

Uddrag!

THE BELGIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

1 JULY - 31 DECEMBER 2001

WORK PROGRAMME

Belgium will hold the European Union Presidency from 1 July to 31 December 2001. The Presidency kicks off at a crucial juncture in the process of European integration. A few months ago, the European Union approved a new treaty that definitively paves the way to EU enlargement. The European Union is currently devising a European social model. By 2010 it aims to become the world's most dynamic knowledge economy, with high levels of economic growth and social protection combined with low inflation and unemployment. The European Union has adopted a sustainable development strategy. In support of its monetary policy, it aims to create a policy that reconciles economic growth with social and environmental protection. The European Union has set itself the goal of creating an area of freedom, security and justice; an area where quality of life, food safety and environmental protection are priorities. Finally, the European Union is currently developing the tools that will enable Europe to play its part on the international stage from a position of strength and unanimity.

Clearly, the Presidency of the European Union is wholly in keeping with the actions undertaken by previous presidencies, proposals advanced by the European Commission and concerns expressed by the European Parliament. Indeed, a Presidency is not a job that can be done in isolation, but rather a mission carried out in the interest of the European Union.

During the second half of 2001, the Presidency will be confronted with two major challenges. First of all, it must address citizens' expectations and advance solutions to the concrete problems facing the EU. Secondly, the Presidency intends to sketch out the major lines of the debate on the future of an enlarged European Union.

The Presidency therefore aims to make progress in all areas of policy that fall within the remit of the European Union. At the same time, it intends to set the agenda, method and timetable for the debate on the future of Europe. This debate will begin in 2004 on the organisation of a new Intergovernmental Conference.

To this end, the Presidency has pinpointed a number of areas where action is required and initiatives will be taken:

1. the European social model;
2. a new currency and a new economic agenda;
3. the European area of freedom, security and justice;
4. sustainable development and a better quality of life;
5. enlargement;
6. the role of the European Union on the international stage;
7. the future of Europe.

The Presidency is intent on helping to find answers to the challenges facing the Union, and doing so in less than six months, and has therefore set itself the goal of making balanced progress in the areas of EU activity listed above. Thus, the Presidency will mark another step forward in the balanced process of unification. That is where the Presidency's ambition lies, and it will seek to flesh out this ambition by engaging in close, sustained cooperation with the European Commission, the European Parliament, the social partners and civil society.

The Presidency's basic ambition is to flesh out the so-called "European social model" and establish a permanent foothold for it in the context of European collaboration. From this point of view, the Presidency's 'social policy' component was based on three priorities: launching European collaboration on pensions; promoting practical cooperation with a view to fighting poverty and social exclusion; and paving the way for the reform of current rules governing the coordination of social security systems.

A common European strategy for social protection, based on open coordination, must be a process that sets out specific, mutually agreed objectives, for which the Member States examine best practice in Europe and draw the appropriate conclusions. The term 'best practice' must be taken quite literally. Europe must demonstrate its determination where social policy is concerned. This means defining 'criteria of excellence', not criteria of mediocrity.

The Presidency is determined to initiate the debate on the sustainability of **pension systems**. Working on the basis of a joint report drawn up by the Committee on Social Protection and the Committee on Economic Policy, we intend to reach agreement on a number of shared objectives guaranteeing sustainable social protection for pensioners and also sound public finances.

On 1 June 2001 all the Member States submitted a National Action Plan on Social Inclusion in which they explain how they will try to achieve their goals. These plans also describe the indicators and monitoring methods to be used to assess policies. Analysing these national action plans should make it possible by the end of the year to formulate an initial set of conclusions on future European collaboration on **the fight against poverty and social exclusion**. This collaboration will allow the Member States to teach each other - through the application of 'good practice' - ways of organising the dialogue with the players involved: NGOs, the social partners, the poor and socially excluded groups.

At both national and EU level, we must use the open coordination method to continue examining ways of developing pertinent quantity and quality indicators, both to measure poverty and social exclusion, and to devise and assess a policy of social inclusion. Such indicators must be linked to income, employment, housing, education, health and other criteria. The commitment of the target group itself is critical: the use of indicators is not based solely on technical expertise, but also on a platform supported by all interested parties, which includes the poor and the socially excluded.

The social economy is a critical factor in achieving a social Europe with a strong sense of solidarity. The Presidency will endeavour to promote the social economy, serving as a fulcrum between the public and private sectors, and paying special attention to the groups in our society that are at greater risk. More specifically, the Presidency wish to tackle the specific features of the social economy from three angles: social insertion, active involvement and/or active citizenship, and a socially responsible entrepreneurial spirit.

II. A NEW CURRENCY AND A NEW ECONOMIC AGENDA

Euro notes and coins will go into circulation on 1 January 2002. Never before will the reality of the European Union have been so patently clear to its citizens. For the first time in the history of the EU, its citizens will see the tangible results of European integration in their everyday lives. The successful launch of the euro will bolster confidence in the European Union and in the single currency.

During the Presidency, the final steps will be taken towards **putting euro notes and coins into circulation**. Monthly monitoring by the European Commission and the Eurogroup will make it possible to closely follow the transition in the various Member States. It is crucial that the Member States implement their measures in parallel.

A massive information campaign will also be launched to help make the euro better known. That campaign must ensure the smooth, efficient introduction of euro notes and coins. In this connection, the main aim is to eliminate any existing concerns on the part of vulnerable social groups as well as small and medium-sized businesses.

The Presidency of the Eurogroup should lead to the development of a **consistent economic policy**, whereby the prerequisites for this include enhancing the coordination of economic policy amongst the Member States and improving the dialogue with the European Central Bank. Ultimately, this situation should lead to a common economic and social policy in support of monetary union. In the various Council meetings held under its aegis, the Presidency will actively prepare for the social and economic summit to be held in Barcelona in 2002. The social, economic and ecological aspects of this policy must be treated in a balanced way.

The Presidency will organise the first **debate on the scope of what is required and the objectives to be pursued by the future regional policy** with a view to enlargement. Action needs to be taken now to secure the future of this solidarity policy with regard to disadvantaged regions.

The introduction of euro notes and coins will mark a turning point down the road heading towards a **genuine single market**. The single market has still not been achieved in full. For instance, financial markets need to be integrated. The Presidency will make efforts to push through a fiscal package. Simultaneous progress in the three areas covered by the package – tax on savings, taxes levied on businesses, interest and charges – is crucial here. Negotiations under way with all third countries - in particular Switzerland - will be pursued with a view to reaching a final agreement in 2002 on a draft directive on taxes levied on savings. Moreover, in consultation with the European Commission the Presidency will verify the extent to which a study can be carried out on the advisability, feasibility and any conditions associated with a tax on flows of speculative capital.

The Presidency will therefore endeavour to **complete the single market**. The correct operation of the single market is a key concern in this connection. After all, an efficient internal market has positive consequences for everyone, consumers and business. In this respect, consumers' interests must be a priority, so as to guarantee the continuity and regularity of services of general interest, the equality of users, and also funds that are sufficient to safeguard these principles, with a view to the ultimate adoption of appropriate legislation. The emphasis for the Presidency here will be on examining the overindebtedness of private individuals, eliminating barriers to the movement of services; continuing with the liberalisation of essential sectors such as gas, electricity, telecommunications (by reviewing the telecoms package), postal services and transport; promoting the competitiveness of our businesses, and reducing the general level of public subsidies across Europe in a harmonised manner. The joint work programme of the three Presidencies (French, Swedish and Belgian) will serve as the common thread here, so that the various target dates set at the Lisbon and Feira Councils can be met. In this connection, particular attention will be paid to aspects concerning social and environmental impact.

The Presidency wants to finalise the negotiations on the **European company statute**. Special attention will also be paid to implementing a special policy for small and medium-sized enterprises. There will be three key factors in this connection: actual implementation

of the European Charter for Small Businesses; access to funding; and improved rules governing the awarding of public contracts.

Where **consumer protection** is concerned, safety must be the top priority. The Presidency will pay particular attention to the Commission's action plan for consumer policy, emphasising the role and rights of consumers with respect to the market, as well as new forms of regulation. It will also be necessary to make substantial progress on the work to modify the Consumer Credit Directive with a view to boosting protection from overindebtedness.

If the European Union intends to become the world's most competitive, most dynamic knowledge economy, it will have to focus more attention on **research and innovation**. Research and development are drivers of employment and economic growth. The creation of a European Area of Research and Innovation is critical. The Presidency will actively contribute towards the adoption of the EU Regulation on the Community Patent. It will also pay special attention to the Sixth Framework Programme for Research and Development as well as to the increased mobility of researchers and students. Finally, the Presidency aims to continue developing the European Space Strategy.

The Presidency has very specific objectives in mind where **the information society** is concerned. One of our central concerns is to offer all citizens, including specific groups of users such as the handicapped, elderly and individuals with few qualifications, access to information and communication technologies. This means that access to the Internet must be less expensive, faster and more secure. This also means that the telecommunications market must be fully liberalised. Further, we must bridge the digital divide in order to prevent the emergence of new forms of illiteracy. Lastly, consumer protection within the context of e-commerce must offer the same guarantees available in traditional commerce. The ethical aspects of the information society will have to be taken into account.

considerations in other Community policies, the main focus of attention will be on the transport sector.

Climate change is threatening future prosperity and the economic progress of the entire planet. Effective international cooperation is required if emissions are to be reduced. The position taken up by the new US administration has profoundly altered the situation. Notwithstanding this, the Presidency will try to relaunch the Kyoto process.

The battle against climate change, waged by implementing a sustainable energy policy, lies at the heart of sustainable development policy at both the European and planetary levels. The European Union must set an example by implementing an ambitious European Programme of Common and Coordinated Policies and Measures before the global summit on sustainable development, scheduled for 2002. This programme should include an agreement, albeit perhaps not a unanimous one, on the harmonisation of energy tax and on a framework directive on tradable emission permits, as well as new measures designed to bolster energy efficiency and promote renewable sources of energy.

By setting such an international agenda for European policy where environmental matters are concerned, the Presidency will put its full weight behind the negotiations on climate change with a view to ensuring that the Kyoto Protocol is ratified, and behind preparations for the world summit on sustainable development and international governance where the environment is concerned. Consequently, EU enlargement must encourage the candidate Member States to integrate this new concept of sustainable development into their respective national policies.

Where **energy policy** is concerned, the Presidency will continue with the initiatives launched by the Swedish Presidency with respect to renewable energy and energy efficiency. In this context, the Presidency specifically hopes to make further progress on the subject of ecotaxes. At the same time, the Presidency is subscribing to the view that the commitments made in Kyoto should be respected. This will entail adopting the Directive on the promotion of renewable sources of energy, which will constitute a first step towards the establishment of a genuinely European market of renewable energy. On the other hand, the Presidency will strive to make headway in connection with the Directive on energy efficiency in buildings. The most important conclusions expected from the Green Book on Security of Energy Supply will pave the way for an analysis of the role played by renewable sources of energy and the decline in demand as an instrument for reducing energy dependency on third countries.

Considerations of citizens' quality of life and long-term mobility will guide the Presidency with respect to its **transport policy**, where special emphasis will be placed on environmental protection, the enhancement of safety and the improvement of working conditions. On the environmental front, the Presidency will ensure that the Annual General Meeting of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) sets exacting international standards for pollution and aircraft noise. The implementation of a second package of measures, dubbed "Erika", concerning maritime safety, will also be monitored very closely. The debate on the Commission White Paper on transport policy until 2010 will provide an opportunity to reflect on the future of the Common Transport Policy, in terms of the specific integration of policies on transport and the environment, managing the rising demand for transport, taxing infrastructure and switching freight to less pollutant modes of transport.

Where safety is concerned, the Presidency will try to ensure that the Member States reach an agreement on extending the use of speed limiters to vans. The debate focussing on the Third European Road Safety Action Programme will enable the discussion of issues such as the targeted objectives, the elimination of blind spots for heavy goods vehicles and the protection of pedestrians in the event of collisions. The Presidency undertakes to ensure that the opening up of transport markets is accompanied by adequate social measures and

