

Meeting of the Chairpersons of the Committees for Union Affairs (COSAC) 19 - 20 January 2020, Zagreb

Background Note

Session I – Priorities of the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

From 1 January to 30 June 2020, Croatia will take over the presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first time, under the motto „**A strong Europe in a world of challenges**“. Priorities of the Croatian Presidency are in line with key Union documents adopted after the European Parliament elections: Council's New Strategic Agenda 2019–2024 and Political Guidelines of the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and in accordance with the Trio programme of Romania, Finland and Croatia, adopted in December 2018.

Priorities of the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU are:

1. A Europe that develops
2. A Europe that connects
3. A Europe that protects
4. An influential Europe

A Europe that develops

The first priority highlights the need for a sustainable and inclusive development of Europe, which implies a further deepening of the single market, encouraging the digitalisation of business, investment in innovations and research as a guarantee for the Union's competitiveness. In addition, it requires a balanced regional development and further development of policies that will create better working and living conditions.

Emphasis is also placed on addressing demographic challenges, creating better opportunities for young people, a more competitive economy, enhancing the competitiveness of European industry and SMEs, investing in innovation and research, and developing an economy that is more environmentally sustainable, contributing to environmental protection and the fight against climate change.

Croatian Presidency will support a balanced, sustainable and inclusive development of the Union that takes into consideration the specificities and needs of all Member States, their regions and citizens.

A Europe that connects

The second priority highlights the need for further development of transport, energy and digital infrastructure and connectivity of the Union in order to achieve full social, economic and territorial cohesion between Member States.



The importance of establishing an integrated energy market and the Energy Union, as well as a greater reliance on renewable energy sources, has been emphasized, which contributes to strengthening energy security.

In order to ensure better integration of Union citizens, it is important to enable greater mobility of pupils, students, researchers and teachers, as well as the cultural and creative sectors. The Croatian Presidency will encourage policies which strengthen infrastructural connectivity of the Union and bring together its citizens, primarily through education, culture and sports.

A Europe that protects

The Croatian Presidency will advocate for a Europe that protects its citizens, while respecting and protecting the rule of law.

The emphasis is on strengthening internal security, better cooperation between Member States in the fight against organized crime, money laundering and terrorist financing, as well as on strengthening civil protection cooperation for better prevention and response to disasters.

The need for a comprehensive and sustainable migration policy, which means stronger external border controls and interoperability of relevant information systems, as well as reforms of the Common European Asylum System and better cooperation with third countries, including Southeast Europe, are highlighted. Finally, in the face of growing hybrid threats, it is necessary to better protect public spaces and critical infrastructures, as well as strengthen professional and technological capacity in cybersecurity.

An influential Europe

The further development of capacities and instruments for common action is the only way to strengthen the Union's leading role on a global scale when facing many challenges, such as terrorism, trade wars or migration. The Croatian Presidency will advocate for an influential Europe that has a leading role in its neighbourhood and the world, especially in the fight against climate change, in promoting effective global governance, protecting human rights and strengthening the multilateral trading system. It will also support the strengthening of transatlantic relations, and intensifying of relations with Asia, Africa, Latin America and other Union's strategic partners, fostering reforms and strengthening resilience in the eastern and southern neighborhood, from Northern Africa to Eastern Europe. Furthermore, the Union provides more than half of the world's total development aid, thanks to which it has developed extensive partnerships with numerous countries in the world. Therefore, it is necessary to promote international development policies in the service of sustainable development and the eradication of poverty.

The Union has a special responsibility to its immediate neighbourhood. The Croatian Presidency will strive for a continued credible and effective enlargement policy, based on a confirmed European perspective of candidates and potential candidates from South East



Europe, based on complete fulfilment of set criteria. Summit will be held in Zagreb in May 2020 with the EU and the Western Balkan leaders.

In conclusion, the Croatian Presidency will also advocate development of operational capacities and instruments for swift crisis response, strengthening the European Union Security and Defense Policy as well as continuing the close and fruitful cooperation between the Union and NATO.

In addition to the Presidency priorities, key topics of the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU were highlighted:

- Adoption of the EU Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021–2027,
- Full implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights,
- Stopping negative demographic trends,
- Better connectivity in the European Union,
- Strengthening the area of freedom, security and justice,
- EU-Western Balkans Summit in May 2020,
- Environmental protection and fighting climate change,
- Adapting the job market of the future, through education and innovation,
- Bringing the Union closer to its citizens, especially young people,
- Protection of principles of democracy and fundamental values of the Union.

