

EUROPE IN ACTION!
(AN ARTICLE BY THE BELGIAN EU-PRESIDENCY)

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The European Union, our Union, faces many challenges. The current crisis, on a scale without precedent during the last 50 years, has worsened unemployment and further accentuated social inequalities. The financial system has been shown to have serious deficiencies. Our public finances have greatly deteriorated as a result and must be restabilised. Our competitiveness continues to be eroded. Our demographics, as well as environment and climate-related pressures, are forcing us to restructure our economies and societies. New forces are emerging on the world stage.

In order to respond to these numerous challenges, we require a stronger, more coherent and determined Europe, focused on guaranteeing and developing its social model and prosperity, as well as on closing the gaps in economic development between its regions. We also require a Europe that is more accessible and in which there is closer dialogue between the Union and its citizens.

As a result of a process that has taken nearly 10 years, since it was first initiated by the Laeken Declaration, the Union now has a new founding treaty and a new legitimacy. The Treaty of Lisbon has led to the creation of new institutions. Created together, these institutions should allow us to lend new impetus to European development.

Europe and the European single currency have made it possible to protect our economies better from the upheavals which are transforming the face of the world in which we live. Yet the crisis and its impact on public finances now require the Stability and Growth Pact to be strengthened. This means moving towards a more economic form of government. The European Council must make strategic decisions based on concrete proposals from the Working Group.

Globalisation is dramatically changing the balance of power. In order to consolidate the role played by Europe, its external policy must be rendered more harmonious, ensuring that it speaks with a single voice.

The Belgian Presidency intends to contribute to meeting all these challenges through collective action and by establishing intensive dialogue with institutions and Member States.

It will only be possible to achieve economic recovery and respond adequately to the current crisis by mobilising all the forces at our disposal. The European Union must become a driving force for structural reform, the creation of jobs, financial stability and increased competitiveness. We have to bring about a return to maintained, sustainable and balanced growth throughout the

European Union. Moreover, it will have to make sure that it speeds up the transition towards a green and knowledge-based economy, whilst ensuring strong social cohesion.

The EU 2020 strategy for employment and growth aspires to establish an intelligent, sustainable and inclusive economy. This assumes growth in employment, a greater mobilisation in support of innovation and education, as well as making ambitious commitments on climate issues and, lastly, a strengthening of social cohesion. The fulfilment of the major objectives defined by the European Council will underpin the **socio-economic priorities** of the Belgian Presidency's programme.

In view of the role and responsibility of the financial sector, the Belgian Presidency will be committed to implementing a new regulatory and supervisory structure for the financial sector. It will pay particular attention to the legislative initiatives of the Commission to strengthen crisis prevention and resolution mechanisms and protect savers and businesses from systematically-failing financial institutions.

Employment will be one of the central themes of the Belgian Presidency. Investment in human capital and the creation of jobs in a modernised labour market are fundamental for the development of our socio-economic model. The Belgian Presidency will focus in particular on the question of *green* jobs and *white* jobs. The consequences of economic restructuring, the fight against discrimination at work, as well as the promotion of equality of pay between men and women also call for renewed attention.

Following the work initiated by the Spanish Presidency and after seeking the opinion of the European Parliament, the Council will adopt employment guidelines under the Belgian Presidency.

The Belgian Presidency will continue the work set in motion by the Monti report dedicated to identifying the bottlenecks, missing links and new frontiers of the internal market.

Barriers to both the protection of innovative ideas and administrative simplification remain a challenge that the Belgian Presidency intends to overcome. The protection of intellectual property and negotiations for a European patent will be other priorities.

The Belgian Presidency will also seek to lend momentum to a sustainable industrial policy, with the main aim of developing a green European economy, competitive at the global level. It will maintain an integrated approach, covering all facets of innovation and targeting the needs of businesses, in the main, and those of SMEs in particular.

Research, development and innovation will be the subject of in-depth discussions at the European Council in December 2010. As a priority, it must define guidelines for better coordination of Member States' policy in this area.

The Belgian Presidency will focus on defining indicators to measure both the extent to which the crucial objective of 3% is being met, as well as the progress achieved through the creation of a European Research Area. Particular attention will be devoted to the free flow of knowledge within this European Research Area and to the simplification of Community programmes.

Teaching and training play an important role in the move towards a knowledge economy. This role involves more than just simply transferring knowledge. The transformation of our economy also requires acquired knowledge to be adapted and constantly updated, taking the needs of the labour market into account. Special effort must therefore be devoted to professional training and lifelong learning, as well as to combating failure to complete schooling.

Amongst the bottlenecks impeding growth, the Commission has also identified shortcomings in terms of infrastructure. The response to this challenge cannot come from the Member States alone. The Union must also contribute, particularly where cross-border infrastructure is concerned. The Belgian Presidency will strive to make progress on this issue, in conjunction with both the Commission and the European Investment Bank. In this context, particular attention will be focussed on the issue of securing the energy supply.

The Presidency will ensure that all its common policies, including agricultural policy and cohesion policy, support the Europe 2020 Strategy. These policies contribute significantly to growth and employment, as well as to the promotion of economic, social and territorial cohesion.

Our social model must be strengthened. Special emphasis must be placed on the necessity of **social cohesion**. Social progress is just as important a challenge as economic performance: this sums up the very spirit of our European model. In this context, the Belgian Presidency will seek to develop an ambitious access to employment policy.

As part of the Social Agenda and ongoing structural reforms, the Belgian Presidency will seek to encourage social convergence towards higher standards by the setting out of objectives and performance indicators. This approach should extend to cover issues of social protection, social inclusion, pensions and healthcare.

The Belgian Presidency aims to make tangible progress in the debate on social services of general interest.

2010 is the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. As part of this framework, the Belgian Presidency will examine how social protection can be strengthened.

The Presidency wishes to make progress in the struggle against discrimination and for equality.

The Union's adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities will also be a matter on the Council's agenda.

Furthermore, the Belgian Presidency will also highlight the added value offered by the European Union in the improvement of public health.

Bringing about the transformation to a low-carbon economy, by using energy and natural resources as efficiently as possible, represents the major challenge of the coming decade. In the years to come, a major part of the European Union's efforts will be devoted to the **environment** and the **climate**.

The Belgian Presidency will work together with the Commission to ensure that the European Union's voice is heard in international negotiations on the follow-up to the Copenhagen Conference. The goal that has been set is to achieve tangible progress and results to be brought to the table at the Framework Convention on Climate Change meeting to be held in Cancun in November 2010. The international community must set ambitious objectives for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and must make firm commitments in support of developing countries. The European Union must put all its weight behind these debates and remain the driving force for change.

In addition, the Belgian Presidency will seek to link this process to new objectives for the European policies on energy and transport, with a view to encouraging the transition to a green economy. The adaptation of taxation regulations must also be considered in order to achieve these objectives. The Belgian Presidency will follow up the efforts made by the Council to reach agreement on European legislation which would allow Member States to recover the external costs generated by road transport from users.

Biodiversity, as well as the sustainable management of materials will also be prominent themes on the European agenda. The Belgian Presidency will prepare for the European Union's participation in the 10th Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to be held in Nagoya in October 2010.

Special attention will be paid to the improvement of our legislative instruments related to the environment.

The creation of an open and safe Union, which is there to serve its citizens, guarantee their fundamental freedoms and protect them represents a major challenge. It can only be met by the reinforcement and completion of the **European Area of Freedom, Security and Justice**. The Lisbon Treaty offers new possibilities in this respect. The Belgian Presidency intends to take advantage of these opportunities to set a new dynamic in motion in this area, in close consultation with the Commission and Parliament. It is in this context that we will implement the Multi-annual Stockholm Programme (2010-2014).

The objective of establishing a single asylum procedure and a uniform international protection statute by 2012 will be actively pursued. The fight against terrorism, organised crime, illegal immigration and human trafficking, in particular, will be priorities in the field of internal affairs. Legal migration will also be a priority for the Presidency. Mutual recognition of judicial decisions will be the central theme for the Belgian Presidency's programme in the field of justice. The undeniable progress brought about by the free movement of persons must be matched by establishing a genuine common European Area for Freedom, Security and Justice.

Particular attention will be paid to the external dimension of these questions. Migration, the fight against organised crime, human trafficking, drug trafficking and the fight against terrorism are all challenges that must be addressed as an integral part of the European Union's external policy.

Thanks to the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Union is now equipped with robust institutions which will allow it to be stronger in **external action**. The power of attraction of the European Union, as the largest regional organisation in the world and as a key player in peace and prosperity, remains intact.

In order to give the Union access to an efficient diplomatic service, the establishment of a European External Action Service is to be finalised by the second half of 2010. As regards external representation of the Union, the Belgian Presidency wants to optimise the potential of the new treaty and place emphasis on uniqueness of representation.

The Union is ready to continue its enlargement process. The rate at which new members are integrated will depend on each candidate's own merits. Negotiations with Croatia could potentially move into their final phase and negotiations with Turkey are progressing. In June the European Council took the decision to open accession negotiations with Iceland. In the second half of the year, the Council will continue to examine the Commission's recommendation to start negotiations with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In line with the message conveyed at the Ministerial Meeting held in Sarajevo on 2 June 2010, the Presidency will also work to establish closer relations with the Western Balkans, in compliance with established procedures and the respective state of progress on reforms.

The Heads of State or Government of the European Union will meet their Asian and African counterparts at two summits. The aim is to strengthen cooperation and partnership with these continents and to address global challenges together.

The Union will continue to plead the case for the opening of markets and to resist the temptation of protectionism. In this context, the Presidency will encourage the continuation of the work embarked upon by the Doha Development Round with a view to bringing it to a conclusion. In addition, the Union will continue to negotiate and ratify bilateral and regional trade agreements with its key partners.

The protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms and their full integration into all areas of EU action will remain a priority for the EU's external relations.

Special attention will be paid to preparations for the high-level meeting of the United Nations General Assembly to mark the 10th anniversary of the Millennium Declaration.

The potential of the new treaty must be exploited in all Union policies. In order to ensure the necessary resources are available for the implementation of these policies, the 2011 budget must be finalised under the Belgian Presidency. In the longer term, the Presidency will also seek to stimulate debate on future financial prospects.

To pursue efforts already undertaken to make the European construction more tangible and accessible to its citizens, the Belgian Presidency will continue the work done under the Spanish Presidency in order to adopt the Citizens' Initiative, envisaged as part of the Treaty of Lisbon.

We believe in the strength of our model and the common values that we have built together over the last five decades. The European Union has opened the way for the development of our continent and now guarantees that more than 500 million citizens can live in peace and prosperity. However, this model is a demanding one. And that is precisely why the Union cannot simply rest on its laurels.

Let's put Europe back into action!