of 2014-2020 programmes; an assessment of the way the Union's territorial cohesion objective is implemented as a strategic framework, including also the macro-regional approach, through an evaluation of the Territorial Agenda 2020 and the further development of an EU Urban agenda; initiating a longer-term strategic debate on territorial development scenarios, and supporting a structured political debate on Cohesion policy; consolidating the framework of legal provisions supporting the better integration of cross-border areas; addressing the particular situation of small and medium cities and their role in urban and regional policy.

These objectives translate into the following activities: follow-up to the work carried out by previous Council Presidencies, taking into account the Commission's Sixth Report on Cohesion and the requests expressed by the European Council and the 2014-2020 Regulations in terms of strategic and political debate on Cohesion policy; continuing support for the intergovernmental cooperation based on the Territorial Agenda 2020, and on the Leipzig Charter, and improving its links with the Community policy framework. The aim is to review the state of the implementation of the Union's territorial cohesion objective and strengthening the link between territorial cohesion and urban policy and between socio-economic and territorial cohesion and economic governance.

Through an integrated and action-oriented approach, the following issues will be further explored:

Possibilities to ensure a more systematic political debate on Cohesion policy in its three integrated dimensions (economic, social, and territorial);

Stimulating multi-level cooperation by using macro-regional strategies to ensure full regional potential, strong EU context and coherence of efforts with European initiatives;

Development of a possible European Territorial vision and perspective 2050, based on scientific analytical work scenarios and perspectives;

Noting the added value of macro-regional strategies, as confirmed by the European Council, the Council will work towards the implementation of the Adriatic and Ionian macro-regional strategy and the elaboration of an EU Strategy for the Alpine Region, while continuing to monitor the implementation of existing macro-regional strategies;

Improving the framework for supporting the creation of integrated cross-border areas effectively;

Political debates and discussion of concrete experiences in the context of the Urban agenda;

Addressing the small and medium-size cities with particular attention to their role in common territorial development including inner areas, their economic growth potential and their role in cross-border metropolitan areas.

Institutional Issues

A new institutional cycle will begin in July 2014, with a newly elected Parliament, to be followed by the appointment of a new Commission and new President of the European Council. Against this background, the Council will be called to address a number of institutional issues. The key priority will be addressing the concerns of the citizens and bringing the European policy closer to them, by delivering a "better Europe". The Council will work towards integrating the concept of a "better Europe" in the key areas of activity, notably, in the EMU and the Single Market, competitiveness, growth and innovation, with due respect to the key principles of subsidiarity, accountability and proportionality.

In this framework, the three Presidencies will try to identify possible operational ways to enhance the inter-institutional cooperation.

The three Presidencies will work towards completion of the accession of the EU to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights.

The reform of the Court of Justice remains a priority for the Council. The three Presidencies will ensure that the necessary modalities are in place to allow the Court to fulfil effectively and efficiently its fundamental functions.

The Council, in close cooperation with the EEAS, will work together to enhance the profile of the EU in the world, to consolidate its role as a global player and to enhance a cross-cutting approach to the diverse and powerful instruments of the EU's external action, guided by the Council conclusions on the EEAS review.

Rule of Law

The Council will closely accompany the future developments of a possible new framework to strengthen the Rule of Law which seeks to resolve future systemic threats to the Rule of Law in Member States before the conditions for activating the mechanism foreseen in Article 7 TEU would be met.

Integrated Maritime Policy

The three Presidencies recognize the importance of seas and oceans for the European economy and, in the context of the Integrated Maritime Policy, will encourage the implementation of the Blue Growth Agenda to support economic growth and jobs. Particular attention needs to be devoted to promote innovation, to support market uptake of renewable energy technologies as well as to contribute to sustainable use of Europe's marine resources. The adoption of the European Maritime Security Strategy will call for the definition of an action plan which will need to be implemented through a comprehensive and cross-sectoral approach to maritime security affairs, in particular with respect to maritime situational awareness.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Common commercial policy

Open and fair trade is a key instrument to stimulate economic growth, competitiveness and employment. Greater market openness as well as increasing trade and investment flows are essential for promoting growth and economic recovery in all of the EU, in line with the needs of industrial and other EU policies to ensure a coherent framework for the economic recovery.

EU trade policy should continue to ensure the enforcement of the EU's rights under existing rules and promote enhanced access to world markets. In this regard, the Presidencies will give their full support to the EU Market Access Strategy, which plays a fundamental role in identifying and reducing obstacles faced by European exporters. In addition, a strategic discussion will be promoted with a special focus on Non-Tariff Barriers.

Strategic partnerships with major economies are fundamental to sustain growth and create jobs throughout the European Union. The EU shall therefore pursue and, wherever possible, finalise bilateral trade and investment negotiations with the United States, Japan and Canada and also deepen trade and investment relations with emerging economies.

The EU remains fully committed to a strong, rules-based multilateral trading system. In this regard, the Presidencies shall continue their full support to the multilateral trading system and progress in the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) – including ratification and implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement and management of the post-Bali Agenda – building on the decisions taken at WTO MC9. The three Presidencies will prepare and coordinate the EU's position, in particular with a view to the WTO MC10 in 2015. Moreover, considering the fundamental role of an enlarged WTO membership in strengthening multilateral trade rules and the fight against protectionism, the three Presidencies will encourage ongoing accession negotiations, including but not limited to Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan and Serbia.

In addition to the WTO's multilateral negotiations, the three Presidencies will also favour the conclusion of the negotiations on plurilateral bases. In this regard the conclusion of TiSA, which should enter into a decisive stage under the three Presidencies, will be of utmost importance. Other areas of possible progress outside the single undertaking could be the launch of the environmental goods and services initiative and the finalisation of the ITA review.

A key tool to promote the development of global rules is the conclusion of an extensive network of ambitious and balanced trade and investment agreements. In this framework, regional and bilateral agreements represent essential means to increase EU visibility and influence in its neighbourhood where they promote stability, welfare European standards and values.

Given the importance of the relations with our neighbourhood, progress will be pursued in opening and advancing negotiations on Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs) with partner countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, in particular with Morocco, Jordan, Tunisia and, when the conditions are met, with Egypt. By the same token progress will be pursued in implementing DCFTAs with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine as well as in committing to further deepening the cooperation with other Eastern Partnership countries to identify progress in the next summit to be held in 2015.

Since regional integration in all areas of the world helps foster stability, build prosperity, and address global challenges, the EU will further pursue the negotiations with the ASEAN countries.

After the conclusion of a trade agreement with Singapore, the aim is now to speed up negotiations with Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia as well as to verify the conditions for launching negotiations with other partners in the region such as Indonesia, the Philippines and Brunei. Moreover, the three Presidencies will fully support and favour negotiations for investment agreements with Burma/Myanmar and China. As for Mercosur and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the EU will continue the negotiations to conclude a comprehensive, ambitious and balanced agreement in line with the current region-to-region approach.

Particular attention will also be paid to advancing and concluding EPA negotiations, especially with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) as well as with other countries with which the negotiations or the procedures for the application of the agreements are still pending. In this regard, the EU recognises the need to take into account the various levels of development of its partners and to assist them in the implementation of their commitments through appropriate technical assistance and aid for trade.

The Council will follow the procedures and act at the most effective level in promoting legislative incentives tabled in the current EU external trade policy agenda for the benefit of all EU stakeholders and ensuring the competitiveness of EU industry and openness of EU market. Relations with the European Parliament will be further developed and strengthened, in particular when it comes to the organization of trilogues.

Furthermore, the three Presidencies will promote the revision of the Council Regulation (EC) No 428/2009 of 5 May 2009 setting up a Community regime for the control of exports of dual-use items, with a view to ensuring security and competitiveness in this sensitive area, as advocated by the Green Paper on the dual-use export control system of the European Union published by the European Commission in 2011.

The Council will also address the question of raw materials and the developments in this area. The ongoing discussions around sustainable development in trade policy, whose importance to national Parliaments and the European Parliament has increased over the past legislature, will also be discussed during the three Presidencies.

Foreign and Security Policy

The core objective of achieving consistency in EU foreign policy and external action, as articulated by the Lisbon Treaty, will continue to guide EU activities in 2014-15. While the precise priorities of the incoming European leadership have yet to be confirmed, these activities will, as in previous years, be largely aimed at addressing regional and global challenges and promoting EU interests and values, in particular democracy, fundamental rights, stability, security and prosperity in the EU's Neighbourhood.

Taking forward the important work on the tools for delivering this will be critical. This will include: ensuring that the Comprehensive Approach framework remains a cornerstone of EU activities, to allow the full range of options at the EU's disposal to be utilised to best effect; and ensuring that the review of the European External Action Service conducted by HRVP Ashton, and subsequent follow-up, is used to further consolidate and enhance the valuable role the Service plays in providing coherence and in delivering objectives.

It will be equally important to build on the partnerships already well-established with key existing and emerging global players - in particular, taking forward the Strategic Partnerships with USA, Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico and South Africa. The strategic partnership with Russia will have to be revisited in the light of events that have taken place in Ukraine including Crimea. Solidifying and enhancing mutually beneficial cooperation with regional organisations will also be a major priority. Support for and complementing the work of multilateral organisations such as the UN will remain a central plank of EU activity.

The European Union's Southern and Eastern Neighbourhood will continue to dominate attention, both given the priority these areas have under CFSP, and the ongoing developments in both regions.

The situation in the Southern Neighbourhood will continue to be high on the agenda. The EU's overarching goal remains supporting long-term democratic change in the region, through the various international and local mechanisms already established, in particular establishing inclusive democracy that allows for the important contribution of civil society and women. The focus will likely be on specific countries engaged in transition, or experiencing conflict or instability.

In particular, on Syria the EU will work closely with its partners to support progress on conclusions made via the Geneva II process, aimed at stopping the violence and securing a legitimate political transition. Furthermore, addressing the humanitarian situation, and encouraging others to do likewise, will be an essential component of the EU's effort. Mitigating the threat of political and insecurity spill over into neighbouring countries such as Lebanon and Jordan, and the destabilising effect of large scale refugee arrivals, will be another core work stream. Iraq will require sustained attention, given that the country is in a critical period of government formation following elections in April 2014 and also faces an escalating insurgency.

The EU will need to continue to follow events in Egypt closely, working with a new leadership to resume full cooperation, which has been hindered by recent events, while finding ways to help ensure that any democratic gains are not lost. In Libya, helping to strengthen state institutions, and assist the central authorities manage risks associated with the rise of militias and the divisions within the country, will be a test for EU diplomacy and programmes. Tunisia's young democracy will need to be supported, given the challenges it faces. This is vital in order to demonstrate a positive outcome of the Arab Spring, and as an example to others undergoing transition.

The EU will remain actively involved, including within the Quartet, working towards a just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this respect the EU fully supports current US efforts and those of the parties. Current talks represent a unique opportunity which must be seized for both parties to implement a two-state solution. The EU has committed to propose an unprecedented package of assistance that could be implemented once there is a final status agreement.

To complement the EU-Gulf Cooperation multilateral track, the EU will further develop its political engagement with individual Gulf countries.

At the regional level, the EU will need to address the implications of instability, including by continuing to work in the context of the Union for the Mediterranean and by enhancing the relationship with the League of Arab States. In particular, it will need to look at ways to mitigate the threat from organised crime who are exploiting the instability in the MENA region to pursue human trafficking, illegal migration and other criminal activities. It will also need to work with international partners to counter the growth of sectarianism and the terrorist threat from ascendant Al Qaida affiliates active in Syria and elsewhere in the region.

In the Eastern Neighbourhood, following up on the outcome of the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit in November 2013 will be key, particularly in relation to the signing and implementation of Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas with Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. It will be important to ensure that these agreements deliver for all sides. The fourth Eastern Partnership Summit to be held in Riga in May 2015 will be an opportunity to evaluate progress achieved in political association and economic integration and to further develop the relationship between the EU and its Eastern Partners. Based on the principle of differentiation within the Eastern Partnership, the EU will seek to foster enhanced relations with other Eastern European partners, including Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Following the signing of the remaining provisions of the Association Agreement with Ukraine including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, the EU will work closely together with Ukraine to ensure its implementation. The EU will continue to support the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine and to promote the country's political and economic stabilisation. The EU will continue with the implementation of its support to the necessary reforms, notably civilian security sector reform and reform of the energy sector.

On protracted conflicts, the EU will continue to work closely with the OSCE and other partners concerned on progress towards a sustainable settlement to conflicts in the Republic of Moldova, in Georgia and over Nagorno Karabakh.

Fostering stability security and prosperity in the Western Balkans will remain an important EU priority . On Serbia/Kosovo, there will still be much work to do to continue implementation of all the agreements reached in the context of the EU-facilitated dialogue. Further progress in the process of normalisation of relations will allow both Serbia and Kosovo to keep the momentum in their respective European paths. Continued engagement with Bosnia-Herzegovina in order to address the country's immediate socio-economical challenges and to encourage further progress on its EU path will be needed. The political dialogue in FYROM and Albania will need to be closely monitored. On the ground involvement (e.g. tools of Pre-Accession Assistance in B-H, EULEX in Kosovo) will remain important.

The EU will maintain and strengthen its political dialogue with Turkey, in particular with respect to cooperation in the region. Our overarching ambition remains to encourage Turkey to further develop its foreign policy in coordination with the EU, in line with the principles set out in the Negotiating Framework.

The EU will maintain close relations with those countries in the EU's immediate neighbourhood not aspiring to EU accession. It will work on improving legal certainty for economic operators and citizens alike by advocating the homogeneous application of relevant EU legislation in the internal market as extended to the EEA countries and Switzerland. In parallel, negotiations on Association agreements with Andorra, San Marino and Monaco may contribute to their stronger integration into the internal market.

The US will remain a key and essential partner in almost all aspects of EU external action. Making progress on the TTIP will be a priority. The EU also looks forward to further strengthening the cooperation with the US on energy security, climate change, data protection and cyber security.

Region-to-region relations with Latin America and the Caribbean will be further strengthened with the II EU-CELAC summit, to be held in Brussels in 2015. Special attention will be given to security issues with the launch of an EU Security Strategy for Central America and the Caribbean. Relations with sub-regional groupings (SICA, CARIFORUM, Mercosur and Pacific Alliance) will also be further developed. The EU will also continue to reinforce bilateral relations with the countries of the region in particular its Strategic Partners (Mexico and Brazil).

The strategic partnership with Russia will have to be reviewed in light of developments in Ukraine, including Crimea, and other countries in our common neighbourhood. The EU will not recognize the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia. The EU will continue to call on Russia to support stability and security in Europe in line with the Helsinki Final Act, the Paris Charter, the principles and instruments of the OSCE and the Council of Europe. The EU and Russia share an interest to cooperate on global issues like climate change, terrorism and in the G20, and on international security issues like Syria, the Iranian nuclear programme and the Middle East Peace Process. The EU will continue to call on Russia to respect its commitments taken in the WTO.

The EU will remain engaged with the countries of Central Asia, including assisting in meeting security and other challenges stemming from the foreseen scale-down of the international security presence in Afghanistan this year. Other challenges include counter-terrorism drug trafficking, energy, water security and regional cooperation, to be addressed both bilaterally and in the EU-Central Asia Security Dialogue. The EU will continue assisting Kazakhstan in its accession talks to the World Trade Organization as well as to encourage steps in the same direction of Uzbekistan. There will be important elections in 2015 which the EU will monitor closely and assist as appropriate. The EU-Central Asia Strategy will be reviewed in early 2015.

Global and regional challenges such as addressing non-proliferation challenges, piracy, terrorism and threats to cyber security will be an important dimension in expanding EU cooperation with China and India.

The agreement on a Joint Plan of Action in November 2013 by the E3/EU+3 and Iran has been a first confidence-building step addressing the most urgent concerns regarding Iran's nuclear programme and an important contribution to the EU's regional security and non-proliferation objectives. After implementation of the Joint Plan of Action began on 20 January 2014 with a decision of the Foreign Affairs Council, the E3/EU+3 and Iran embarked on new negotiations with the goal to reach agreement on a comprehensive solution to the Iranian nuclear issue. Several rounds of talks between the E3/EU+3 and Iran took place in Vienna. The EU will remain actively engaged in these diplomatic efforts to seek a long term comprehensive solution which would fully address the international community's concerns about the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear programme.

Contributing to Afghanistan's state-building and transition process will be a major priority, in view of Presidential and Parliamentary elections in 2014/15, the ISAF withdrawal and NATO's follow-on mission. Supporting the full implementation of the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, and possible peace talks under the new administration, will be essential. A more comprehensive approach combining different EU and MS instruments should guide the envisaged new EU Strategy for Afghanistan, including on Rule of Law and civilian policing, with input from the EUPOL police mission. The finalization of the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development remains an important objective, as does continuous EU support at regional level, including through the Heart of Asia Process, to encourage Afghanistan's neighbours to contribute constructively.

In Pakistan, the EU will work on the implementation of the 5-year Engagement Plan, and to develop a broader relationship.

In Bangladesh, the EU will continue to monitor the governance and human rights situation while encouraging the two main political parties to engage in genuine dialogue, which should allow the holding of transparent, inclusive and credible elections.

The EU will maintain its support for the ongoing transition in Myanmar/Burma, building upon the outcome of the first EU-Myanmar Task Force meeting of November 2013.

EU engagement with Myanmar/Burma will also be important in the context of its chairmanship of ASEAN in 2014. The EU will step up engagement with ASEAN, using the 20th EU-ASEAN Foreign Ministers' meeting to be held in 2014 to take forward its broad agenda of cooperation.

The EU will use the 10th ASEM Summit to be held in October 2014, and the 12th ASEM FMM to be held in November 2015 to convey a strong message of commitment to Asia. It will monitor developments in Asian security closely. The EU will continue to strengthen relations with the Pacific Islands countries and their regional organisations through high-level political dialogue.

The EU Africa summit in April 2014 showcased the breadth and depth of the partnership and the Summit Declaration together with the Roadmap 2014-2017 framing continental cooperation will be the basis for future action.

Implementing the EU's new Gulf of Guinea Strategy in support of regional efforts to cope with security challenges in this part of Africa, will be an important further step in EU partnership with Africa on peace and security.

Continuing assistance (military and diplomatic) to help maintain and improve security in the Central African Republic, DRC and the Great Lakes, South Sudan, Somalia and Mali will be vital. The Horn of Africa and the Sahel region will also remain high on our agenda, following up to the Mali and Somalia conferences from 2013. Election support and monitoring may also be a key activity. In the Horn of Africa region, the implementation of the EU's Strategic Framework, adopted in November 2011, will continue to be a priority. The EU will particularly focus on finding a peaceful and lasting solution for the internal conflict in South Sudan which risks to have serious negative spillover effects onto the region. The EU's attention will also remain on Somalia's political stabilisation process and state building agenda, the fight against piracy (EUNAVFOR Atalanta) and reinforcing support to the security sector in Somalia (EUTM Somalia, EUCAP Nestor). Throughout 2014, the EU chairs the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS). CSDP missions in Africa, either ongoing or newly created, will remain an essential component of EU engagement.

The EU will use the opportunity of the 7th EU - South Africa Summit – but also of other key political events in 2014-15 from the EU-South Africa Joint Cooperation Council, to the Political and Security Dialogue and up to the Ministerial Political Dialogue to demonstrate the strength and breadth of our Strategic Partnership with South Africa and with the region.

Making progress on relevant aspects of the December 2013 Council conclusions, in particular increasing the effectiveness, impact and visibility of CSDP, will be a core objective. This should include providing greater support for security partners and regional organisations on shared challenges such as terrorism, international crime and piracy, and building capacity through training, advice, equipment and resources where appropriate and in close cooperation with partners such as the UN, NATO and the African Union. The Council will prepare a report drawing on inputs from the Commission, the High Representative and the European Defence Agency, on the basis of which the European Council will assess the progress achieved in June 2015.

Improving the EU's rapid response capabilities to deploy the right civilian and military assets, and properly dealing with security challenges, in particular those resulting from interlinkages between internal and external challenges, will be further goals. This will require taking forward work on, inter alia, the EU Cyber Defence Policy Framework, an EU Maritime Security Strategy (from June 2014), and operationalising synergies between CSDP and Freedom/Security/Justice actors to tackle horizontal issues such as illegal migration, organised crime and terrorism.

Tackling global factors affecting, directly or indirectly, the stability of states and international peace and security are likely to become even more pressing priorities. It will remain essential to continue to strengthen the EU's early warning, conflict prevention and mediation support capacities, including the development of shared conflict analysis. The EU will continue to use restrictive measures as an instrument of its broader CFSP objectives. Disarmament, non-proliferation of WMD and wider CBRN risks, combatting illicit trade in conventional arms and new challenges such as sustainability of Outer Space activities will also be important aspects.

On climate and energy diplomacy, the main focus will be to create the political momentum for the leaders' climate summit in September 2014, promoting an ambitious EU 2030 climate and energy package as well as preparing the post Kyoto agreement to be hopefully adopted at the UNFCCC December 2015 Paris meeting.

Migration will be another major challenge, including in view of the upcoming evaluations of major international processes on migration (e.g. GAMM and post-Stockholm JHA Programme).

Underpinning all EU external action will be core EU values such as encouraging democratic governance, respect for human rights and political inclusiveness. The EU will work closely with partners, multilateral forums and international organisations dealing with human rights and democracy. Cooperation with the Council of Europe, in particular in the Eastern Neighbourhood and the Western Balkans, will be essential in this regard. The EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy will remain a key vehicle, and the EU Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy will guide the EU's engagement. The EUSR on Human Rights will continue to enhance the effectiveness and visibility of the EU's Human Rights work.

The European Endowment for Democracy will continue to provide support to activists endeavouring for democratic transition in the European Neighbourhood and beyond. The completion of the process of EU accession to the European Convention of Human Rights will remain a priority for the EU (Art. 6 of the Lisbon Treaty) in 2014 and 2015.

In the area of development, the focus will in the coming years remain on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the work to prepare the new post-2015 framework for sustainable development and poverty eradication. The EU has a key role to play in the development of the new universal framework, which should build on the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social, environmental) and should also integrate issues relating to governance, the rule of law, human rights, gender equality and peaceful societies, as well as key sectoral issues such as food security. Issues relating to Global Partnership and Financing for Development will also be taken forward. Efforts to move towards a joined-up EU position should be reinforced.

The EU will also continue to modernise its development policy and its development cooperation, in line with the Agenda for Change and its two priority areas of inclusive and sustainable growth and of human rights, democracy and other key elements of good governance. The implementation of EU development cooperation programmes and external relations instruments will continue, as will the efforts to better coordinate and increase the effectiveness and impact of the development cooperation programmes of the EU and its Member States through Joint Programming. The work towards an EU Results Framework will also continue.

In the coming years, the EU will also reinforce the efforts to make better and more effective use of its collective tools and resources across different political and policy domains to achieve more coherent and effective EU external action, in particular in conflict and crisis situations, in line with the principles and priorities of the EU's comprehensive approach and the Council Conclusions adopted in May 2014, also in view of the Action Plan to be prepared by March 2015. Efforts to strengthen Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) will also continue.

Finally, the European Year for Development 2015 (EYD 2015) will be a key opportunity for the EU to showcase and inform the general public, civil society and the private sector about its development policy and its efforts to promote poverty eradication and sustainable development around the world.

Humanitarian Aid

In the face of a growing number of people affected by natural and man-made disasters and a dramatic increase of humanitarian needs, the Council will closely monitor on-going and emerging humanitarian crises, and will seek to further improve the effectiveness of the EU and the international community's response to these crises. The Council will continue to promote information sharing and will contribute to strengthening coordination among EU Member States and within the EU. Efforts for closer cooperation between humanitarian aid and civil protection will continue, especially in disaster preparedness and response. The EU will provide continued support to the central coordinating role of the United Nations, notably of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Action (OCHA) and will strengthen EU humanitarian advocacy vis-à-vis third countries and international organisations in the context of humanitarian crises.

The Council will endeavor to ensure that in the implementation of the EU comprehensive approach to external conflicts and crises, EU and Member States' humanitarian actors will contribute to and benefit from information-sharing and joint analyses with other areas of EU external action to facilitate coherence and complementarity of assistance. Humanitarian aid will continue to be delivered solely on the basis of assessed needs, according to the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, as set out in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. The implementation and the awareness of the Consensus will continue.

Efforts will continue to strengthen and to build greater capacity in the areas of prevention, preparedness and LRRD (linking relief, rehabilitation and development), as well as the implementation of the EU Approach to Resilience and the Resilience Action Plan, in close cooperation with development aid actors.

The Council will ensure, together with the Commission, the coordination of the EU position for the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, looking notably into ways to further enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian aid, improve risk management, improve aid delivery to people in conflict situations and support innovative approaches, including through engagement with the private sector.

The three Presidencies will continue to monitor the implementation of the Food Assistance Convention. The three Presidencies will also ensure the coherence of the EU's external representation in humanitarian bodies, notably within the Executive Board of the World Food Programme (WFP). To this end, EU statements to the WFP Executive Board proposed by the Commission will continue to be discussed and finalised within the Council.

The Council will follow up on the implementation of the EU Aid Volunteers Regulation and the negotiations on the post-2015 Hyogo Framework for Action.

Fight against terrorism

The Council will continue to ensure that consideration of counter-terrorism is mainstreamed into wider EU analysis and efforts in the priority regions of the Middle East and North Africa, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia, Maghreb, Sahel and West Africa, Somalia and East Africa. The three Presidencies will follow through on priorities such as the implementation of counter-terrorism Strategies and Action Plans, the development/counter-terrorism nexus, criminal justice and human rights compliance, countering radicalisation and recruitment, countering terrorist financing and engagement with international partners, on the basis of a comprehensive approach. While counter-terrorism remains mainly a responsibility of Member States, EU efforts are increasingly adding value and complementing bilateral efforts.

European Consular Cooperation

EU consular cooperation is based on mutual solidarity. In addition, a specific Treaty right is established in regard to the provision of consular assistance to unrepresented EU citizens. As provided for in the Lisbon Treaty, this assistance is based on the principle of non-discrimination. Pursuant to Art. 23 TFEU, every EU Member State is committed to helping any EU citizen whose country has no embassy or consulate in that particular third country, under the same conditions as its own nationals.

With the view to strengthening citizens' knowledge of their consular rights, the three Presidencies together with the Member States, the European External Action Service and the European Commission will continue to work on maintaining and improving the existing European consular cooperation. In this regard, the work will include further negotiations regarding the legislative framework on consular protection for citizens of the Union abroad. Furthermore, the three Presidencies will continue discussions, coordination and cooperation on 'hotspots', crisis management, joint demarches and initiatives such as the Lead State Concept or Consular Cooperation Initiatives.

The three Presidencies will also seek to further develop tools and arrangements for cooperation in the event of a major consular crisis affecting EU citizens in a third country. In addition the Consular Dialogue with like-minded countries such as the United States, Canada and Australia will be further pursued.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Economic Policy

With the euro-area crisis abating the EU needs an overarching economic strategy to come out of the crisis and return to job rich sustainable and inclusive growth. The three Presidencies are determined to support the economic recovery and the implementation of policies conducive to job creation. To this effect, the Council will continue to focus on the differentiated, growth-friendly fiscal consolidation, the rebalancing of the economies and the repair of bank balance sheets as well as structural reforms and the reinforcement of the single market.

Economic policy action will build on the measures already taken to strengthen economic governance and economic policy coordination. The Council will draw the first lessons from the implementation of the new governance tools and step up its efforts in those areas where it is necessary. To this effect, the Council will carefully consider the Commission's review of economic governance legislation expected by mid-December 2014. It will provide the background for thoroughly assessing the effectiveness of the current governance framework and whether changes are needed.

The Council will continue work on deepening the EMU along the lines of the four pillar roadmap outlined in the Report of the four Presidents and endorsed by the Heads of State and Government in December 2012. While significant progress has been made in the field of financial stability and Banking Union, a decisive step forward is required to achieve economic and fiscal union. To this effect, the Council counts on the Commission to make further proposals in line with the roadmap outlined in the "Blueprint for a deep and genuine Economic and Monetary Union."

In this context, the Council will carry work forward on Partnerships for Growth, Jobs, and Competitiveness on the basis of the orientations provided by the European Council in December 2013.

In the second semester of 2014, the Council will take stock of the implementation of the commitments made under the Treaty of Stability, Coordination and Governance (TSCG), in particular the implementation of balanced budget rules and automatic correction mechanisms by Member States in their national legal frameworks according to the agreed principles.

Building on the experience of earlier years, the Council will discuss its policy priorities and implement the Country-Specific-Recommendations in the framework of the European Semester. The Semester integrates the surveillance of structural reforms and fiscal policy under the strengthened Stability and Growth Pact. National Reform Programmes and Stability and Convergence Programmes are presented simultaneously. Within this framework, the three Presidencies will pursue an integrated approach, ensuring that Member States address their structural and macro-economic challenges, while returning to sustainable public finances.

The EU's and the euro-area's enhanced policy co-ordination framework also aim to tackle macroeconomic imbalances and competitiveness losses. The Alert Mechanism Report and the In-Depth Reviews allow for a thorough discussion of such economic developments within the Macroeconomic Imbalances Procedure (MIP). The three Presidencies will monitor the evolution of imbalances in particular within the euro area and at the level of the euro area as a whole and assess the achievements of the procedure.

Building on its experience with implementing the European Semester for several years and the flagship initiatives, the Council will contribute to the mid-term review of the EU 2020 Strategy to be completed by spring 2015.

Moreover, the Council will continue to ensure the implementation of the Compact for Growth and Jobs, adopted by the European Council in June 2012 with a view to enhancing Europe's growth potential.

The Council will oversee the implementation of measures to restore normal lending to the economy, in particular to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), including through the European Investment Bank (EIB) and through the European Investment Fund (EIF) following its capital increase in 2014.

The Council will also work on the follow up to the report of the High Level Expert Group (HLEG) and on the implementation of the actions proposed by the Commission in its Communication on Long-Term Financing of the European Economy.

The three Presidencies will continue to work towards supporting EU partners facing difficulties, including through the macro-financial assistance.

Financial Markets

Sound and efficient financial markets and intermediaries are key to the resilience and recovery of the real economy in the European Union. Channeling savings towards investments in a smooth and uniform manner across the Single Market is instrumental to revive the economy and ensure a proper functioning of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU).

In this perspective, the completion of the Banking Union, in all its components, is of the outmost importance for the three Presidencies. The completion of this cornerstone of the EMU will not only break the nexus between the banking sector and the sovereign but will also reduce the financial fragmentation in the euro area and in the European Union as a whole. The new supervisory and resolution framework will have to be implemented with a view to ensuring the highest prudential standards in the banking sector, while at the same time preserving a level playing field across national markets and institutions.

A fundamental milestone in this implementation process will be the entry into force of the Single Resolution Mechanism (SSM) Regulation in November 2014, preceded by the comprehensive assessment by the European Central Bank (ECB). The follow-up of this unprecedented exercise, whose results will be published in October 2014, will be a crucial first step in the implementation of the Banking Union.

In order to further strengthen the EU banking sector the three Presidencies intend to bring further the discussion on new rules on banking structures to address and limit the risks in trading activities of the biggest and most complex banks, including through a possible ban of proprietary trading. Also the possible accompanying measures aimed at increasing transparency of certain transactions in the shadow banking sector will be addressed.

Promoting the diversification of the EU financial system (financing of the economy) is a priority for the three Presidencies in order to ensure the broadness, depth and continuity of financial flows to the real economy at all times. In this vein, further development of capital markets and of long term investors, will be sought in order to supplement bank credit to the economy, with a special focus on Small and Medium Enterprises. Intermediaries, also in the shadow banking sector, will have to be subject to proper prudential arrangements to reduce systemic risks and safeguard market integrity.

As regards payment systems, to support online services particularly cross-border, the three Presidencies will aim at improving harmonization of the legal framework, stimulating technical standardization and innovation, while improving payment security.

The soundness, integrity and stability of the financial system can be threatened by the efforts of criminals to disguise the origin of criminal proceeds or to channel money for terrorist purposes. The finalization and the effective implementation of the new legislative framework to combat financial crimes in particular reaching an agreement on the anti-money laundering directive and the regulation on information accompanying transfers of funds are important priorities for the three Presidencies.

In order to improve the functioning and governance of benchmarks and to ensure that benchmarks produced and used in the EU are robust, reliable representative and fit for purpose and that they are not subject to manipulation, the three Presidencies envisage to conclude the benchmark Regulation by 2015. It is also important to facilitate cross-border activities of institutions for occupational retirement provision and to improve the governance.

Taxation

In view of strengthening the fight against tax fraud and evasion the Council will take forward the discussion on the Commission's Action Plan and continue work to improve the functioning of the existing instruments of administrative cooperation, in line with relevant European Council and ECOFIN Council conclusions.

In the area of transparency and exchange of information in the field of taxation, the Council will seek adoption of the revised Directive on administrative cooperation by the end of 2014

The aim is to ensure that EU law on automatic exchange of information is fully aligned with the new single global standard, agreed by the OECD and endorsed by the G20.

The Council will closely monitor the progress of the negotiations of agreement with third countries (Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino and Switzerland) aimed at extending the scope of the existing agreements on taxation of savings and bringing the tax cooperation fully in line with the new single global standard of automatic exchange of information in tax matters.

In the area of direct taxation, the Council will make efforts to promote corporate tax measures aimed at preventing abuses, double non-taxation and mismatches caused by hybrid structures, taking into account international developments on base erosion and profit shifting. The Council will in particular examine the proposals to amend the Parent/Subsidiary and the Interest and royalties Directive and make progress in the area of hybrid structures within the context of the Code of Conduct Group on business taxation.

The Council will also take forward discussions on the Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base (CCCTB).

The ongoing work of the Code of Conduct Group on business taxation to examine measures which potentially constitute harmful tax competition will continue. The three Presidencies will also encourage the extension of the principles and all criteria of the Code of Conduct to third countries.

In the area of VAT, the Council will continue works to improve the common system of value added tax with the aim of favouring the better functioning of the internal market and establishing a framework which is simpler, less burdensome for economic operators and tax administrations and more effective to prevent VAT fraud.

The Council will pursue work on the proposals for the standard VAT return, treatment of vouchers, insurance and financial services.

The Council will be working towards an agreement on the proposal for the revision of the Directive on the taxation of energy products and electricity. It will also ensure that work on the proposal for enhanced cooperation on a financial transaction tax will be carried forward, while taking into due account the implications for the good functioning of financial markets.

Taxation aspects of the digital economy will be further examined in the Council and tax policy coordination among Member States will be further pursued. The Council will continue to keep the European Council informed on tax policy issues on the basis of regular reports prepared by the High Level Working Party on tax issues.

Export Credits

In the field of international disciplines for officially supported export credits, the three Presidencies will continue to promote and coordinate the EU's position in the OECD Arrangement on Export Credits. This Arrangement will continue to be transposed into EU legislation.

Discussions in the context of International Working Groups on Export Credits will be pursued with a view to possible negotiations with China and other BRIC countries, aiming for a level playing field with OECD countries.

Budget

The Council will ensure that the annual budgetary procedures are carried out successfully in line with the budgetary provisions of the Lisbon Treaty, and that adequate resources will be available in particular for an effective implementation of the programmes under the multiannual financial framework for 2014-2020. Sound financial management of EU funds will remain a priority for the Council, notably when monitoring the implementation of the budget on the basis of the European Court of Auditors' annual report.

The Council will take a decision to revise the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020 before 1 May 2015 concerning the transfer of unused allocation for the year 2014 in accordance with Article 19 of Council Regulation No 1311/2013 of 2 December 2013 laying down the multiannual financial framework for the years 2014-2020.

Own resources

The Council will follow the progress of the work and the interim assessments made available by the High Level Group on Own Resources (HLGOR). It will take note of the Member States' approval of the new own resources Decision for the period of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2014-2020. The Council will take note of the recalculated ceilings of own resources based on the Member States' transmitted data on the basis of ESA 2010. Moreover, the Council will examine the expected Commission's proposal for a revision of the procedure for calculating the interest on amounts made available belatedly.

Protection of the European Union's financial interests

The Council will examine the reports from the Commission, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and the OLAF Supervisory Committee in the field of the protection of the financial interests of the European Union. Special attention will be given to the implementation of Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 883/2013 concerning investigations conducted by OLAF notably as regards the inter-institutional exchange of views.

Statistics

Depending on the progress reached by the previous Presidencies, the three Presidencies will continue and finalize work on the amending Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 on European Statistics, on the EXTRASTAT Regulation, the Regulation on statistics of goods transport by inland waterways and the Regulation on rail transport statistics. Work will be continued on the macroeconomic imbalance procedure statistics Regulation and on the alignment of statistical Regulations with the Lisbon Treaty. The programme will take into consideration the Regulations on harmonisation of gross national income at market prices, harmonised indices of consumer prices and business statistics and eventually the amending Regulation concerning balance of payments.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

The three Presidencies will be committed to assessing the implementation and proper enforcement of the already adopted measures, and will encourage the Council to take all necessary steps to facilitate initiatives aiming at fully implementing the Strategic Guidelines to be adopted by the European Council in June 2014, also by ensuring coherence and complementarity between external and internal policies.

The Council will also follow closely the implementation of the new multiannual financial framework 2014-2020. In this context, the citizen will remain at the core of the EU activity in the development of the area of freedom security and justice.

The Council shall determine the necessary consequential and transitional arrangements following the UK's notification to opt-out from pre-Lisbon measures in the area of police cooperation and judicial cooperation in criminal matters, as is its right under Protocol 36.

The three Presidencies, recognizing the strategic importance of the European Agencies as a result of the increasingly complex and ambitious tasks to be performed by them, in particular after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, will emphasize their key role and promote better synergies of their activities.

HOME AFFAIRS

Visas

Work will continue on the further development of the Common Visa Policy, in order to respond in an appropriate manner to the needs of the EU and Member States. A main objective will be to examine and pursue an agreement on the forthcoming proposal of the Commission for a recast of the Visa Code.

The three Presidencies will give priority to the full roll-out of the Visa Information System (VIS) and will, in that regard, look at how to ensure the best possible operation of VISION until its replacement by VIS mail.

Furthermore, due attention will be given to ensuring progress in visa dialogues and negotiations on visa facilitation agreements with a number of third countries of the Southern and Eastern neighbourhood and to the launching of negotiations with China in the framework of the high level dialogue on migration and mobility.

Borders

In full compliance with the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights, the improvement and strengthening of integrated management of the European Union's external borders will continue to be one of the key priorities during the upcoming 18 months. The three Presidencies' efforts will concentrate on guaranteeing security on the European Union's territory while, at the same time, facilitating the entry of bona fide travelers who do not represent a threat to public order and security.

The three Presidencies will aim at ensuring the full operational deployment of EUROSUR and the application of the Regulation on joint operations at sea borders, coordinated by FRONTEX, facilitating a more effective participation of Member States.

In accordance with the approach endorsed in COREPER on 5 February 2014, work on the Smart Borders Package will continue. As foreseen, a proof of concept for the Entry/Exit System (EES) and for the Registered Travellers Programme (RTP) is currently being undertaken. Under the guidance of the Commission and with the assistance of EU-LISA and relevant Member States' experts, it looks at a number of technical, cost-related and operational questions. While the pilot is taking place, the three Presidencies, in contact with the European Parliament, will continue examining the legislative proposals in order to reach an agreement by mid-2016.

A policy debate on the future development of FRONTEX, including the feasibility of a European system of border guards, is expected to be launched, possibly towards the end of 2014.

The ongoing work in the field of false documents will be continued and further developed.

The three Presidencies will pursue efforts towards the full implementation and monitoring of the Schengen information system (SIS II) and the VIS.

Schengen area

In the context of the regular strategic debates as supported by the European Council in its conclusions of March 2012, the Council will continue to monitor the functioning of the Schengen area based on the Commission's biannual reports.

Work will also continue towards the successful enlargement of the Schengen area. In order to ensure a smooth transition to the new Schengen evaluation mechanism, the Presidency's efforts will focus on the finalization of the on-going Schengen evaluation procedures. The three Presidencies will further take up and develop the tasks assigned to the Council in the framework of the said mechanism.

Legal migration

The three Presidencies will concentrate their efforts on the development of a Common European Migratory Policy capable of contributing to the EU's Growth Agenda. At the same time, it will not lose focus on the development of relevant countries of origin. Cooperation with countries of origin will remain a priority over the next 18 months.

Particular emphasis will be put on the implementation of the Policy Plan on Legal Migration, especially on the Directives on seasonal workers and on intra-corporate transferees (ICT). Furthermore, the negotiation of the proposal to amend Directive 2004/114/EC and Directive 2005/71 relating to the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, pupil exchange, remunerated and unremunerated training, voluntary service and au pairing will be resumed with the European Parliament as soon as possible.

Integration of the third-country nationals will be further pursued, notably by promoting the exchange of best practices between Member States, with the aim of raising the level of performance in this field in Europe.

The Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM), as re-defined by the Council in 2012 and 2014 will continue to guide the work of the Council as regards the external dimension of the EU policies in the field of migration.

Further work will be pursued on the development of the different processes and dialogues, notably the Rabat process, the Prague process, the Budapest process and the dialogues with the ACP countries, the African Union, the CELAC countries, the US, the Russian Federation, India and China.

Additional efforts will be dedicated to the effective implementation of Mobility Partnerships which are already in place (Eastern Partnership countries, Tunisia and Morocco) as well as the establishment of new Mobility Partnerships, with other countries in the South and South East Regions.

A new dialogue will be launched between the EU and the Countries of Eastern Africa on migratory issues, especially the fight against trafficking in human beings.

Irregular Migration

Bearing in mind that the European Union is subject to structural migratory pressures, the Council - also as a consequence of the deep social and political changes affecting large neighbouring regions - will be encouraged to update its action, also taking into account the communication by the European Commission on the results of the work of "the Task Force Mediterranean" established by the JHA Council of October 2013, and welcomed by the European Council's conclusions of October and December 2013.

The aforementioned Communication is also relevant for certain issues in the field of visas, which are likely to be influenced by the future Strategic Guidelines.

Both migration policies, and the management of EU external borders will remain crucial, with a view to pursuing the efforts undertaken in the framework of the "EU action on migratory pressures - a strategic response". In order to ensure a coherent response at EU level to the continuous migratory pressures, the three Presidencies will explore the possibilities of new and forward looking initiatives.

The development of a comprehensive set of readmission agreements with relevant third countries, will remain a key priority, as well as maintaining the pace of on-going negotiations and identifying additional third countries with which agreements should be negotiated. The Council will also continue to promote practical cooperation with third countries in the area of return, including in the area of voluntary return.

The question of unaccompanied minors requires special attention by the European Union, as it is a particularly sensitive issue. The three Presidencies will encourage the exchange of good practices and evaluate the possibility of outlining an appropriate common approach to protect this vulnerable category including common identification methods also in connection with the special reception needs of minors.

Furthermore, the three Presidencies will give their support to the activities of the European Agency for the management of operational cooperation at the external borders of the EU Member States, also with a view to promoting the possible conclusion of technical operational cooperation agreements with third countries on border control and fight against irregular migration.

The arrivals of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea will remain high on the Council's Agendas and may lead to new political initiatives from the Commission.

Asylum

The legislative work on the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) has been completed. During the next 18 months, Member States will need to transpose the legislative instruments of the CEAS into national legislation.

Legislative work will continue, notably with the aim to promote and strengthen a genuine intra-EU solidarity while respecting the principle of responsibility of MS. This should include, *inter alia*, the monitoring of the Greek national action plan and active participation in the European Relocation Forum. Furthermore, the three Presidencies will continue to support the work of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) in implementing the CEAS. It will also promote increased practical cooperation between the Member States.

Another priority area will be the complex and still unresolved question of the mutual recognition of national decisions on international protection, including the right to work and settle in any EU Member State.

The three Presidencies will also invest their efforts into promoting practical cooperation with third countries in the area of return, including in the area of voluntary return.

Special attention will be given to the situation of Syrian refugees and of migrants arriving by sea.

Internal security

The security of European citizens which is a value in itself will remain at the core of the Council action for the JHA area.

The implementation of the Internal Security Strategy and its possible follow up will be a key point for the Council.

In the area of serious and organized crime, the EU policy cycle will continue to serve as the main basis for coordinating the operational cooperation, with regard to the nine priorities identified by the Council Conclusions of the 6th of June 2013. Special attention will be given to the fight against criminal infiltration in the legitimate economy, including in public procurement, money-laundering and corruption and other emerging threats as identified by Europol. Specific efforts will aim at recovering criminal assets in order to confiscate the proceeds of crime.

Moreover, efforts will be stepped up to increase coordination between the EU's internal and external security policy areas.

In the framework of the strategy for the prevention and fight against trafficking in human beings, the Council will ensure the utmost coherence of action in the field of prevention, protection of victims and law enforcement activities, also through the dissemination of good practices and the possible establishment of criteria for the identification of victims.

In the field of police cooperation, and with the aim to facilitate the work of police officers operating in border areas, the Council will evaluate the possibility to streamline the Schengen rules on cross border pursuit and observation. Besides, the activities of the expert groups in police cooperation and networks will be closely monitored and evaluated in a view to rationalize their activities if necessary.

Information exchange is one of the main tools for enhancing the fight against cross-border crime. The use of existing instruments, databases and other tools must be maximised and communication channels and working procedures must be streamlined. In this regard the Council will continue with the practical implementation of the Prüm decisions. Reflections in different user groups and evaluations will be encouraged so as to enhance the European Information Exchange Model and ensure that practitioners will obtain the full benefit. This work will also cover the information exchange with and among EU agencies in the field of Justice and Home Affairs. Efforts will continue to enhance information exchange with a view to fighting serious and organized crime and terrorism, including a better use of SIS II, the set-up of an EU PNR system and reflections about the appropriate access of law enforcement authorities to border management databases and EURODAC.

On the basis of the 2012 EU Cybersecurity Strategy, the Friends of Presidency Group on Cyber will continue to coordinate, where necessary, the cyber-related work of various policy areas, covering both internal and external aspects and contributing to a closer cooperation with and between EU agencies active in the cyber field. Relevant projects and policies will be implemented, notably the Directive 2013/40/EU, a peer evaluation on cybercrime and activities of the Operational Action Plans on cyber crime (child sexual exploitation, card fraud and cyber attacks) in the framework of the EU policy cycle and a peer evaluation on cybercrime, with a view to tackling the challenges posed by cyber crime and cyber security in the short and mid-term.

Moreover, the Council will aim to finalise the new legal base for EUROPOL. As regards CEPOL, the Council will examine a new legal basis as soon as a proposal will be presented by the Commission. The aim is to provide an efficient basis for operational law enforcement cooperation, as well as law enforcement training, in particular the implementation of the European Law Enforcement Training Scheme (LETS), and streamlining the capacities of these agencies on regional, EU and international levels.

Drugs

The Council will continue to work towards the full implementation of the "EU Drugs Strategy 2013-2020" and the related "European Drugs Action Plan 2013-2016".

The Council aims to finalize the work on the proposals for new legislation on the control of new psychoactive substances so as to have an effective instrument in the fight against this ever increasing threat. Preparations for the 2016 UNGASS will be intensified in order to ensure a timely preparation of the EU and Member States' position in this framework. Operational cooperation in the fight against drugs will continue in the framework of the EU policy cycle and reflections will be made on how European Drugs Action Plan's relevant actions could be aligned with the EU policy cycle.

Fight against terrorism

Building upon the on-going revision of the EU Strategy on preventing and combating radicalisation and recruitment and its associated Action Plan, the Council will continue to implement or support a broad range of measures to tackle this problem. The growing number of foreign fighters highlights the need to pursue the EU's support to Member States' actions against terrorism, building on the four components of the EU Strategy against Terrorism, but also maximising border security tools as well as enhancing cooperation with third countries on counter-terrorism.

The fight against terrorism, in its prevention and protection aspects, will be at the center of the three Presidencies, in particular with regard to terrorist activities conducted by lone-actors and /or micro cells operating in unpredictable or unforeseen ways, such by using "insidious" methods. In this context the three Presidencies will consider the development of methodologies of shared analysis, such as the experience acquired with the multinational ad hoc teams.

The Council will be highly committed to promoting the set-up of the European Passenger Name record (PNR) system. Furthermore, steps towards the timely conclusion of PNR agreements with requesting third countries will be encouraged and developed.

The Council will aim to finalise its Decision regarding the implementation of the solidarity clause set out in Article 222 TFEU, arising in situations of a terrorist attack or a natural or a man-made disaster, with special focus on the elaboration of the related preparedness measures in order to mitigate identified threats from natural and man-made disasters.

Customs cooperation

The Council will continue the ongoing work to implement existing strategies aimed at strengthening cooperation among the EU's customs services, and between the custom services and other law enforcement agencies. The Seventh Action Plan to Implement the Strategy for Future Customs Law Enforcement Cooperation pays particular attention to coordination with the EU policy cycle on serious and organised crime. In that context, coordination of joint police-customs operations will be further pursued and multi-disciplinary cooperation will be given specific attention.

Civil Protection

The new civil protection legislation adopted in December 2013, aims at improving the effectiveness of systems for preventing, preparing for and responding to natural and man-made disasters within and outside the Union. Work on the implementation of the new legislation will continue, with a focus on the European Emergency Response Capacity, prevention and preparedness policies. In parallel, work will continue in the area of disaster risk reduction, with the aim to endorse and implement the post-2015 Hyogo Framework for Action.

Reinforced coordination and synergies between civil protection and humanitarian aid will be further explored in order to foster cooperation in coping with humanitarian crisis and disasters by focusing on the entire disaster management cycle.

The Council will further examine ways of improving the implementation of EU Action Plans on the CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear) and on Enhancing the Security of Explosives, by looking at enhancing and exploiting existing synergies between the two action plans with the objective of making some concrete progress and moving forward in some identified key areas. Finally, the three Presidencies will also follow progress on the implementation of the European Programme for Critical Infrastructure Protection (EPCIP).

JUSTICE

Fundamental rights and citizenship

The Council underlines that the principle of free movement of EU citizens represents one of the most important achievements of the EU, is a fundamental element of EU membership and an expression of European citizenship.

The Council will support the Commission's negotiating efforts for the EU's accession to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR). The opinion of the European Court of Justice will be examined by the FREMP Working Party. The incoming Presidencies are committed to steering timely discussions in the Council towards a decision authorizing the conclusion of the accession agreement. Furthermore, a similar approach will be taken when it comes to any work needed for the adoption of legislative proposals concerning the internal EU rules which are necessary for the accession of the Union to the ECHR.

Work on the proposals for a Regulation on data protection and a Directive on the protection of personal data by competent authorities for the purposes of prevention, investigation, detection or prosecution of criminal offences or the execution of criminal penalties will be pursued as a high priority.

The Council will seek agreement on the Data Protection package, building on the work done under the previous Presidencies and in line with the conclusions of the European Council of 24/25 October 2013 that confirmed that the file is "essential for the completion of the Digital Single Market by 2015". This important reform aims at reinforcing the rights of citizens and adapting Member States' supervision over the processing of personal data, in a rapidly changing world of digital economy and technological development, notably with regard to the use of on-line platforms and services.

Ensuring coherence of the framework for the protection of personal data across the various policy fields in the Justice and Home Affairs sector will be a key objective.

The Council will also follow the development of the Justice Scoreboard and follow-up regularly on the implementation of the *acquis*. The Council will promote regular dialogue between the Commission and the Member States on this exercise.

Protection of the most vulnerable

Following the successful adoption of the Protection of Victims' Directive in 2012, work will continue on a "Roadmap" of measures concerning the position of victims in criminal proceedings.

The Council will work on issues relating to combating gender based violence and domestic violence. If the proposal for a Directive on the Compensation to Victims of Crime is presented by the Commission it will be examined.

Rights of the individual in criminal proceedings

The Council will proceed to a swift examination of Commission proposals related to the "Roadmap for strengthening procedural rights of suspected or accused persons in criminal proceedings".

Negotiations on the draft Directives on procedural safeguards for children suspected or accused in criminal proceedings, on presumption of innocence and on legal aid will be pursued with a view to an early adoption.

The Council will assess the progress made in the field of the protection of fundamental rights in criminal proceedings. This may include a reflection on the coherence of the instruments adopted in the field of mutual recognition and their consolidation, an assessment on the level of implementation by Member States as well as on possible future initiatives. The Council will carry out this exercise in line with the indications of the future strategic guidelines for the area of freedom, security and justice.

Mutual recognition and minimum rules

The principle of mutual recognition is a cornerstone of judicial cooperation. Minimum rules will be further pursued in order to increase mutual trust between Member States' judicial authorities and facilitate mutual recognition and in order to define criminal offences and sanctions in the areas of particularly serious crime with a cross-border dimension.

Given the impact mutual recognition has on every Member State's national law, efforts to support the Council conclusions on the follow-up to the implementation of the mutual recognition instruments will be enhanced. In this context, the update of the EJM website could be envisaged. Improving the effectiveness of the application of the European Arrest Warrant will also be examined, taking into account the findings presented by the Commission and the European Parliament in its report of 2014.

Bearing in mind the need to secure European citizens' security, the Council will work towards completing the implementation of the European Criminal Record Information System (ECRIS) framework. In this regard, it will steer discussions pertaining to the transposition of the general technical rules into the national systems and the updated Manual for Practitioners. A proposal on a central register for third country nationals (ECRIS-TCN) will also be examined.

European Public Prosecutor's Office and Eurojust

The Council will seek agreement on a draft Regulation on the Establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's office (EPPO) and a draft Regulation on Eurojust. In this context the Council will strive to conclude swiftly the negotiations on a Directive on the protection of the Financial Interests of the Union.

Civil Law

Work should focus, in the area of business, on the adoption of the proposal for a Regulation amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1346/2000 on insolvency proceedings. Special attention will be given to the review of the Regulation creating a European small claims procedure, with a view to enhancing its efficiency. Further progress should be made on the proposal for a Regulation for a Common European Sales Law.

In the area of interest to the European citizens, work will be carried out in order to finalise the proposal for a Regulation simplifying acceptance of certain public documents in the EU and abolishing authentication requirements related to these documents.

The review of the Regulation on the service of judicial and extrajudicial documents in civil and commercial matters will also be examined.

On matters relating to family law, particular attention will be given to the proposal reviewing the Brussels IIa Regulation relating to divorce, legal separation and parental responsibility. The three Presidencies will endeavour to advance work on a Regulation for matrimonial property regimes and on the property consequences of registered partnerships.

E-Justice

Efforts will be made on the continuation of work on e-Justice at both European and national level on the basis of the Strategy adopted for the period 2014-2018 and of the Action plan which implements this strategy and serve as a practical guide for its follow-up. Work will focus on access to information in the field of Justice through the e-Justice Portal, access to courts and extrajudicial procedures in cross-border situations and on communications between judicial authorities.

Corruption

Cooperation within GRECO (Group of States against Corruption) will be further enhanced. A proposal on the EU joining GRECO should be tabled during the period and will be examined by the Council as a matter of priority.

The Council will promote regular dialogue between the Commission and the Council on the Corruption Report.

Judicial training

Actions focused on training of professionals working in justice will be given a high priority with special attention to the development of the European Judicial Training Network.

EXTERNAL DIMENSION OF JHA

The external dimension of Justice and Home Affairs remain at the core of the Union's endeavors, through enhancing cooperation with EU strategic partners and regions covering security, justice and migratory issues. The Mediterranean region will be a crucial partner in the dialogue on migration within the GAMM. Policy coherence and institutional as well as inter-agency (Europol, Eurojust, Frontex, EASO) coordination will remain paramount, in order to exploit each body's competence to the fullest and successfully incorporate the JHA external dimension to the Union's broader foreign policy.

Progress on EU-USA relationships will be continued across all domains. Transatlantic mobility, security, judicial cooperation and counter-terrorism will still be based on the 2009 Washington Statement and the possibility to assess this Statement will be examined.

The Council will examine as a matter of priority the proposals for an EU-US "umbrella" data protection Agreement.

Particular attention will be given to cooperation with third countries for reasons of law enforcement and prevention of serious crime. In this context special relevance will be given to assessing the operation of existing agreements and by exploring the conditions for possible future actions in this area, including on the regulatory framework for the exchange and processing of personal data, with the aim of balancing the maximum degree of protection with the need to ensure efficient decision making in preventing and combating serious crime.

EU-Russia relationship will cover the areas relevant for the Common Spaces, relying on commitments in the fields of human rights and the rule of law and taking into account the general context of the EU-Russia relations. Consideration for data protection should be enhanced.

The 2006 Agreement on surrender procedures with Iceland and Norway should be concluded as a matter of priority. Likewise, the EU accession to the Protocol to the UN Convention on Organised Crime Relating to Firearms should be finalized.

During the next 18 months, negotiations with Switzerland, Norway and Iceland regarding the service of document and evidence should be pursued.

In the perspective of EU integration as well as of EU internal security, partnerships with the Western Balkan countries will be continued.

The JHA Ministerial meetings and practical cooperation with Eastern Partnership countries will be continued.

Strengthening the relationships between the agencies (Europol, Eurojust, Frontex, CEPOL) and the countries around the Mediterranean will remain a priority. Likewise, the Council will support security sector reforms in the North African and Middle Eastern countries and invest in strengthening security and counter-terrorism cooperation.

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY

Employment and Social Developments

For 2014 and 2015, economic forecasts confirm signs of a slow recovery, though modest, fragile and uneven. Nevertheless, the legacy of the financial and economic crisis will continue to weigh on growth for a considerable time, through high levels of unemployment, falling household incomes and rising poverty and inequalities. The rise of unemployment seems to have stabilised; however, more than 26.8 million jobseekers represent a considerable drag on growth in the short term through weakened demand. Europe's long-term competitiveness is threatened as many people lose their skills and many young people struggle to enter the labour market.

In 2013, the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU reached the alarming figure of 25% of the total EU population. The Social Protection Performance Monitor (SPPM) shows that the depth of poverty, in-work poverty, the growth in the share of jobless households, the severe material deprivation, and the share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion and youth exclusion are among the main trends to watch driving living standards downward.

On the whole, the crisis that started in 2008 leaves behind the legacy of fragile growth, too little and often low quality jobs and more people exposed to poverty and social exclusion. The report on the Social Situation in the European Union and the scoreboard of employment and social indicators show that the social situation in the European Union is not improving while in some countries the situation is even worsening.

European Semester

The Europe 2020 Strategy and the European Semester process have placed employment and social headline targets at the core of EU activities. The EPSCO Council and its subsidiary committees, the Employment Committee (EMCO) and the Social Protection Committee (SPC), play an important role in the European Semester. The committees carry out the multilateral surveillance process and the thematic review of the implementation of the Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs), and provide the Council with their opinions on the Commission's draft CSRs proposals.

The high unemployment in Europe remains alarming. As the EU governance structures are still being improved so as to better monitor the implementation of reform commitments and better analyse the employment situation in Europe, there is scope for the EPSCO Council to further step up its involvement in the European Semester process.

EPSCO will also participate in the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 Strategy, with a focus on the employment and social aspects.

Within the European Employment Strategy (EES), employment policies are closely coordinated and monitored via peer reviews and thorough analysis. The role of the Public Employment Services (PES) will receive particular emphasis in this context. Common orientations provide guidance to Member States in the elaboration and implementation of their employment policies.

The Employment Guidelines, addressed to all Member States, were decided in 2010 and are in principle valid until the end of 2014. In 2015, as part of the mid-term review process, a new proposal (post-2014) is to be tabled by the Commission.

Work will also continue on the Social Dimension of the EMU. The three Presidencies will concentrate on the follow-up of the Commission communication on this topic and further refinement of the scoreboard of employment and social indicators will be undertaken, as well as its adequate integration into the existing framework and instruments (EPM and SPPM).

Employment / Labour Market issues

The three Presidencies will continue to put emphasis on mobility, social dialogue, quality job creation, structural reform of labour markets and investment in human capital, as instructed by the European Council.

In view of the gravity of the current labour market situation, particular emphasis will be placed on the impulse and follow-up of ongoing initiatives to improve the unemployment situation of youth, most particularly via the Youth Guarantee schemes and the Youth Employment Initiative as well through ESF funding.

The crisis has hit all layers of society, but some vulnerable groups deserve special attention in order to ensure that labour markets remain inclusive. Additional attention needs to be paid to addressing the problems of vulnerable groups, with a particular focus on young people, women, older workers and the long-term unemployed. An integrated approach is needed in order to ensure their sustainable integration into the labour market, a condition for releasing untapped growth potential.

Social dimension

In the area of the social dimension of the EMU, the three Presidencies will concentrate on the follow-up of the Commission communication on this topic and on the further examination of the employment and social scoreboard, taking into account also the review exercise of the Europe 2020 strategy.

The three Presidencies will place greater emphasis on strengthening the social dialogue at Member State and EU level as a fundamental component of the European social model and a necessary element for the competitiveness of all EU economies.

Social policy issues

In the area of social protection and inclusion, the three Presidencies will continue to ensure an appropriate follow-up to the initiatives presented by the Commission in February 2013, in particular the "Social Investment Package".

In the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy mid-term review the three Presidencies will pay utmost attention to the set of indicators of poverty and social exclusion to measure progress achieved by the Member States and will support the Commission initiatives to prevent and tackle homelessness.

Attention will also be paid to monitoring social protection and the development of social protection policies, to the financing, effectiveness and efficiency of social protection, to the issue of long-term care in the EU and to pension adequacy.

Based on the preparatory work of the SPC, the three Presidencies will elaborate a set of guiding principles in the area of social governance, building on the strengthened economic governance arrangements, in order to better reconcile different but equally important policy objectives.

Labour legislation

The three Presidencies will continue discussions, as necessary, on the Commission proposals still under examination. In particular, work will continue in the area of mobility, including all its effects, following up on the Commission's Labour Mobility Package. Furthermore, building on the achievements of the Hellenic Presidency, the three Presidencies will make every effort to progress on the Commission proposal for a Regulation on EURES, which aims at reforming and modernising the current EURES network.

The three Presidencies' work-programme will also cover other initiatives which are expected in 2014, such as a proposal concerning the revision of Regulations 883/2004 and 987/2009 on the coordination of social security systems.

Discussions will also advance on a proposal for a decision of the Council and of the European Parliament on an undeclared work platform and on a proposal for a Council decision implementing the European framework agreement on working time in inland waterway transport concluded by the social partners.

The three Presidencies will also deal with any possible amendments of the Directives on the information and consultation of workers and on the proposal for a Directive on seafarers.

Health and safety at work

The three Presidencies will work towards the identification of common strategies to improve safety at work, to reduce the rate of accidents at work and to implement shared solutions at European level. In this context, work will be continued on the new EU Strategy on Health and Safety at Work for the period until 2020.

The Council may continue its work on the Commission's proposal to amend the Directive on measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding ("maternity leave").

Equality between women and men

Equality between women and men is a fundamental value of the European Union. There is also a strong economic case for advancing equality between women and men, particularly in the context of the ongoing economic crisis, and for demographic reasons. The three Presidencies will seek to ensure that the Council fulfils its commitments as set out in the European Pact for Gender Equality (2011-2020), and will take into account the framework of the Commission's Strategy for equality between women and men (2010-2015).

In the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the three Presidencies will continue to support the labour market activation of women, in keeping with the 75% employment target for women and men. Specific issues that are relevant from an employment perspective include the pension gap, gender stereotypes, women and technology and the role of women in decision-making. Another vital theme that will receive attention is the need to combat gender-based violence.

Work will also continue on the Commission's proposal for a Directive to improve the gender balance on company boards.

The three Presidencies will seek to implement the gender perspective into all policy areas ("gender mainstreaming") and in the context of external actions. EU coordination will be ensured at the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 2015 and a 20-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action will be undertaken.

Antidiscrimination

The three Presidencies will continue to work on the proposal for a Council Directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The promotion of the social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities and of marginalised groups, including Roma, will continue in accordance with the Council's commitments and competences.

External dimension of EU Employment and Social Policies

The global crisis has had a substantial negative effect on social cohesion. As the social consequences of the crisis have spread, international efforts to address the situation have intensified. Past Presidencies have been increasingly involved in international fora, representing the EU alongside the Commission and ensuring a coordinated and coherent approach by the EU Member States. Based on guidance from the Council, the three Presidencies will, where appropriate and with the support of the Commission, support actions to be taken, for example, in the context of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the G20 process, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the ASEM process.

HEALTH AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS

Public Health

In the field of public health, the three Presidencies will promote action to improve the health of EU citizens, in line with the EU Health Strategy and the indications forthcoming from World Health Organisation and using the actions set out in the third Union Programme for action in the field of health (2014-2020), while taking due account of the current economic situation.

The three Presidencies believe that it is essential to ensure an adequate representation of health in the process of the European Semester. The three Presidencies will encourage a proper follow up of the reflection process on chronic diseases and of the reflection process on modern, responsive and sustainable health systems, in particular the importance of guaranteeing the sustainability of health systems, their accessibility as well as the equity in the provision of safe and high-quality healthcare to all citizens, looking into the improvement of primary healthcare and its relation to hospitals system.

In all areas of action, the three Presidencies will stress and support the identification and adoption of innovative approaches, including cost-benefit assessments, that could have a positive impact on the health of citizens, as well as on the economy. The three Presidencies will evaluate, in close cooperation with the Commission, the results achieved through the implementation of the Directive on patients' rights in cross-border healthcare.

The three Presidencies shall implement their programme in the field of health promotion, diseases prevention and health care, taking into account the organizational matters and with a stronger focus on the most vulnerable groups. They will give priority to individual and collective prevention, with a special focus on primary and secondary prevention of chronic non-communicable diseases, on the account of their incidence and their high costs in human, socio-economic and health terms. In this context, a special attention will be paid to the promotion of healthy life style, focusing on encouraging physical activity and healthy nutrition.

Due attention will also be given to the reinforcement of the cooperation at the EU level on serious cross-border health threats (notably in the context of emerging or re-emerging communicable diseases), in particular by proper EU-wide implementation of legislation.

Pharmaceuticals and medical devices

With the objective to fill the gaps in the existing EU legislation on medical devices, to further strengthen patient safety and to support innovation and the competitiveness of the European medical device industry by allowing rapid and cost-efficient market access for innovative medical devices, the three Presidencies will prioritise the work on the package of two proposals concerning medical devices and *in-vitro* medical devices in order to ensure timely adoption and entry into force of these two Regulations.

In relation to the announced revision of the Regulation on advanced therapy medicinal products, the Directive on donation of human tissues and cells and the Directive on collection and distribution of human blood and blood components, the three Presidencies will actively take forward work on any such proposals when submitted by the Commission.

The Commission is currently working on a review of the Directive on veterinary medicinal products, which will require a horizontal examination in the Council in order to avoid unnecessary discrepancies with the legislative framework on medicinal products for human use. The three Presidencies will work on this proposal once it will have been adopted by the Commission.

The three Presidencies may also explore whether and how to take forward the ongoing review of the Directive on transparency of measures regulating the prices of medicinal products for human use and their inclusion in public health insurance systems.

Foodstuffs

The protection of citizen health requires constant attention to the safety of the food daily consumed by citizens. Thus, the three Presidencies will give priority attention to developing the legislative and policy framework to continue to ensure the food safety for all citizens, including prevention of food fraud.

The proper implementation of two important legal acts, the Regulation on food information to consumers ('Food labelling') and the Regulation on food intended for infants and young children, food for special medical purposes and total diet replacement for weight control ('Food for special purposes'), will be important as they create a framework of reinforced information, transparency, and high level of food safety for the Union citizens.

COMPETITIVENESS (INTERNAL MARKET, INDUSTRY, RESEARCH AND SPACE)

Competitiveness

The European economy is recovering after several years of very limited or even negative growth. In order to sustain and reinforce the recovery the three Presidencies will give Europe's growth and competitiveness policies the highest priority.

Against this background, the Council will take essential growth enhancing measures in the framework of the Single Market, Industrial competitiveness, Research and Innovation and Space policy. Many initiatives are embedded in the Europe 2020 strategy, the European semester, and in particular the "Compact for Growth and Jobs".

The three Presidencies will do their utmost to ensure that the Council contributes in an effective manner to achieving the targets of these initiatives by delivering concrete and timely results on the European growth agenda. They will pay particular attention to policy areas which have a greater short and medium impact on EU competitiveness and higher synergies and strengthen the position of EU businesses in the global value chain. This can be achieved through integrating within the broad Agenda for the Internal Market by building on an integrated Single Market policy and fostering three crucial drivers for growth: industrial competitiveness, access to financing and trade and export policies.

Single Market

The three Presidencies start their term at the beginning of the new parliamentary cycle. This offers the opportunity to prompt a new "strategic" cycle centred on the completion of a borderless Single Market, with the aim of allowing consumers and businesses to buy and sell goods and services anywhere in the EU as easily as in their home market, regardless of their nationality or place of residence. The objective of the three Presidencies will be to build on the results achieved through the implementation of the Single Market Acts I and II and to strive towards closing the remaining gaps and improving the consistency of the legal framework, so as to enhance confidence and legal certainty for consumers and businesses. In order to achieve these objectives, the three Presidencies will promote the use of all the relevant regulatory and non-regulatory tools, including harmonisation and mutual recognition, where appropriate. Addressing the practical issues that consumers and businesses face on a daily basis in the Single Market will be at the heart of the three Presidencies' work. In this respect, the forthcoming reports on the principle of mutual recognition and on the state of the Single Market for services, to be published by the Commission by mid-2015, should provide a strong evidence base and valuable guidance for further policy action.

The three Presidencies will also build on the peer review under the Services Directive and undertake further actions to remove discriminatory, unjustified or disproportionate requirements applied to providers and recipients of services (consumers and businesses), to facilitate access to regulated professions, building on the peer review exercise foreseen by the revised directive on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications, and to fully implement the actions foreseen in the retail action plan. The three Presidencies will also give high priority to a possible review of the current Directive on misleading advertising between businesses.

Furthermore, special emphasis will be put on the governance and the practical functioning of existing Single Market rules, including through the annual Single Market integration report.

Finally, the increasing pace of global market integration and the further opening of the Single Market are among the biggest changes since the creation of the Single Market. The three Presidencies will strive towards further integrating the external dimension of the Single Market in EU policies and contribute to promoting EU regulation and common standards at international level.

In the longer term, the three Presidencies' programme will focus on a reflection on emerging challenges to the Single Market, with a view to enhancing EU competitiveness. This reflection will be the basis for a new Agenda to bring the Internal Market to a new stage of development, in particular by attaching priority to policy areas which have a greater short and medium term impact on EU competitiveness, with special regard to SMEs and are likely to gain to the EU business a stronger position in the global value chain. This can be done - as already mentioned in the section on Competitiveness - by means of a stronger emphasis on industrial competitiveness, access to financing, and trade and export policies.

Company Law

The three Presidencies also intend to work on initiatives supporting long-term financing, such as the proposals on the Single Member Company and on Shareholders' Rights submitted by the Commission within the process of "Rethinking European Company Law" with the overall aim of further simplification and modernization of existing company law and enhancement of corporate governance.

Better regulation

Better regulation ("Smart Regulation") will be an ongoing priority for the three Presidencies in seeking a better quality evidence-based legislation and an effective and less burdensome policy making. The three Presidencies will continue efforts to ensure that EU legislation is "fit for purpose" through the effective use of smart regulation tools (reduction of unnecessary burden, impact assessment, evaluation and stakeholder consultation), particularly for SMEs and micro-enterprises. Special attention will be paid to achieving progress under the Commission REFIT programme and to concretely remove unnecessary burden.

Technical Harmonisation

In the area of the harmonisation of technical specifications for motor vehicles the Council will seek to conclude the work on the eCall Regulation which is expected to lead to a substantial reduction of fatalities on European roads. The three Presidencies will also start work on the forthcoming proposal for the review of the Framework Directive on the type approval of motor vehicles and their components. In addition, the three Presidencies will resume the examination of the proposal for the simplification of the transfer of motor vehicles registered in another Member State as soon as the awaited additional analysis is submitted.

The three Presidencies will work on the proposals on Cableways, Gas Appliances and Personal Protective Equipment which have been recently adopted.

Consumers

The three Presidencies will promote the implementation of the Consumer Agenda 2012-2014 in order to maximise the benefits of the Single Market for consumers. This should *in fine* allow consumers to shop anywhere in the EU as easily as in their home country, while at the same time benefiting from a high level of protection based on clear and consistent common rules.

The three Presidencies will seek agreement on the Product Safety and Market Surveillance Package, that aims to improve the functioning of the Single Market through simplified and more uniform and efficient safety rules applying to non-food products, streamline market surveillance procedures and more efficient coordination and cooperation of market surveillance authorities. They will aim to achieve agreement on the proposal of the Directive on Package tourism travel. In addition, the three Presidencies are looking forward to possible new Commission initiatives, *inter alia* concerning the review of the Regulation on consumer protection cooperation.

Intellectual Property

The three Presidencies will pursue ongoing efforts to strengthen the intellectual property *acquis* with the aim of achieving a high level of protection while promoting the well-functioning of the Single Market.

In the field of copyright and related rights, following the adoption of the Orphan Works Directive and the Directive on Collective Management of rights, the three Presidencies will consider the legislative proposals that might be submitted by the Commission following the outcome of the review of the EU copyright framework which may lead to a possible revision of some aspects of the copyright *acquis* in the digital era.

In the area of trade marks, work will focus on the adoption of the trade mark package, aimed at streamlining and modernising both the Community Trade Mark Regulation and the Directive approximating national trade mark laws with the purpose of making the trade mark system in Europe more efficient and coherent, while recognising the need for harmonious co-existence and reinforced cooperation between the Office for Harmonization of the Internal Market (OHIM) and national trade mark offices. The aim is to agree on the Trade mark package with a view to its rapid adoption.

In the field of trade secrets, work will concentrate on providing businesses with a harmonised legislative framework deemed necessary for boosting technological cooperation and exchange of know how across national borders. The three Presidencies aim at swiftly reaching an agreement on this package.

Customs Union

The three Presidencies will continue and finalise work, with a view to its timely adoption, on the proposal for a Directive on the Union legal framework for customs infringements and sanctions as well as on the proposal for a Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 515/97 of 13 March 1997 on mutual assistance between the administrative authorities of the Member States and cooperation between the latter and the Commission to ensure a correct application of the law on customs and agricultural matters.

Furthermore, the three Presidencies will give due consideration to any new Commission proposals in the area of Customs policy, in particular to the pending proposals for Council Regulation amending the base Council Regulation (EU) N° 7/2010 opening and providing for the management of autonomous tariff quotas of the Union for certain agricultural and industrial products and for a Council Regulation amending the base Regulation (EU) N° 1344/2011 suspending the autonomous Common Customs Tariff duties on certain agricultural, fishery and industrial products. This also applies to a possible proposal for a e-Customs decision and to the amendment of the Council Regulation 2658/87 (Tariff and statistical nomenclature and Common Customs Tariff) and Council Regulation 1147/2002 (Airworthiness).

At international level the three Presidencies will deal with the Revision of the appendices of the regional Convention on pan-Euro-Mediterranean preferential rules of origin, the EU-New Zealand Customs Cooperation Mutual Administrative Agreement, the EU-Canada Mutual Recognition of Authorized Economic Operators Programs as well as with the follow-up to the Commission Communication on the State of Customs union and especially on the governance reform via Council conclusions for the simplification of the policy making process also through the reorganization of the various groups within the Customs Code Committee and Customs 2020 programme.

Considering its right of objection in the preparation and adoption process of the Union Customs Code Delegated Acts (UCC-DA), the Council will continue to monitor the legal implementation of the UCC.

The Council will monitor the state of implementation of the EU Customs Action Plan to combat IPR infringements, more particularly through the Yearly Summary Report transmitted and presented by the Commission Services.

Finally, the three Presidencies will coordinate the EU position for the agenda items of WCO, ASEM, JCCC and other International Fora. It will work towards an extension of the Convention on common transit and the SAD Convention to Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia by 1 of June 2015.

Industrial policy

The crisis has underlined the importance of the real economy and of strong manufacturing and services sectors. Europe's industry, including SMEs that are the true back-bone of the European economy, is a major driver for growth, output, jobs, innovation and export. Industrial policy will play an important role to enhance European competitiveness in building on the identified strengths and upgrade the competitiveness of European industry.

The three Presidencies will work on reinforcing the governance of the European industrial policy in order to systematically mainstream competitiveness concerns across all policies areas.

Fostering industrial competitiveness will be at the centre of the three Presidencies' activities, including ensuring a further integration of the Single Market, development of industrial cooperation and improving the overall business environment for European companies. This includes EU instruments such as the Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME) and the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation Horizon 2020.

The three Presidencies will work on the development of a proactive, ambitious and integrated industrial policy in Europe which aims at responding to the needs of the changing economic situation and strengthening a coordinated approach of industrial competitiveness through all relevant EU policies. In this respect, the three Presidencies will pursue a horizontal approach, where a coherent set of policies (innovation, energy, resource efficient industry, Single Market, competition, access to financing, trade and export policies etc.) aims at improving business conditions both at EU and global levels, guaranteeing a constant attention to the main drivers of the productivity growth such as key enabling technologies and disruptive technologies. Progress in the implementation of the Industrial Policy Action Plan and the industry flagship actions will be assessed and the implementation of the specific sectorial action plans (such as on the steel sector) will be monitored actively.

This also includes the implementation of important EU financing and support instruments such as the Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME) and the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation Horizon 2020.

Small and medium sized enterprises

SMEs play an important role in Europe as a lever for growth and jobs. Therefore, giving particular attention to their needs through a systematic application of the “Think Small First” principle will be an important commitment of the three Presidencies.

Regarding the general framework for SMEs, the Small Business Act (SBA) has proved to be a successful tool for the policies to be implemented in the Member States. In this regard, the ongoing review of the Small Business Act will be a high priority and the three Presidencies will also continue to monitor, in close cooperation with the network of “SME envoys”, the carrying out of ongoing actions to simplify life for SMEs by reducing administrative burden and improving their access to the Single Market and to international markets.

Access to funding remains one of the major problems that SMEs have faced in recent years and are still facing. The narrow set of financing sources typically available to SMEs make them more vulnerable to the changing conditions in credit markets. Whereas EU instruments such as COSME and Horizon 2020 will operate in conjunction in facilitating and improving access to finance for SMEs, it is necessary to develop broader strategies to increase SMEs' access to finance and capital markets.

Finally, particular attention must also be paid to the development of entrepreneurial skills for existing and potential entrepreneurs. In the same manner, further action should be taken to ensure a better matching between the skills of employees and the needs of SMEs.

Research and innovation

The three Presidencies underline the pivotal importance of research and innovation for the European competitiveness, employment and social progress as providers for new sources for growth in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy, the Innovation Union flagship and the ERA Framework. To maximise their contribution and in order to provide a concrete contribution to the EU 2020 Strategy, research and innovation need to be based on networks without barriers, fully exploiting the potential of national research and innovation systems. To this respect, the three Presidencies intend to promote links among research, innovation and growth (in terms of competitiveness and employment), investigating any possible measures to boost investments in these strategic sectors. The three Presidencies will therefore focus on the enhancement of the European Research Area, which is considered of paramount importance to ensure free circulation of researchers and scientific knowledge focusing on implementation aspects and EU added value as well as better alignment of the national research and innovation policies, effective use of EU structural and investment funds, and through research infrastructure integration. Moreover, the empowerment of young researchers with an appropriate social security coverage, attractive career pathways (including those in industry) and raising entrepreneurial ability to underpin the strategic value of investment on human resources are identified as a key priorities.

The three Presidencies acknowledge the Commission's efforts to promote and contribute to the development of an evidence-based monitoring system at European level on progress towards the European Research Area and the Innovation Union.

Convinced that the implementation of the projects on the ESFRI Roadmap will significantly advance Europe's capacity to generate new ideas, contributing also to bridging the innovation gaps and help create jobs, the three Presidencies will address issues such as the implementation of the ESFRI roadmap and the development of the ERIC instrument, consistent with smart specialization strategies and regional and macro-regional policies. Moreover, advancement of the EU digital agenda and the development of an e-infrastructure (including a data infrastructure) that encompasses the needs of all research communities and innovation sectors constitutes a key factor for economic development.

The three Presidencies will raise awareness on a "Science with and for society", with the aim of fostering social and economic inclusiveness and competitiveness enabled by research and innovation in the context of addressing major societal challenges such as climate change, energy security, food security, bio-economy health and ageing population, including through social innovation, open science and socially led technological innovation. In this context, initial stage of discussions on Commission's forth-coming Green paper on Science after 2020 could serve as important catalyst fostering prioritisation and better understanding of the scope and importance of global challenges.

In order to ensure a dynamic continuity with previous work within the Council, the three Presidencies intend to further advance the dossiers on scientific and technological research in specific regions, notably the Mediterranean and the Baltic Sea Areas with particular reference to joint research programmes undertaken by several Member States in this respect.

The three Presidencies will facilitate work on the final evaluation of the Seventh Framework Programme. The three Presidencies will closely monitor and analyse the results of the initial phase of the framework programme Horizon 2020 to ensure exploitation of the full potential of the programme in terms of scientific, industrial and social growth of the European Union, including the appropriate synergies with the European Structural and Investment Funds.

Space

Discussions about the evolution of future relations between the Union and the European Space Agency (ESA) started towards the end of 2012. The three Presidencies will take forward this process to allow the Council to provide orientations for future options on the way forward from 2015 onwards regarding these relations including amendments to the current Framework agreement between EU and ESA and exploiting ESA expertise through a reinforced partnership. Therefore broader discussion on the future development of integrated and comprehensive EU Space strategy, bringing together efforts of individual member states and EU policy instruments is welcomed.

High resolution satellite data (HRSD) and HRSD-based applications have become an indispensable tool for environment monitoring, urban planning, agriculture, natural resources management and disaster and emergency management, but are important for security and defence, too. However, there are important differences in the way production and dissemination of HRSD by commercial operators are regulated within the EU. The three Presidencies will pay attention to progress of work towards adoption of the forth-coming proposal for a Directive on the identification and the dissemination of High Resolution Earth observation satellite data (HRSD) for commercial purposes, with the aim to ensure proper discussions of Member States and stakeholders in order to establish a more reliable access to HRSD, and a good and sufficient level of information on accessibility of HRSD for businesses in the HRSD value chain and customer businesses.

Galileo and Copernicus EU flagship programmes are at the beginning of their operational stages and further work is needed towards full implementation and exploitation. It needs to be ensured that these programmes benefit the Union policies and citizens as much as possible. To this end a discussion could be started and developed during the term of the three Presidencies.

A Space Surveillance and Tracking (SST) capability should be established at European level to develop and exploit existing national and European civil and military assets, with the aim to tackle the problem of space debris which has become a serious threat to the security, safety and sustainability of space activities.

Recognising the dual use nature of such a capability, the three Presidencies will work in close coordination with the European Commission, in order to promote and facilitate participation by the greatest number of Member States during in the SST support framework, subject to compliance with participation criteria.

Tourism

Tourism is of increasing importance for economic development and growth in Europe and the three Presidencies are therefore committed to contribute to maintaining Europe's leadership as the first tourist destination worldwide, to promoting an exchange of best practices between Member States and to increasing the visibility of Europe's brand on long haul markets.

Particular attention will be given to the promotion of actions ensuring a better integration of tourism into a broad range of EU policies, sustainable and responsible tourism and high quality services, which are a strong competitive advantage for businesses, especially SMEs, also to coastal and maritime tourism.

Furthermore, the three Presidencies will encourage initiatives aimed at facilitating the entry of non-EU tourists into the EU by simplifying existing visa issuing procedures. In this regard, the three Presidencies will give due attention to any proposals from the Commission.

TRANSPORT, TELECOMMUNICATION AND ENERGY

Crosscutting issues

In the context of the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy, the three Presidencies will ensure that the Council continues to contribute to meeting the targets of the strategy as well as the deadlines set by the European Council for the completion of the Internal Energy Market and the Digital Single Market. The overall aim is to achieve a fully interconnected Europe across borders and networks and to mobilize also the private sector in this gradual building process entailing the necessity for identification of new forms of public/private partnerships including also innovative financial instruments for the pan-European infrastructure. In so doing the three Presidencies will strive to build on synergies between the three TTE sectors, to advance the deployment of infrastructure notably via the launch of implementation of the Connecting European Facility, the TEN-T, TEN-E and TEN-Tele corridors, the upcoming European infrastructure for alternative fuels as well to the strengthen the security of critical infrastructure. Also the crosscutting contribution of Galileo to the European infrastructure should be fully exploited by promoting the roll-out of its early services available in 2014/2015.

The three Presidencies will also strive for improving evidence-based policy setting and monitoring of the TTE sector by using the so-called "output indicator" put forward by the Commission in the area of innovation and research. This new instrument will be used for systematic monitoring of the growth and innovation creation capacity of the TTE sector with the aim to benchmark it with other job and growth enhancing sectors.

TRANSPORT

EU transport policies aim to promote a mobility that is efficient, safe, secure and environmentally friendly as well as to create the conditions for a competitive industry generating growth and jobs. During the coming 18 months those priorities will remain at the forefront of the EU's transport policy agenda. In this context, work will continue inter alia on the proposals on all modes of transport.

Horizontal issues

A proposal for a Regulation on access to public and private transport data is likely to be submitted to the Council and the European Parliament during the fourth quarter of 2014.

Further work on the full implementation of Galileo will be facilitated by the three Presidencies as Galileo has links with other files in the transport sector and, beyond this, with energy and telecommunications.

Aviation

The negotiations with the European Parliament on the Air passenger rights package that provides for the revision of the Regulation 261/2004/EC on compensation and assistance to passengers in case of denied boarding and of cancellation or long delay and on the revision of the Regulation 2027/97 on the liability of air carriers should be concluded during this period.

Negotiations could be concluded with the European Parliament on the Airport Package, including on the proposals on ground-handling services and airport slots.

Negotiations are likely to be revived on the proposed Single European Sky Regulations (SES2 +), starting from the proposal for the revision of the Regulation establishing the general principles to set up a Single European Sky, with the aim of accelerating the reform of the European air traffic control in order to meet the growing traffic demand expected in the coming years. Under the same package, the three Presidencies are likely to take forward the work on the proposal for the revision of the Regulation 216/2008 which modifies the rules governing the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA).

A proposal for the revision of Regulation 868/2004 on unfair pricing practices in aviation should be presented by the Commission during the third quarter of 2014.

In the first half of 2014, the Commission will adopt a Communication on the EU policy regarding remotely piloted aircraft systems (drones), which will lead to the submission of legislative proposals in the course of 2015.

A proposal for the revision of the EASA Regulation is expected to be submitted by the Commission in the second half of 2015.

Land transport

On rail transport, the three Presidencies will endeavour to complete the negotiations on the remaining proposals of the fourth Railway package by the end of their term.

Besides, work on a proposal for a Directive on rail freight noise reduction could be envisaged as this proposal might be presented by the Commission during the fourth quarter of 2014.

In the field of road transport, work will continue on the revised Directive on weights and dimensions of commercial vehicles.

Still on road transport a Directive on mandatory deployment of ITS real traffic information could be submitted by the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament in the third quarter of 2014.

Furthermore, a proposal for the review of Directive 2003/59 on training of professional drivers, including eco-driver requirements is scheduled to be submitted by the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament in the fourth quarter of 2014.

A proposal for a Directive concerning the mandatory deployment of information services for safe and secure truck parking places could be submitted by the Commission in the third quarter of 2014.

As part of the ongoing work to promote inland waterway navigation ("NAIADES II package"), a modification of a proposal for a Directive laying down technical requirements for inland waterway vessels and repealing Directive 2006/87/EC could be submitted by the Commission. Furthermore, a proposal for a Directive on modernisation and recognition of professional qualifications in inland navigation is likely to be submitted in the first quarter of 2015.

Maritime transport

Work is likely to continue on the proposal for a Regulation establishing a framework on market access to port services and financial transparency of ports, including negotiations with the European Parliament. A proposal for a Directive on the review of Directive 2000/59/EC on port reception facilities is likely to be submitted by the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament in the first quarter of 2015.

The Commission could present a proposal for a Regulation on the establishment of a European framework for granting Pilotage Exemptions Certificates (PEC) during the second quarter of 2014.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND THE DIGITAL SINGLE MARKET

The commitment to complete the Digital Single Market by 2015 expressed by the European Council in its conclusions of October 2013 will set the three Presidencies' agenda. A strong digital economy is vital for the growth and the competitiveness of the European Union. This will be achieved only if pursued through a comprehensive approach addressing the infrastructure supporting the Digital Market, trust in on-line activities and security of networks, the integration of telecommunication markets as well as guaranteeing data protection, and the free movement of such data, adapting copyright rules, ensuring cross-border access to online services and content and the deployment of strategic technologies.

The three Presidencies invite for an update of the Digital Agenda and will ensure the Council's contribution for it so as to preserve its growth potential for Europe in spite of an increasingly global competition.

While the implementation of the new instrument for e-identification and signature will already contribute to improved trust and confidence in the digital environment, it is necessary to set up a broader framework for the security of network and information given growing cyber-security concerns: the three Presidencies will therefore spare no efforts in order to secure agreement on the proposal on Network and Information Security.

The telecom market and its operators remain at the core of the EU Digital Single Market: it is however still fragmented, putting European operators at disadvantage and not delivering enough to citizens and businesses. In order to give Europe a strong and dynamic telecom sector that it needs the three Presidencies will address all relevant initiatives such the "Connected Continent" package in order to provide operators with the stable and coherent framework they need and consumers with the protection they deserve.

Access to on-line services is not only a question of availability of networks: web accessibility for all, including those with disabilities, should also be addressed and the three Presidencies will work to ensure the adoption of the Web Accessibility Directive.

Regarding strategic technologies such as Big Data, Open Data and Cloud computing, it is vital to better exploit their potential as growth and productivity enablers, building on European initiatives under way. The three Presidencies will facilitate further reflection on a more coordinated approach at European level in support of high standards, in particular through regulation, for the safe and reliable use of these technologies. By doing so they will take care that the development of Cloud computing will be facilitated and not restrained by any European regulation. Given the key role that they can play in improving the efficiency of the public sector, due attention will be given to these technologies when reviewing the European e-Government Action Plan which expires in 2015 and during the ongoing reform on data protection.

Regarding the external dimension of the Digital Agenda the three Presidencies will ensure a coordinated position of the EU in the context of the International Telecommunications Union as necessary. In the same vein the three Presidencies will facilitate an EU active role in supporting a multi-stakeholders governance model for Internet, in order to foster its sustainability, security, and development.

ENERGY

As reaffirmed by the European Council the priorities on which the Council should deliver are the completion of the Internal Energy Market by the end of 2014, the end of Member States' isolation from European networks by the end of 2015, increasing diversification of suppliers and routes, energy security and EU gas storage capacities as well as working for a political agreement among the Member States on the framework for the climate-energy policies in the period from 2020 to 2030.

Regarding the completion of the Internal Energy Market, this means securing the adoption and implementation of network codes for electricity and gas in the framework of fully implemented energy market legislation. It is nevertheless acknowledged that however important the 2014 milestone it does not mark the end of the development of the internal market: the three Presidencies will see to it, on the one hand, that the dynamic of the internal market is preserved after 2014 and, on the other hand, that further work is carried out as regards in particular the retail market, the role of consumers as well as the fuller integration of the gas market.

Regarding infrastructure and the 2015 deadline efforts will concentrate on the effective implementation of the new regulation on Trans-European energy infrastructures and making sure that the recently adopted projects of common interest (PCI) have access to financing, permitting and regulatory treatment. The next step to be undertaken during the three Presidencies will be to prepare for the adoption of the second list of PCIs.

Taking due account of the guidance provided by the European Council and bearing in mind the need to enhance investors' certainty, the three Presidencies will contribute to the definition of the energy component of the 2030 framework for Energy and Climate policies, looking in particular at the development of a governance model which could improve the coherence of policies across sectors and Member States, and at the key contribution expected from updated policies in the fields of energy from renewable sources and of energy efficiency. In this respect, new legislative proposals from the Commission will be given adequate priority.

The three Presidencies also note that the use of sustainable biomass is an important element in order to deliver greenhouse gas savings. If deemed relevant the negotiations on the proposal addressing indirect land use change in relation with biofuels will be brought to a close.

With its external energy dependence set to grow, the EU should further develop the external dimension of its energy policy: the three Presidencies will therefore pay due attention to new and ongoing negotiations with strategic partners and the diversification of supply and routes as well as to the implementation of the principles of the internal energy market in the European neighbourhood. In this respect it will be important to prepare for an effective Energy Community Treaty post-2016. So that, developing the European external energy policy, particular attention should be paid to the energy security. The three Presidencies will continue to increase the European energy security by reflecting notably on storage capacities, interconnections, diversification of supply, further market liberalisation, indigenous energy sources, increasing EU bargaining power, energy efficiency aspects and reducing energy dependence thanks to an acceleration in energy sources and routes diversification.

The transition of the EU to a low-carbon economy calls for relentless efforts in R & D and Innovation and for a more integrated research and innovation chain at EU level: the three Presidencies will therefore facilitate the implementation of the Roadmap on Energy technology and innovation linked to the Strategic Energy Technology Plan (SET-Plan).

Ongoing efforts to enhance the safety of all sources of energy, conventional and non-conventional will be pursued: this will be the case in particular as regards the regulatory framework on nuclear safety as well as related developments concerning liability and emergency measures.

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES

AGRICULTURE

Using the full potential of the reformed Common Agricultural Policy, the three Presidencies will continue to promote the sustainable, innovative and environmentally-friendly development of the agriculture, food and fisheries sector in the European Union.

The three Presidencies will also continue to work in order to improve competitiveness of the EU agricultural production and food sector by ensuring that EU legislation promotes aspects of competitiveness.

In the area of food security, the Expo Milano 2015, devoted to the theme "Feeding the planet, energy for life", will be a landmark event for the European Union. The three Presidencies will also ensure that the EU will continue to be fully engaged in international discussions on agriculture and food security, particularly in the framework of the United Nations Organisation for Food and Agriculture (FAO) and the Committee on World Food Security.

Regarding the implementation of the reformed Common Agricultural Policy, attention will be paid to issues related to the stabilization of farmers' income.

The three Presidencies are committed to taking work forward on the Commission proposals to revise the aid schemes for the supply of fruit and vegetables, bananas and milk to schools and negotiations with the European Parliament aiming to bring these files to a successful conclusion.

The three Presidencies also intend to give full attention to following up on Council's response to the Commission report on the implementation of the 2007 reform in the fruit and vegetables sector, in the context of its examination of any Commission proposals for the sector. Likewise, a report from the Commission on the development of the market situation in the milk and milk products sector in the light of the operation of the measures of the milk package is expected for June 2014. This report, which might be accompanied by legislative proposals, will be carefully examined.

Special emphasis will be placed on examining the Commission proposal for a review of the Regulation on organic farming, and in particular on the rules on control, import and repression of frauds. Moreover, all actions related to the simplification of the administrative procedures and the safeguard of the quality of organic production will be considered as primary issues.

The three Presidencies will also focus on the implementation of the key principles of the reformed CAP in the ultra-peripheral regions of the Union, on the basis of an initiative from the Commission.

Veterinary, food and phytosanitary

The protection of citizens' health requires constant attention to the safety of the food that is consumed daily.

The three Presidencies shall give priority attention to developing the legislative and policy framework in this area with the aim of ensuring that all EU citizens have access to safe food secure from frauds.

Due account will be given to the forthcoming Expo Milano 2015 dedicated to the overarching theme of food and food security.

The three Presidencies shall devote adequate attention to free circulation, traceability and health of animals since it has a direct impact on human health and on the treatment with dignity of all animals and of pets in particular.

The three Presidencies will focus the work on the adoption of the new Regulation on Novel Foods submitted by the Commission in December 2013, together with proposals on the prohibition of food production from animal clones and the interdiction of the cloning reproduction technique for farming purposes.

A strong focus will be put on the problem of expansion of diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans (zoonosis), which create substantial economical losses as well as threats to human health. Cooperation between FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization), OIE (World Organization for Animal Health) and WHO (World Health Organization) on eradication of diseases common to man and animals, inter alia with regard to surveillance and research activities, will be strengthened.

The three Presidencies will seek to complete the Animal and Health Package aiming at a simple but effective legislation and at ensuring health and safety standards for the whole agri-food chain: the update of current Regulations on health and safety of the whole agro-food chain including the revision of the Regulations on protection against harmful organisms for plants; production and marketing of plant propagation material; official controls and other official activities intended to ensure the effective application of laws on plant health and phytosanitary production, animal health and food and feed production; placing on the market of veterinary medicines and medicated feed; cloning of animals for food production and placing on the market of food from clones; zootechnical and genealogical conditions for trade in and imports into the Union of breeding animals and their germinal products; revision of the hygiene package.

With regard to the negotiations between EU and third countries, the three Presidencies will do their best in order to reach greater compliance with international health standards provided by the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement (SPS) and promoting the export of agro-food products.

Forests

With regard to forests, the three Presidencies will continue the negotiations on a "Legally Binding Agreement on Forests in Europe" (L.B.A.) and will ensure the implementation of the new EU Forestry Strategy, with particular focus on maximizing the efficient and sustainable use of forest resources in the context of the future Climate and Energy Strategy for 2030.

Significant input in popularization and promotion of European forest management model globally with the aim to ensure sustainable and responsible forest management in the whole world will be the United Nations Forum on Forests (New York, May 4-15, 2015).

FISHERIES

For the three Presidencies, the main priority will be to make every effort to achieve significant progress in preparation of legal basis and focus on implementation of the new Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

Particular attention will also be paid to aquaculture in view of the increase in production in the EU, enhancing the competitiveness factors that are represented by the respect for the environment and ecosystems, food safety and quality.

The three Presidencies will focus on reaching agreements on fishing opportunities in 2015-2016 in EU waters and international waters (TACs and quotas: Regulation for EU waters and international waters, Baltic Sea, Black Sea, Deep-sea species), which will have to be fully consistent with the objectives of the new CFP.

In order to ensure sustainable management of fisheries and, in particular, the goal to achieve Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) for all stocks the three Presidencies will work on elaboration of multiannual management plans. The new framework of technical measures will be regarded as an essential element of this effort.

The work on alignment of various existing Regulations to the Lisbon Treaty will be continued accordingly.

In light of unsatisfactory data regarding the stocks in the Mediterranean Sea, the three Presidencies seek to promote the regional procedures allowed by the new CFP - also through the adoption of management plans - in order to ensure shared measures by the Member States concerned, as well as the action of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) in view of the introduction of appropriate measures management, also shared by concerned third countries.

A special effort will be deployed to ensure appropriate representation and coordination of the Union's position in the negotiations on fisheries partnership agreements with third countries and in meetings planned within multilateral organizations and with the coastal countries in the fisheries sector.

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental issues

Action to protect the environment and sustainably manage natural resources encompasses areas ranging from biodiversity and ecosystems to air quality, waste, and water management, species protection and sound management of chemicals, but also broader governance issues and contribution to an inclusive sustainable green economy. Green growth and resource efficiency have become stable and strong priorities of the Council action in the area of environmental policy, in the broader context of sustainable development. Maintaining a high level of environmental protection while stimulating green growth (including green jobs) through for instance eco-innovation, will therefore be strong features of the three Presidencies' work programme.

Against that background the European Semester provides an opportunity for better integrating environmental sustainability in the wider economic governance cycle, turning it into concrete opportunities for growth and competitiveness. The three Presidencies will pursue efforts towards greening the European Semester, taking also into account the review of the Europe 2020 strategy.

The further development and review of environmental legislation, on the basis of the new Commission proposals already on the table (such as on air quality, plastic bags) and forthcoming ones (e.g. review of waste targets, environmental inspections) will be at the core of the Council's programme to make as much progress as possible towards adoption, together with the European Parliament, of the new legislative measures. Work on the legislative proposal concerning the cultivation of Genetically Modified Organisms will be taken forward.

With regard to international issues, the "Rio+20 follow-up" and the post-2015 agenda will continue to require intensive work at EU and international level towards the development of a coherent global framework encompassing the reviewed Millennium Development Goals and new Sustainable Development Goals. This will also include preparation of meetings of the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) in 2014 and of the reformed UNEP with its new governing body with universal membership, UNEA, in 2014. The three Presidencies will also be engaged at international level in actions to implement other outcomes from the Rio+20 Conference concerning for instance a financing strategy for sustainable development; sustainable consumption and production; the development of indicators to complement GDP; and the third International Conference on SIDS in 2014. These latter aspects will require coordination across various sectors, too.

Furthermore, the three Presidencies will work on a wide range of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and other international environmental processes ranging from long-range transboundary air pollution to sound management of chemicals (including mercury) and waste, and from biodiversity and species protection to whaling and biosafety. All these international processes and agreements will require intensive and detailed preparations within the Council and coordination of positions within the EU including during international meetings. These meetings will include, in 2014-2015, the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, the Conferences of the Parties (COPs) to the UN Biodiversity Convention, and its related Biosafety and ABS Protocols in October 2014, CLRTAP meetings, PIC, POPs and Basel COPs in 2015 as well as meetings of the new Minamata Convention on Mercury, CITES, International Whaling Commission, IPBES and EFE meetings, and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification.

Climate Change

The international regime for the fight against climate change is at crossroads.

The Council will continue to work on the policy framework for climate and energy in the period from 2020 to 2030 in order to ensure that the EU post-2020 is on track to meet its climate objectives, while contributing to the overall sustainability, economic competitiveness and growth and security of energy supply of the EU.

The next two years will be a crucial, demanding time during which steps will be taken and important commitments will be endorsed: a climate agreement and the post-2015 Agenda will have to be agreed upon in the next few months.

In such negotiations the EU has an important leading role to play. To this end the three Presidencies will actively work with the EU institutions and Member States, keeping in mind that a global approach is the best way forward and that climate change - as well as energy - is a cross cutting issue with a heavy impact on sustainable development.

The three Presidencies will be committed to facilitate the dialogue both at European and global level in order to reach an international agreement on climate change.

In this context and on the basis of the European Council's orientations, the three Presidencies will prepare and coordinate the EU's position effectively, in particular with a view to the UN Conferences in December 2014 and late 2015, with the objective of adopting a global legally-binding climate agreement in Paris in 2015.

The Council will continue to work on legislative proposals from the Commission in this respect, such as the proposal for a market stability reserve for the EU Emission Trading System, the conclusion of the Doha amendment to the Kyoto protocol and the proposal for monitoring, reporting and verification of CO₂ emissions from maritime transport.

EDUCATION, YOUTH, CULTURE, AUDIOVISUAL AND SPORT

During the 18-month period in question, the work priorities in the areas covered by the EYCS Council formation will be closely linked to the wider economic and social challenges facing the EU, and in particular to the EU's growth and jobs strategy. Equipping young people with the right skills to find work, and developing a creative and entrepreneurial mind-set among our citizens will be key to ensuring a broad-based and strong recovery for the EU. In this perspective, the three Presidencies will also work on the monitoring of the Youth Guarantee across Europe as well as on the implementation of the Youth Employment Initiative.

The economic crisis has also had a serious social impact, with local communities around Europe under the stress of dealing with large numbers of unemployed youngsters and increased numbers of migrants, at the very time when public funding for social infrastructure has been under great pressure to find savings. It is now vital for education, youth, sport and culture policies to focus on the need to strengthen communities at the grassroots level.

In all these sectors, the opportunity to modernise service provision, and to harness the potential provided by new digital technologies is essential. Whilst technological change must be embraced and full advantage taken of the potential of technology to enhance our economies, societies and the lives of our citizens, it is equally important that our basic values and principles are maintained. Over the 18-month period of this team Presidency, the impact of new technologies will be an important theme across all these sectors, but particularly in education - where the potential of open education resources and on-line courses is already significantly impacting on the higher education sector - and in audiovisual policy where a proposal is expected from the Commission to adapt the regulatory framework for the provision of audiovisual services to the "converged" media landscape.

Education and Training

Tomorrow's jobs require higher, more labour market-relevant skills as well as more flexibility. The three Presidencies will work on a new European agenda for Education to provide new impetus to education's contribution to the overall EU 2020 strategy and its review with particular reference to the fight against youth unemployment, with a focus on youth empowerment and employability. An initial political discussion on the "economic case for education" will highlight the impact of investment in education on economic sustainable growth and lead to Council conclusions.

To mark the end of the latest 3-year work cycle under the "ET2020" strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, a joint Council and Commission report will be drawn up and adopted in early 2015. The report will assess the overall progress towards the agreed objectives for that period. This will then serve as the basis for establishing a fresh set of priority areas and for the identification of European level issues with specific outputs to be achieved during the next work cycle (2015-2017). The 2015 Joint Report will also be the opportunity to assess the interim evaluation of the "ET2020" strategic framework, which was established in 2009 for the period up to 2020, and to agree modifications to improve governance methods and the functioning of different aspects of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC).

The three Presidencies undertake to enhance international cooperation between universities and higher education institutions and to support the new Erasmus+ program to achieve a significant and continuous exchange of students.

With the aim of broadening the debate on open educational resources and digital teaching/learning, which allow to elaborate more flexible educational models, an EU Summit on Digital and Open Education will be organized, aimed at ensuring that Europe exploits the opportunities brought by technological developments, involving all stakeholders in the debate and identifying new policy initiatives.

Europe faces a number of challenges which can only be met if it has innovative, well-educated and entrepreneurial citizens, who are willing to take risks and initiatives. Entrepreneurship is regarded as one of the key competences which every citizen needs, and entrepreneurial attitudes and mind-sets need to be fostered from an early age, starting in school. The Council will also focus on entrepreneurship education as a means to acquire the skills and competences both for personal and professional life.

Regarding vocational education, on the basis of an expected Commission communication on progress under the Copenhagen Process, the three Presidencies will invite the Council to adopt conclusions setting out short-term deliverables for the next work period, 2015-2018.

The Council will also be invited to adopt conclusions on policies in formal and non-formal education to reduce early school leaving, one of the five key targets of the Europe 2020 strategy, considering especially children with migrant background in a context of linguistic and cultural diversity.

The three Presidencies will also give a special attention to the issue of integration between education and training systems and the labour market through the enhancement of work-based learning pathways (such as apprenticeships, traineeships, etc.), specifically focused on the so-called dual perspective. To support this integration, the three Presidencies will work and put a particular focus on:

- mobility at national and transnational level for education and increased job opportunities purposes;
- rational use and streamlining of the various EU transparency tools (e.g. Europass, ECVET, EQF, EQAVET, etc.), in order to grant the validation and recognition of skills and competences acquired in different learning settings.

To this end, the non-formal and informal learning settings are crucial for a wider validation and recognition of skills and competences and the three Presidencies will work for the recognition of non-profit organisations as natural suppliers of non-formal and informal education in the framework of life-long learning, as well as of the certification of civic and technical skills acquired through volunteering and engagement in non-profit organisations and initiatives, in educational curricula and in European tools for competence assessment and transferability.

The three Presidencies will act in favour of third sector organisations involvement in programmes of learning support, school dropout prevention and to enlarge higher technical and academic education access, which contribute to achieving the objectives of the 2020 Strategy.

The three Presidencies will support the adoption of adequate provisions in the EU budget for youth volunteering and training abroad programmes, in collaboration with third sector organisations, to enlarge access to language learning opportunities, employability and the construction of European civic awareness.

Youth

This current generation of young people are faced with a particularly challenging set of circumstances. Recovery from the economic crisis is still tentative and labour market conditions remain very difficult. There are also issues regarding low levels of interest and engagement in the political process.

Against this background, the 18-month team Presidency will prioritise the implementation of the new EU Work Plan for Youth which the Council adopted in May 2014. In this context, the key role of youth work and non-formal and informal learning as a means of enhancing the skills development and employability of young people is a key priority. Youth work is able to reach the most socially disadvantaged individuals and those that are not in formal education and training. In addition to employability, youth work plays a key role in ensuring social cohesion in communities under pressure due to high levels of unemployment. Enhanced cross-sectorial cooperation should further advance youth sector's contribution in achieving Europe 2020 Strategy objectives.

The youth field has a well-established practice of Presidency co-operation in the context of the Structured Dialogue between public authorities and young people. In this context, the overall theme for the 18-month period is the empowerment of young people. This theme will be the common thread that will ensure the continuity and consistency in the work of the three Presidencies. The empowerment theme will address youth access to rights and the importance of political participation of young people.

Culture

The aim of the three Presidencies will be to ensure that the role of culture as a value and as a vector is adequately reflected in the contribution to the Europe 2020 strategy. The three Presidencies will continue to make efforts so that the cultural and creative sectors are properly addressed in the implementation of the whole spectrum of the EU programmes and instruments which are part of the multiannual financial framework for the 2014 - 2020 period.

The three Presidencies will strive to raise awareness of culture as a driver for innovation and as an instrument for enhancing social cohesion and building social capital. In order to promote growth, and employment and entrepreneurship - in particular among young people - in the cultural and creative sectors, the three Presidencies will continue to explore alternative funding models for these sectors and to improve their access to finance.

The activities of the three Presidencies will aim at stimulating creative partnerships between culture on the one hand, and other sectors such as economy, research, business, innovation and education on the other hand, in order to fully benefit from the spill-over effects of culture on other sectors.

In response to social challenges present in Europe, the three Presidencies will focus on the intrinsic value of culture to develop active citizenship, creativity and skills and to increase cultural participation through audience development and the widening of the access to culture, including online access.

In order to demonstrate the social and economic impact of culture, the three Presidencies will continue to enhance the need for evidence-based policy making.

The three Presidencies will work further on a strategic approach to culture in the Union's external relations with the focus on development cooperation.

Given that the current Council Work Plan for Culture will come to an end in 2014, a key priority will be the adoption of the new Work Plan for the next period running from 2015, and the implementation of the priorities identified in the new Work Plan.

Special focus will be given by the three Presidencies to bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore by addressing its transversal contribution to the objectives of the EU policies and Europe 2020 strategy.

The Council will be invited to adopt conclusions on cultural heritage from the strategic perspective whilst providing specific recommendations on how to put the mainstreaming principle into practice.

In order to raise wider awareness of the value of cultural heritage for society and its role as a spin-off for the creative sector, the three Presidencies will also continue to support the development of Europeana and the use of digital technologies as a means to enhance access to cultural and creative content online in general, and to the European cultural heritage in particular, in order to stimulate creativity, especially among young people.

Audiovisual

The increasing use of the Internet and mobile devices as the preferred means of viewing audiovisual content raises significant issues for regulation in the audiovisual sector which is historically based on the broadcasting model. Whilst the 2007 Audiovisual Media Services (AVMS) Directive is the EU's regulatory framework, the rapid technological and market developments since then may necessitate punctual adaptations. As and when a proposal to amend the AVMS Directive is tabled by the Commission, the three Presidencies will prioritise this key dossier.

Other key subjects in the audiovisual area include the cross-border access availability and use of online creative content in the digital single market, which is to be established by 2015. Providing digital content across the single market is closely linked to the modernisation of Europe's copyright regime, as identified in the European Council conclusions of October 2013. The three Presidencies will ensure that cultural diversity is upheld also in the digital environment.

Issues surrounding the digitisation of European cinemas and of the European audiovisual heritage will also be addressed in order to ensure a successful transition of European cinema to digital age.

Sport

A new EU Work Plan for Sport has been agreed by the Council in May 2014 which establishes the priorities for Member State and Commission co-operation in the sports field for the next three years. The three Presidencies overarching priority during their 18 month period will be to ensure the efficient implementation of the new Work Plan.

The role of sport, in particular grass roots sport, as a means to maintain good socially cohesive local communities, and as an environment in which young people can learn key "soft skills" to enhance their employability will also be highlighted, given its clear link to the EU's Europe 2020 agenda. The role of investment in sports facilities, the role of volunteering, the needs of disabled people and the need for an equal opportunities approach (i.e. gender issues), will also be important topics.

The encouragement to practise sport from early childhood, not only for corporal development but also for shaping education, attitudes and values will also be a priority, for developing a "global concept of sport".

The focus will also be on professions in the domain of sport in order to increase and facilitate the employment potential of this sector.

The three Presidencies will also prioritise the promotion of physical activity in order to strengthen health and to spread healthy lifestyles at all levels and ages, with particular reference to the implementation of the Council's Health enhancing physically activity (HEPA) Recommendation for target groups, and to the promotion of quality physical education in schools.

The issue of match-fixing is likely to remain high on the agenda, and it will be important to ensure that the EU remains at the forefront of international efforts to find practical and effective means to combat this threat to sporting integrity. In this regard the ratification by the EU of the Council of Europe Convention currently being finalised is likely to be a priority.

In the area of anti-doping, the three Presidencies will continue to ensure that the EU and its Member States co-operate and coordinate effectively so as to remain a strong voice at the World Anti-Doping Agency. In addition, doping in (recreational) sports will be highlighted.