

UK PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL JULY-DECEMBER 2005

The United Kingdom assumes the Presidency of the Council on 1 July 2005. We have worked closely with other Presidencies, particularly the Luxembourg and Austrian Presidencies, and with the European Commission to ensure continuity. As President of the Council, we are conscious of the need to work in partnership with the European Parliament, the Commission and the other Member States.

The main priorities for the UK Presidency are set out below. These reflect the issues identified in the cross-Presidency Multiannual Strategic Programme for 2004-06, published in December 2003, and the Luxembourg-UK work programme published in December 2004.

The list which follows is by no means a comprehensive account of all the Presidency work – there are many other dossiers and issues on which we will seek to make progress.

EUROPE'S ROLE IN THE WORLD

Doha Development Agenda

The WTO Ministerial meeting in Hong Kong in December will aim to take forward the current round of trade talks (the Doha Development Agenda). We will want to work with our EU partners, the Commission and the European Parliament to achieve the best possible result at that meeting. We want an outcome which leads to global economic growth, including through better access to markets for developing countries, in particular for the poorest nations in the world. We want an outcome which reflects the Millennium Development Goals, and which allows the DDA to be completed during 2006.

Development and Africa

The Presidency will represent the EU at the UN Millennium Summit in September. We will continue to work with our European partners, including the Parliament, to ensure that the EU provides the leadership and the quantity and quality of aid needed to tackle global poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals, building on the decision to set targets for 2010 to double EU aid and to achieve the UN 0.7 target by 2015. Africa is also a key priority for Britain's G8 Presidency, and will receive at least 50% of the EU's additional resources. We will develop a comprehensive and long-term global strategy towards Africa in the light of the Millennium Summit's outcome.

Climate Change

We want to make progress on Climate Change through the EU and G8 Presidencies. We will work with EU partners to reinvigorate the international negotiations on climate change by exploring options for a post-2012 strategy and developing stronger co-operation and real dialogue with key international partners on ways of securing low-cost emissions reductions. There is also an opportunity to begin the work of extending the EU emissions trading scheme to cover aircraft emissions.

Sugar reform

The EU's sugar regime is an important element of reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. We will want to achieve a consensus amongst partners on a market-based, liberalising reform. Reforms on these lines will strengthen our wider trade and development objectives, putting the EU in a better position to contribute to an ambitious outcome in the world trade talks. Integral to reform are good, timely, transitional arrangements, which are acceptable to the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries and which effectively help them adjust to the reform.

Russia/Ukraine

We will want to continue to build the EU's partnership with Russia following the summit during the Luxembourg Presidency. We will take this forward based on common European values, and reflecting the EU's interests in the common neighbourhood. Events in Ukraine last year marked a watershed for democracy in Ukraine. We will continue to develop the EU's relationship with Ukraine on the basis of the steps agreed earlier this year, reflecting progress in implementing reform in Ukraine.

Peace, stability and reform in the Middle East

Building on President Bush's visit to Europe, we will want the EU to continue to work with the US and other international partners in order to play a major role in the Middle East, in particular as a member of the Quartet for the MEPP. The MEPP continues to present one of the most important international challenges. The EU will continue to play a vital role, supporting the work of Jim Wolfensohn (the Quartet's Special Envoy for disengagement), monitoring Palestinian Legislative Council elections, and reforming donor structures. We want to take forward the role the EU is developing in supporting the transition in Iraq, building on the successful EU-US sponsored conference on Iraq. And we will work with the European Parliament to use the tenth anniversary of the Barcelona Process to deepen the EU's partnership with the region, supporting reform efforts.

ECONOMIC REFORM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Better Regulation The Inter-Institutional Agreement on Better Law-Making demonstrated the commitment of the Parliament, Commission and Council to improving the regulatory environment in Europe. We will want to work with the EP and others to implement the Agreement fully. Together with Ireland, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Austria and Finland we developed the six-Presidency Better Regulation initiative, which aims to ensure that policy-making and legislation in the EU is more effective, takes account of European competitiveness and does not impose unnecessary burdens on business or on job creation. During our Presidency we will work with the Commission to implement the agenda set out in its Communication on Better Regulation. We want to see action in three areas. First, improving the policy making process by better consultation and Impact Assessments (which should include measuring the burden on business and testing the impact on the EU's international competitiveness). Second, reducing the volume and complexity of EU legislation. Third, reviewing the impact and outcomes of existing legislation.

The Services Directive We will want to build upon the work done by the Dutch and Luxembourg Presidencies, as well as forthcoming European Parliament proposals on the Services Directive. The proposal aims to open up trade in services across the EU. As services account for around two-thirds of EU GDP, this measure is an opportunity to make one of the biggest improvements to the Single Market since its original creation, potentially generating hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions of euros for the EU economy. Europe has a strong service sector and businesses and consumers throughout the EU would be well-placed to take advantage of increased trading opportunities.

Post-Financial Services Action Plan: implementation and enforcement

We will work to ensure that the remaining dossiers in the Financial Services Action Plan are adopted efficiently. We will take forward the debate on the Commission's recent Green Paper on the post-FSAP agenda, which is in line with the views of the Council and European Parliament. In financial services we will work to deliver the commitments made by the Commission on: the use of better regulation principles in all policymaking; placing a greater emphasis on implementation and enforcement; giving an increased recognition of the need to maintain the competitiveness of the EU financial services sector; using a range of policy responses to single market issues, not just legislation.

Environment and sustainable development

The EU needs growth which does not compromise the quality of life of future generations. Discussions on the review of the EU's sustainable development strategy will start under the UK Presidency. We will make progress on all three dimensions of the strategy – social, environmental and economic – with the aim of producing a balanced and forward-looking strategy. Work on continuing improvement of the environment for all Europeans should include taking forward proposals on air quality standards, with the aim of reducing pollution and improving life expectancy.

The Chemicals Regulation (REACH)

We particularly want to make significant progress in discussions on the Chemicals Regulation (REACH), working closely with the Parliament, to ensure that the Regulation promotes public health, the environment and competitiveness.

EU/US

We will want to add value on the transatlantic agenda, in particular seeking areas for concrete cooperation and action with the US. Strengthening the economic partnership will be a particular priority. We will want to build on the achievements of the EU-US Summit

during the Luxembourg Presidency and demonstrate clear progress in breaking down barriers to trade and investment in priority areas.

SECURITY AND STABILITY

Counter Terrorism It is in the interests of all Member States to work together, and with countries outside the EU, to fight terrorism. We will work towards the commitments made in the Hague Work Programme and the EU Counter Terrorism Action Plan. We aim to make progress on the European Evidence Warrant and EU-wide rules on the retention of telecommunications data, where we will engage in thorough dialogue with the Parliament. We also want to make progress on enhancing the security of the EU's external borders, and work to improve the security of EU travel documents.

Enlargement We will work to deliver the EU's commitment to open accession negotiations with Turkey on 3 October. This will be an important step for the EU – beginning the process which should lead to EU membership for Turkey. We will also prepare for Bulgarian and Romanian entry in January 2007, and be ready to open accession negotiations with Croatia as soon as the conditions have been met.

FUTURE FINANCING

Future financing The UK Presidency will take forward the discussions on future financing, drawing on progress made to date, and with a view to resolving all the elements necessary for an overall agreement as soon as possible. The Presidency will first consult all interested partners on the way forward.

Further information about the UK Presidency can be found on the UK Presidency website at:

www.eu2005.gov.uk

The website will become live on 27 June.