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PROGRAMME

**of the Republic Of Bulgaria for the Presidency
of The Council of the European Union**



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The motto of the Bulgarian Presidency **UNITED WE STAND STRONG**



INTRODUCTION



The European Union (EU) is a project unique in its nature, at the core of which lie peace, stability and prosperity of Europe and the European citizens. Today, Europe and the world are facing serious geopolitical, economic and social challenges – the vision about the future of Europe, migration and security, the decisive phase of Brexit negotiations, climate change, the economic and social development and the digital agenda.

Bulgaria takes over the rotating Presidency at a time, when unity and solidarity of the Member States are of paramount importance for the future development of the EU. The final phase of the EU institutional cycle creates high expectations for the EU Council Presidency for progress on many of the important legislative initiatives.

Appreciating its responsibility as a rotating Presidency, Bulgaria will be an honest broker and will work towards finding common solutions in response to the needs of Europe and the European citizens for more security, stability and solidarity, aiming to establish a Strong, Digital and United Europe through consensus, competitiveness and cohesion.

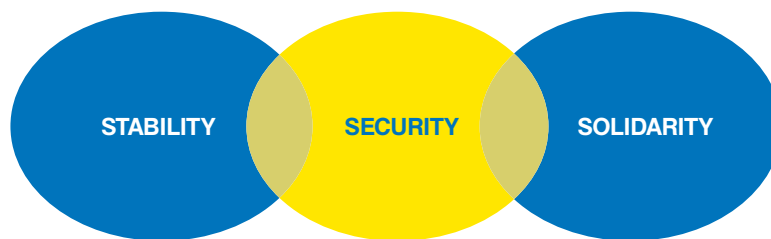
The Presidency will work in a spirit of transparency and in close cooperation with the Member States and all EU institutions in response to the expectations of the European citizens and young people who are the key to the sustainable development of each and every Member State.

The motto of the Bulgarian Presidency “United We Stand Strong” goes back to our country’s statehood and history and, following the Rome Declaration, reflects the idea of a Europe of unity and solidarity.

PRIORITIES OF THE BULGARIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION 2018

During the Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the period 1 January – 30 June 2018, the Republic of Bulgaria will strive in a positive spirit towards **achieving future-oriented and realistic results**, following the principles of **transparency and accountability** and realizing an **“open to citizens” Presidency**.

Europe and the European citizens need



In that respect, through **consensus**, **competitiveness** and **cohesion** the Bulgarian Presidency will aim for a stronger and more stable European Union for consolidating a **strong, digital and united Europe**.



The Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2018 is a historic moment, a privilege, but also a great responsibility. Its main objectives are related to enhancing partnerships at all levels based on an integrated approach and mutual cooperation. Also, we will try to find a balance between the specific priorities of the Member States and the strategic priorities of the European Union to achieve real, visible results in an active dialogue with the citizens on European issues and responding to their needs for greater

security, employment, sustainable growth and a stronger EU presence on the global stage. Acknowledging the important role in formulating and implementing the European agenda of the European Parliament and the national parliaments after the Lisbon Treaty, the Bulgarian Presidency recognises the key role of the Parliamentary dimension for the successful Presidency as a guarantor for the democratic legitimacy of European policies and the representation of the interests of the European citizens.

The Bulgarian Presidency will work on youth and security issues as horizontal priorities, in view of the complex nature of the challenges facing young people and the current security environment.

A specific priority of the Bulgarian Presidency is the European perspective and connectivity of the Western Balkans.

As an EU Member State with an Euro-Atlantic outlook, Bulgaria will focus its efforts on the strategic priorities of the European Union, maintaining good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, working further on the implementation of the EU Strategic Agenda.

**The priorities for the Bulgarian Presidency
of the Council of the European Union (January 1 - June 30, 2018) are:**



The Future of Europe and the Young People – Economic Growth and Social Cohesion

The Bulgarian Presidency will work for improving the wellbeing of all citizens of the European Union through promoting cohesion, which creates the conditions for unity and solidarity.

The Bulgarian Presidency will work towards finding the best solutions not only for the future of the Cohesion Policy, but for the overall cohesion of the European society.

Achieving specific results and **providing European value added** are very important for the European project and its implementation through the EU budget. At the same time, they are characteristic features of the policy of cohesion, which leads to **tangible results for all regions of the EU**. The future of this policy is therefore an important priority for the Bulgarian Presidency.

Continuing the debate on the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) post-2020 is one of the key priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency, in order to support a faster and more effective process of negotiations. We will work towards continuing the targeted EU assistance for **creating sustainable jobs, economic growth and social cohesion by keeping the role of the Cohesion Policy and the Common Agricultural Policy of the EU**. We will also support the efforts to apply and implement the principles of good financial governance and budgetary discipline, as well as for attaining concrete results.

MULTIANNUAL FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK POST-2020

Placing a strong emphasis on the stability of EU finances, the Bulgarian Presidency will launch initiatives to continue the debate on the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

In the context of the debate on growth and competitiveness of the European economy, we will raise the issue of the future use of financial instruments. We will work on the successful implementation of the future financial instruments and the creation of a framework based on lessons learned and aimed at more efficient and flexible governance.

Investing in economic growth and jobs will remain a top priority. In order to ensure their implementation and taking into account the trends of budget constraints and the emerging new challenges, it is crucial to use the full potential of all programmes and instruments. The European Union needs strong and adequately funded community policies with complementing rather than competing instruments.

COHESION POLICY AFTER 2020

The Bulgarian Presidency will strive for an open debate on the future of Cohesion Policy and its role in the implementation of the EU's priorities after 2020, **working to preserve its key role in the EU budget after 2020** as a fundamental policy for long-term investment in growth, employment and balanced territorial development of the Union.

Taking into account the need for **simplification of the legislation and the rules and procedures**, widely identified by Member States, Bulgaria will work to optimise the model of shared management and **effective implementation of the principle of proportionality with a focus on results**.

The Bulgarian Presidency will work on the harmonisation of the rules of the Union's funds and instruments and **finding the right balance between grants and financial instruments, as well as between traditional priorities and new challenges**.

THE FUTURE OF THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY (CAP) – SIMPLIFICATION AND MODERNISATION

In today's environment of globalisation and growing world population, the role of agricultural production and **rural development as important economic, social and political factors** is growing. It is of crucial importance for the future CAP framework beyond 2020 to be defined in a way that will help to improve the sustainability of agricultural holdings and ensure a stable level of farmers' incomes.

Within the discussion on the future CAP, the Bulgarian Presidency intends to put emphasis on **preserving the role of CAP and the instruments of the current CAP structure that have proven their effectiveness**.

Despite Brexit and the resulting negative effect on the EU budget, CAP should **remain a strong and adequately funded community policy** in view of the growing challenges worldwide, related to instability of agricultural markets, demographic changes, food security and limited natural resources.

ECONOMIC AND MONETARY UNION

The Bulgarian Presidency will work on creating optimal conditions for strong and sustainable economic growth in the EU through the initiatives to strengthen the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). The Presidency will promote the discussions presented in the EU strategic documents, including the Five Presidents' Report, the Commission's White Paper and others, aiming at deepening the EMU, including risk reduction in the banking sector as part of the measures to complete the Banking Union, as well as building the Capital Market Union. During our Presidency we will work towards finding an acceptable balance and compromise

on risk reduction in the banking sector, and continue the work on the legislative proposal for the creation of a European Deposit Guarantee Scheme as part of the measures to complete the Banking Union. The Presidency will continue to work on measures for building the Capital Markets Union with a view to strike a balance between bank and non-bank financing, strengthening the European financial system as well as to create more funding opportunities for small and medium-size enterprises.

SUSTAINABLE AND FUTURE-ORIENTED ENVIRONMENT

The Bulgarian Presidency will work towards safeguarding the high standards of environmental protection and the citizen's quality of life by means of sustainable growth and a "green economy" focusing on the transition to the **circular economy and eco-innovative initiatives**, aiming at efficient use of resources and minimising harmful impact on the environment and human health, including through new technologies.

CULTURE AS A STRATEGIC RESOURCE FOR THE BETTER FUTURE OF THE EU

In the current political, social and cultural processes in the EU, the Bulgarian Presidency will focus the efforts on common values and the unifying links between the European citizens. During the Bulgarian Presidency culture will be regarded one of the main drivers for the future development of the EU based on a new vision of its past with an emphasis on young people and digital opportunities.

It is of special significance for Bulgaria that the Presidency will take place during the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

Young people have a central place in the debate on the Future of Europe, as they bring new and innovative ideas, and it is upon them that the future competitiveness of our economies depends on; they are the ones who will live in the renewed European Union.

The Bulgarian Presidency will strive to encourage the pro-active civil and political involvement of young Europeans in building a secure, united and peaceful society by respecting the European values.

The aim will be to keep the level of European investment in education and research, including in relation to **providing access to education and development of skills at any age; encouraging digital, entrepreneurial and creative skills; providing adequate infrastructure for education, training and research.**

A key priority of the Bulgarian Presidency will be the continuation of the work on the Euro-

pean Commission package on “Modernising Education – Youth Initiative” and the progress on the New Skills Agenda for Europe. Emphasis will be placed on the mid-term evaluation of the **Erasmus+ Programme and facilitating the political discussion on its future, in the context of the forthcoming proposal of the European Commission on the new MFF.**

The Bulgarian Presidency supports the **European Solidarity Corps and the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships**, since it is precisely the young people who are the key to securing sustainable development for each country, based on the effective link between education and the labour market, as well as values, such as solidarity, tolerance and cooperation.

European Perspective and Connectivity of the Western Balkans

The European Union has a clear interest in stable, secure and prosperous Western Balkans, where its rules and values are respected. Delivering a **tangible European perspective for the Western Balkans** including a dialogue, based on **fulfilment of the conditions and the principle of own merit**, political will and decisive reforms by these countries, is key not only for the region, but for the European Union as a whole.

The Leaders' Agenda foresees an informal Summit of the Heads of State and Government devoted to the Western Balkans – on 17 May 2018 in Sofia. In February 2018, the European Commission will publish a strategy, announced by the Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker as a “Strategy of the Commission for a successful EU accession of Serbia and Montenegro as frontrunner candidates in the Western Balkans”.

A key priority of the Bulgarian Presidency will be the **EU Enlargement Policy, which continues to be the most effective instrument for guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity in the Western Balkans.** The Bulgarian Presidency's ambition is to be a Balkan Presidency.

The Bulgarian Presidency attaches great importance to deepening **regional cooperation and developing good neighbourly relations.** The topic of the connectivity of the Western Balkans is of particular importance – the so-called **“Connectivity Agenda” (transport, communications, energy, education, digital)** with the understanding that its aim is to improve specifically the links with the EU Single Market.

The step-by-step adoption of the EU Roaming Rules by the Western Balkan countries as well, through gradual reduction of the charges and increasing the broadband internet access opportunities, is an important initiative for digital connectivity.

Security and Stability in a Strong and United Europe

As Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Bulgaria will work on building and implementing effective mechanisms for **increasing the security of EU citizens, strengthening border controls and a more effective management of migration processes**.

The current security environment is characterised by a complex range of inter-related threats – asymmetrical, hybrid, internal and external, as well as risks containing new elements – economic, financial, energy, environmental, societal and legal.

In the overall context of the fight against terrorism, the Bulgarian Presidency will encourage the use of all possibilities for improving the cooperation between law-enforcement and security services, as well as the exchange of information with European agencies.

In-depth discussions are needed on the security checks along the borders and within the Union.

The Bulgarian Presidency will work to restore the normal functioning of the Schengen Area.

As regards measures for enhancing ethnic and religious tolerance and for countering acts of anti-Semitism, the focus will be on the freedom of speech and expression, the freedom of religion and confession, and countering anti-Semitism.

We will work towards improving resilience and maintaining high standards **in the area of cyber security in the EU**, taking into account the need to strengthen the trust of the European citizens and enterprises in the digital space and in the digital technology realm, in view of the **vulnerability to cyber-threats** of the web-based economy and society, especially when **large scale cyber-attacks** are becoming a more and more frequent phenomenon.

MIGRATION

Achieving a sustainable system for managing migration and increasing the effectiveness of the return policy will be a key priority, and to this end we will work on strengthening the dialogue with third countries.

Of paramount importance will be to achieve progress on the reform of the Common European Asylum System based on the principles of **responsibility and true solidarity**, and to continue the discussion on the legislative acts in the framework of that system.

EFFICIENT, RAPID AND FAIR JUSTICE

During the Bulgarian Presidency, the priorities in the area of justice will be focused on providing rapid and efficient justice, including by electronic means, improving the business environment and safeguarding the rights in family matters.

In order to ensure effective prosecution of fraud and other crimes affecting the EU's financial interests, the Bulgarian Presidency will work as a matter of priority for the **institutionalisation and the launch of the work of the European Public Prosecutor's Office**.

The Presidency will also aim to organise intensive discussions on the **preparation of the new EU e-Justice Strategy 2019-2023, as well as on e-evidence**. This topic is closely linked with enhancing the effectiveness of the Judiciary, as well as **improving the judicial cooperation between Member States**.

In the field of family law, the Bulgarian Presidency will work as a matter of priority for the adoption of a revised text of the Regulation in the Jurisdiction, Recognition and Enforcement of Judgements in Matrimonial Matters in the area of parental responsibility and international child abduction ("**Brussels IIa**"), taking into account the fact that the proposal affects a large number of citizens in the Member States and refers to particularly sensitive aspects of their lives.

ENERGY

The Bulgarian Presidency will strive to achieve a stable Energy Union and increase the potential for regional cooperation by promoting the construction of the necessary infrastructure, with a view to ending the isolation of some of the Member States from the European gas and electricity grids.

Ensuring the security of gas supply through diversification of sources and routes, protecting the critical energy infrastructure, as well as measures related to increasing energy efficiency as a contribution to the reduction of energy consumption, are among the key issues the Bulgarian Presidency will work on with a view to finding sustainable solutions.

EU AS A STRONG GLOBAL ACTOR ON THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE

As regards the **EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), including its instruments – the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)**, the main goal will be **consolidating the Union's role as a strong global actor on the international scene**.

Together with the European External Action Service, the Presidency will work towards the full implementation of **all the initiatives ensuing from the EU Global Strategy, deepening EU-NATO cooperation**, as well as enhancing security in the Western Balkans by capacity building of the countries of that region so they can tackle the security challenges autonomously.

The Bulgarian Presidency will play a pro-active role for the practical implementation of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) for reinforcing European security and defence.

The Bulgarian Presidency will continue the work for the adoption of Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council establishing a European Defence Industrial Development Programme.

The aim is to create incentives for the European production of high-tech defence equipment, the cost for which to be covered jointly by the European Defence Fund and EU Member States.

SUSTAINABLE INTEGRATED APPROACH FOR THE DANUBE AND THE BLACK SEA REGIONS

Driven by the understanding that the EU should take full advantage of the potential of the existing macro-regional strategies, the Bulgarian Presidency will work to enhance the visibility of the Danube and the Black Sea regions where appropriate, including by increasing their connectivity on the basis of the potential of the two regions.

Digital Economy and Skills needed for the Future

COMPETITIVENESS

The Bulgarian Presidency will promote an environment of competitiveness, which is important for the economic prosperity of the EU citizens.

We will work on removing the legal barriers to cross-border trade and on making real progress to tackle the existing regulatory barriers that hamper establishment and cross-border trade in services and goods within the EU. The Bulgarian Presidency will encourage **the reduction of unjustified and disproportionate requirements for businesses** in the area of **services** by applying a more sophisticated notification procedure for compliance with European requirements and establishing the relevant instruments for **supporting citizens and businesses in handling the necessary administrative formalities, facilitated access to information and online procedures.**

The Bulgarian Presidency will focus on:

- Accelerating the process of completing **a competitive and fair Digital Single Market; supporting connectivity within the EU; updating the regulatory framework for telecommunications; enhancing the credibility and security of personal data in the digital space and the development of a European data-based economy;**
- Developing **intermodal transportation**, enhancing the competitiveness and sustainability of air transport in the EU;
- Striking a balance and finding compromise solutions in order to achieve positive results on the legislative proposals in the Mobility Package that take into account the national specificities of the transport sector in each Member State;
- Fair and efficient taxation of corporate profits and fight against tax evasion and avoidance

through enhanced administrative cooperation and effective exchange of information between Member States;

- Creating the conditions for making **audio-visual production and Copyright protection** elements of economic growth, innovation, and enhancing the legal protection of authors and rightholders.

As regards the **external dimension of competitiveness**, Bulgaria will work to consolidate international trade as a means to maintain the high standards of living of EU citizens and to continue the Union's commitment for a progressive and ambitious programme in the area of trade and investment, promoting inclusive growth and sustainable development.

DIGITAL SINGLE MARKET

The Bulgarian Presidency will place the emphasis on the **Digital Single Market as a source of growth and competitiveness** in order to achieve a greater share of users of online services and a rapid **penetration of information and communication technologies in all sectors of the economy**.

Tackling the challenges in this area is related to creating a clear and simplified legal environment that allows consumers to fully engage in the Digital Single Market and make effective use of the opportunities of the internet environment regardless of where they are in the EU.

The completion of the Digital Single Market in Europe undoubtedly requires also a big investment in research and innovation, such as for instance, cloud computing and big data, artificial intelligence, maximum use of data and research information. Bulgaria will focus on strategic areas where the potential of digital research infrastructure can be put to the best use, as well as on wide and free access to publications and data, including through the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC), and high-performance computing initiatives, such as EuroHPC.

In order to deepen the integration in the services sector and to simplify the regulatory framework to support businesses, the Presidency will continue the work on the legislative proposals of the Services Package, as well as on the expected new proposal regarding relations between the online platforms and businesses.

The development of a competitive Digital Single Market with a high level of user protection through promoting cross-border e-trade in goods, offering digital content and providing digital services are among the tasks of the Bulgarian Presidency.

At the same time, balanced compromise solutions will be sought on the regulatory framework in the area of telecommunications, taking into account the interests of all stakeholders.

The Bulgarian Presidency will strive to find solutions guaranteeing the protection of citizens' privacy, of personal data and of the confidentiality of communications in a way that makes the development of digital innovation possible.

PROMOTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SOCIAL INNOVATION

The Bulgarian Presidency will work **to promote entrepreneurship based on digital technology and innovation** which has a leading role in the EU's economic and social development. This includes: progress in implementing the **Start-up and Scale-up Initiative**; developing alternative sources of funding and **improving the business environment for small and medium-sized enterprises** in line with the "Think Small First" principle; **incentives for social innovation** in the economy, in education, healthcare, information and communication technologies with a focus on young people, the entrepreneurship ecosystem and the **development of skills and competences for the 21st century**.

During the Bulgarian Presidency we will encourage discussions on capacity building for the next generation researchers and innovators, as well as investing in the skills needed for the development and use of new technologies, systems, platforms and services for big data analysis. In this dialogue, we will take into account as much as possible the need for targeted schemes at regional level, in order to ensure that investments achieve maximum impact and inclusion of peripheral urban areas.

In addition, we will work actively on modernising the European education systems and curricula by promoting the dissemination of **common European values**, social inclusion by means of **formal and informal learning**; consolidation of the role of **teachers** as key actors in the educational process and their role in improving the quality and effectiveness of education; revision of the European Framework of key competences and **wide-ranging introduction of information and communication technologies** at all levels of the education system, promoting basic competences, including mathematics and science as a key factor for improving the quality of the education system.

THE FUTURE OF WORK IN A DIGITAL AND FAIRER EUROPE

The benefits of the **free movement of workers for the smooth functioning of the Single Market** and the development of competitiveness of the European economy are indisputable. European citizens should be able to make the most of the job opportunities within the Single Market.

The Bulgarian Presidency will work for:

- promoting the **early childhood development** concept and investing in early childhood education and care;
- a better environment for the **development of social economy, with emphasis on social innovation**;
- equal opportunities and non-discrimination with a focus on gender equality and the role of **"Women in the Digital World"**;
- fostering full social inclusion for people with disabilities;
- active policies to combat poverty and social exclusion;
- facilitating free movement of workers and the provision of services in the EU by **revising the Regulations on the coordination of social security systems** and **improving the ex-**

- isting rules on Posting of Workers** in the framework of the provision of services;
- recognising the **role of legal migration in the development of the European economy** and regulating the conditions for entry and residence of highly qualified third-country workers (Blue Card Directive);
 - protecting health and improving European citizens' health by providing access **to effective medicines** at affordable prices and promoting a **healthy diet for children**; promoting physical activity; ensuring better health and safety at work.

The Bulgarian Presidency sees the “future of work” in **identifying the right skills for the new jobs and a better planning and interaction of the policies in the area of education, training and employment with emphasis on youth employment and the skills and competences, necessary for the 21st century.**

PRIORITIES OF THE BULGARIAN PRESIDENCY WITHIN THE CONFIGURATIONS OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EU



GENERAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL

The Bulgarian Presidency will support the work of the **European Council** in order to achieve the necessary **balance and consensus** on major topics for the European Union. **The Western Balkans** are a central strategic priority for the Bulgarian Presidency and we will continue to encourage their European perspective, including through enhancing security, stability, democratic foundations and the rule of law. As Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Bulgaria will foster a dynamic, effective and transparent dialogue on the **Multiannual Financial Framework post-2020** as a determining factor for the future development of the Union. The Bulgarian Presidency will strive to facilitate an honest and open political debate on the decisive contribution of the Cohesion Policy to the economic development and competitiveness of the EU, maintaining its key role within the budget of the Union post-2020.

- **The debate on the future of Europe** and the items on the **Leaders' Agenda**, endorsed on 20 October 2017, will be discussed at every meeting of the Heads of State or Government, in order to deliver tangible and valuable results for the everyday lives of Union citizens and to outline a new vision for the future of the European Union.
- The future of the **Western Balkans** lies in the European Union. The Bulgarian Presidency's main goal will be to support **all countries from the region in their efforts to move forward** on their European path, taking into account that this process is based on the principles of individual merit, meeting established criteria and carrying out necessary reforms. The implementation of ambitious reforms will be encouraged and the EU will strive to create a political environment that favours the implementation of strategic goals to build a **stable and prosperous region, upholding European values and rules**. The Bulgarian Presidency will draw up **conclusions of the Council of the EU** based on the Enlargement package to be published in April 2018.
- In March 2018, the Bulgarian Presidency will organise a conference on the main topics of the next Multiannual Financial framework of the EU in order to facilitate a more expedient and efficient process of negotiations. The European Commission is expected to publish its proposal for the next MFF in May 2018 and the Bulgarian Presidency will convene sessions of the Council and its working bodies so that the Commission can present its proposal and an initial exchange of views on this dossier can take place between Member States.
- The Bulgarian Presidency will place emphasis on the **further development of democratic legitimacy at EU level and on enhancing interinstitutional cooperation**. To this end, the Presidency will work hard for the adoption of the revised Regulation on European Political Parties and European political foundations and the new Regulation on the European Citizens' Initiative, as well as to conclude an Inter-Institutional Agreement (IIA)

on the Transparency Register. The Presidency is committed to performing its duties in accordance with the IIA for Better Law-Making.

- The General Affairs Council (Cohesion) will discuss the future of the Cohesion Policy. Achieving more results and European value added are key elements of the European project, and the EU budget is the main tool for this purpose. The measures of the **Cohesion Policy** are related to this, bringing visible results and benefits to all regions of the EU. The Presidency will seek consensus among the Member States as regards the simplification of the Cohesion Policy, the role and the place of financial instruments in the future Cohesion Policy, and the shift of focus of the Cohesion Policy and the European Structural and Investment Funds from compliance and control to performance and results. The implementation of the measures proposed by the Commission to increase the visibility of policies and to improve communication with European citizens will be examined. We plan a high-level conference on Cohesion Policy after 2020 on 8 June 2018.

The Bulgarian Presidency will support proactively the implementation of the conclusions of the European Council (Article 50) of December 2017. The Presidency will perform its functions within the General Affairs Council (Article 50) in an optimal way in order to guarantee that the **Brexit negotiations with the UK** are in line with the guidelines and directives on the negotiation process. The key priority is to safeguard the unity of the remaining 27 Member States.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Bulgaria will actively support the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, chairing the Foreign Affairs Council in all its configurations except “Trade”, attaching great importance to maintaining and enhancing consensus in the framework of the **Common Foreign and Security Policy, including its instrument – the Common Security and Defence Policy**. Bulgaria’s priorities will be focused on the implementation of the **EU Global Strategy, the Western Balkans** and promoting their European perspective, strengthening the **European Neighbourhood Policy** and tackling the challenges of **migration**. Bulgaria also considers the implementation of **Agenda 2030** in line with the **new European Consensus on Development** as a priority.

FOREIGN POLICY

- Bulgaria will support the implementation of the **Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union** under the leadership of the High Representative. The five priority areas of the Global Strategy are equally important for achieving its goals.
- The future of the **Western Balkans** lies in their European destination and the Bulgarian Presidency will work hard to help all countries in the region to achieve progress on the basis of their own merit and progress in implementing the necessary reforms. These reforms will be encouraged and the EU will strive to create the political environment and conditions needed to achieve the strategic goal of developing a stable and prosperous region based on European rules and values. Developing good neighbourly relations and overall regional cooperation are key conditions for enhancing sustainability and consolidating the European perspective of the countries of the Western Balkans. The Bulgarian Presidency will work towards continuing the dialogue and cooperation with Turkey.
- One of the main priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency is for democracy, stability, prosperity and sustainability of the countries in the **European Neighbourhood**. The scope and depth of the ongoing partnership within the **Eastern Partnership** will depend on the ambition and needs of the EU and the partner states, as well as on the speed and quality of the reforms that they implement. Particular attention will be given to current measures for sustainability by supporting projects for connectivity, economic development and trade, contacts between people and overall cooperation in the area of education and research. Work will continue on the implementation of the results achieved at the 5th Eastern Partnership Summit and the approved document “20 Deliverables for 2020”, which is a working instrument for enhancing cooperation between the EU and the part-

ner countries. The multilateral cooperation within the Eastern Partnership will contribute to achieving the deliverables by providing shared ownership and mutual commitment on the part of the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries. As regards the **Southern Neighbourhood**, continuing the EU's efforts in support of long-term stability will be a priority. The Presidency will work to support the High Representative in seeking a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Syria, the resumption of the negotiations in Geneva under the auspices of the UN and easing the situation of vulnerable Syrian citizens in line with the EU Strategy for Syria. The Presidency will support the efforts for reconstruction and reconciliation in Iraq, as well as efforts to find a political solution to the crisis in Libya based on the plan of the UN's special envoy. Work will be carried out in support of the EU's efforts to assist progress in the Middle East peace process towards a sustainable solution based on the two-state principle.

- The Bulgarian Presidency will work towards increasing the visibility of the **Danube and the Black Sea region** including through improving their connectivity by making full use of the potential and the toolkit of the EU's macro-regional strategies. Important priorities are strengthening security and improving connectivity in terms of transport, communication and digital infrastructure.
- Maintaining the constructive commitment of the EU and strengthening its relations with key strategic allies and transatlantic partners – **USA and Canada** - remains essential. The defence of our common interests in the area of security, counter-terrorism and in trade and economic affairs can best be achieved by working together.
- The Presidency will support the activities of the High Representative in strengthening ties with key partners in **Asia and the Pacific**, including through widening the scope of the FTA network and partnership and cooperation agreements (PCAs), as well as addressing common challenges related to security, reconstruction and development.
- One of the priorities of the work on the **external aspects of migration** is the Partnership Framework and its geographically balanced implementation. Both the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes will be monitored. The full implementation of the EU-Turkey statement of 18 March 2016 will be supported. Particular attention will be given to strengthening cooperation on migration issues with key countries of origin and transit in Asia. Guided by the belief that **significant efforts are needed on all five pillars of the Valetta Joint Action Plan**, the Presidency will give the necessary attention to the forthcoming review of its implementation. We recognise the importance of encouraging legal pathways to access the EU and addressing the root causes of migration in the long term, but at the same time we will strive to enhance efforts to strengthen the EU's external borders and increase the effective return of illegal immigrants as a key element of the migration management policy.
- The Bulgarian Presidency will continue work to support the implementation of the conclusions of the Council (Foreign Affairs) on **counter-terrorism** of 19 June 2017. We believe that the EU should try to be more proactive and less reactive with regard to terrorist

threats. We attach great importance to youth-related initiatives. It is of key importance to focus on counter-terrorism within the framework of the EU's immediate neighbourhood, including the Western Balkans region and Turkey.

DEFENCE

- The Bulgarian Presidency will continue to support the efforts of the High Representative ensuing from the Implementation Plan in the area of **security and defence** and from the conclusions of the Council of November 2016, with a greater focus on the development of civilian capabilities, capabilities in support of security and development, as well as other ongoing initiatives. The efforts to enhance EU-NATO cooperation in the areas outlined in the Joint Declaration of 2016 will provide tangible value added for Europe's security as regards counter-terrorism, situational awareness and capacity building of partner countries. We will continue to work actively in order to achieve maximum progress on the proposal on establishing a European Defence Industrial Development Programme. The Presidency will support the efforts of the Member States and the institutions to develop a well-functioning, inclusive and ambitious Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO).

DEVELOPMENT

- A key priority of the Bulgarian Presidency will be the implementation of **Agenda 2030** in line with **the new European Consensus on Development**. The main goal will be the integration of the sustainable development goals in the respective EU policies and the achievement of realistic goals based on transparency, accountability and dialogue with the citizens.
- **The link between migration and development** will continue to be a priority of the Presidency. We will continue work on the goals of the Consensus in the area of migration, including the root causes of migration.
- Work will continue on renewing the partnerships with **African, Caribbean and Pacific** countries, with the aim of raising the cooperation to a higher level within the changing international environment. The Cotonou Agreement will expire in 2020 and the Bulgarian Presidency is committed to work on a common position of the Council on the draft new EU negotiation mandate.
- We will continue the work of the previous Presidency on the **Digitalisation for Development (D4D) dossier**.
- The Bulgarian Presidency attaches great importance to **building resilience against crises** as a key element of the EU Global Strategy. We will work towards the future operationalisation of the **Humanitarian-Development Nexus**, particularly for the EU's neighbouring countries.

- The Bulgarian Presidency will focus on a coordinated implementation of the European consensus on humanitarian aid and monitoring, and finding an effective collective response to emerging, current and ongoing crises with **special emphasis on the forgotten crises**. Following the **Global Humanitarian Summit**, the Bulgarian Presidency will encourage the efficient use of humanitarian aid and innovative solutions.

TRADE

- We will work towards consolidating the Multilateral Trading System and strengthening trust in the World Trade Organisation. The Presidency will support the reform of the International System for Settlement of Investment Disputes and the negotiations on the Multilateral Investment Court.
- We will continue the efforts of the EU to sign Free Trade Agreements with priority third countries and regions. Achieving ambitious, balanced and mutually beneficial agreements is a means to maintaining the EU citizens' high standards of living. The Presidency will strive to provide equal conditions for economic operators focusing on compatibility with the WTO rules for eliminating unfair trade practices and market distortions.
- We will work to achieve maximum progress on key dossiers in this area, such as **anti-dumping and countervailing measures for non-EU countries, screening of foreign direct investments to the EU**, access of third country goods and services to the internal **public procurement** market of the EU, as well as access of EU goods and services to the public procurement markets of third countries.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Establishing a Financial Union as part of the completion of the Economic and Monetary Union of the EU is one of the key priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency. The area of financial services and financial markets has proven to be one of the key areas where the EU focuses its efforts in order to support the real economy, achieve economic growth, improve competitiveness in the EU and create new jobs. The Bulgarian Presidency will direct its efforts towards the **completion of the Banking Union** with a focus on **reducing the risks in the banking sector** and on **developing a Capital Market Union**.

Another key priority of the Bulgarian Presidency will be promoting investment, securing sustainable economic growth and guaranteeing fair competition in the Single Market through fair and efficient taxation of corporate profits generated in the EU, as well as removing the possibilities for aggressive tax planning and enhancing transparency in the field of taxation.

- Strong emphasis will be placed on **risk reduction in the banking sector and the completion of the Banking Union**. The Bulgarian Presidency will strive to find an acceptable balance and compromise on the legislative package for risk reduction in the banking sector, and make progress on the proposal for the establishment of a **European Deposit Guarantee Scheme**. We will start the work on the other measures for completing the Banking Union, outlined in the Communication from the European Commission of 11 October 2017.
- The Bulgarian Presidency will continue working on the development of the **Capital Market Union**, the discussion of the legislative proposals on clearing obligations and derivative reporting, on the establishment of a framework for recovery and resolution of central counterparties and supervisory oversight, as well as on requirements vis-a-vis third-country CCPs.
- Bulgaria will continue the work on the legislative proposal for the creation of a Pan-European pension product with a view to making maximum progress on the dossier.
- Bulgaria will start substantive discussions on the review of the European System of Financial Supervision and on the proposal to introduce a new prudential regime for investment firms.
- The Bulgarian Presidency will encourage the debate on **deepening of the Economic and Monetary Union**, including in relation to the European Commission's package of proposals of 6 December 2017. Bulgaria will support open and transparent discussions on the issues related to the structure of the Economic and Monetary Union. The Presidency will streamline the process of work in accordance with the guidelines from

the Euro Summit on 14 and 15 December 2017. The Bulgarian Presidency will strive to secure a smooth implementation of the 2018 Cycle for economic coordination– the **European Semester**. The Council will adopt conclusions on the Annual Growth Survey and on the Alert Mechanism Report, and the Recommendation for the Eurozone. The Bulgarian Presidency will organise a thematic debate between the Ministers of Finance in March with a focus on the implementation of the Recommendations for 2017. The process will end in June when the Council and the European Council will approve the package of Country Specific Recommendations for 2018-2019, thereby fostering the implementation of structural reforms and investments in the EU.

- In the area of **direct taxation**, the Bulgarian Presidency will strive to achieve a general approach on the proposal on the Administrative Cooperation Directive regarding automatic exchange of information linked with the reportable cross-border arrangements in the area of taxation, as well as to make progress on the draft Directive on a common corporate tax base. Giving priority to the topic of taxation of the digital economy, the Bulgarian Presidency will focus its efforts on making significant progress at technical level on the upcoming EC's proposal in this area, which is expected in early 2018, with a view to gathering political support.
- As regards **indirect taxation**, the Bulgarian Presidency will make efforts to achieve significant progress on the first step of the introduction of the definitive Value Added Tax (VAT) system as well as on the proposal on enhancing administrative cooperation in order to fight VAT fraud. In support of the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), we will start work and aim for progress at technical level on the Commission proposal for small and medium-sized enterprises.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS COUNCIL

During its Presidency of the Council, the Republic of Bulgaria will work to develop and implement **efficient mechanisms for improving the security of EU citizens, strengthening border controls** and **managing more effectively the migration processes**; we will continue work on the **reform of the Common European Asylum System**, based on the principles of shared responsibility and true solidarity; we will try to bring to the fore the fight against terrorism and organised crime through better cooperation and exchange of information and data between the competent authorities of the Member States and the adoption of a new legal framework for the functioning of the Schengen Information System.

The priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency in the area of justice will be focused on providing **efficient justice**, including by **electronic means, guaranteeing family rights and improving the business environment**. In this way, access to justice will be improved and the principle of mutual trust in the judicial systems of the Member States will be consolidated. We believe that it is in the interest of the European Union for the European Public Prosecutor's Office to become operational as soon as possible, so as to allow more effective investigation of infringements related to the European budget and European tax payers' money.

HOME AFFAIRS

- The Bulgarian Presidency will apply a holistic approach regarding **migration management**. We will work for a close cooperation and a pragmatic dialogue with third countries of origin and transit. The **return policy** is essential and all possible instruments will be used to improve cooperation in the area of readmission.
- As part of the efforts to improve the management of migration processes through improving the channels for legal migration, the Presidency will strive to achieve progress on the **Blue Card Directive**.
- With respect to the Reform of the **Common European Asylum System**, the Bulgarian Presidency will aim to make maximum progress by finalising the work on the legislative dossiers that are at trilogue stage with the European Parliament, and to reach agreement in the Council on the remaining dossiers in order to start negotiations with the European Parliament.
- We will work towards the modernisation of the EU's visa policy. We will aim to reach agreement in the Council on the proposal to amend **the Visa Code**.
- In the area of internal security, we will focus our efforts on the effective implementation of the revised **EU Internal Security Strategy** and its three main pillars: fight against organised crime, terrorism and cybercrime. During the Bulgarian Presidency, the new

EU policy cycle for organised and serious international crime 2018-2021 will be launched. We will focus on ensuring effective monitoring and improving the added value of this key mechanism to fight the main threats to the security of EU citizens.

- Achieving **interoperability of information systems and databases** is a key priority of the Bulgarian Presidency. The optimum use of the information available will provide a response to a number of today's challenges regarding migratory pressures, terrorist threats, organised crime and cyber-attacks. In this respect, the Bulgarian Presidency will work actively to create a **new architecture for the exchange of information at EU level** and for reaching agreement within the Council on the new interoperability Regulation.
- In the context of interoperability, finalising the negotiations with the European Parliament on **the legislative package for reforming the Schengen Information System** will be of key importance to the Bulgarian Presidency.
- We will work further to achieve political agreement with the European Parliament on the **extension of the mandate of the European agency for managing large scale information systems** (eu-LISA).
- In the field of counterterrorism, special emphasis will be placed on the efficient implementation of the **Passenger Name Record (PNR) Directive**, the prevention of radicalisation and countering the phenomenon of foreign fighters.
- Effective external border controls are of paramount importance both in the context of fighting illegal migration as well as in the prevention terrorist attacks. The Bulgarian Presidency will work to conclude the negotiations with the European Parliament on the Regulation establishing a **European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS)**. We will monitor the process of **implementation of the newly established Entry/Exit System**.
- Restoring the normal functioning of the Schengen area is among the priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency and we will work to achieve agreement in the Council on the amendments to the **Schengen Borders Code** thereby adapting the Schengen legal framework to new challenges in the area of security.
- We will work on enhancing cooperation with the countries of the **Western Balkans** in fighting serious and organised crime, terrorism and border control.

JUSTICE

- As one of the initiators of the establishment of the **European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO)** the Bulgarian Presidency will consider a priority the institutionalisation and operationalisation of EPPO and the development of relations with partner institutions and services, including Eurojust, Europol, OLAF, third countries and international organisations.

- The Bulgarian Presidency will strive to ensure that successful trilogues are held on the draft legislative acts in the area of **criminal justice, the fight against money laundering, mutual recognition of freezing and confiscation orders, exchange of information on criminal records of third country nationals and the Eurojust Regulation**.
- We will work actively to reach a general approach on the proposal in the area of **fighting fraud and counterfeiting of non-cash means of payment**.
- In order to give priority to the topic of **e-justice**, we will launch a structured debate on the upcoming proposal of the Commission regarding cross-border access to e-evidence.
- Special attention will be given to the development and maintenance of the **E-Codex platform** as a common mechanism for standardised protected cross-border exchange of information between Member States in court proceedings.
- We will work to bring the positions of Member States closer to solve the key issues in the the revised text of the Regulation in the Jurisdiction, Recognition and Enforcement of Judgements in Matrimonial Matters in the area of parental responsibility and international child abduction ("**Brussels IIa**"). As regards contracts **for the supply of digital content** the Bulgarian Presidency is committed to take forward actively the trilogues with the European Commission and the European Parliament. Work will also continue at expert level on the amended Proposal concerning contracts for online sale of goods.
- Bulgaria will work towards the conclusion of the process of EU accession to the Istanbul convention.

EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL POLICY, HEALTH AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS COUNCIL

The Bulgarian Presidency will work to **build on the results of the debate on the future of work** and to make further progress in finding solutions for productive employment and sustainable and balanced economic growth. We will work actively to make **free movement of workers and provision of services in the EU easier**, as well as encouraging the implementation of the **early childhood development concept** and for solving the problems encountered by **people with disabilities**.

In the area of employment and social policy, special attention will be given to the changing realities in European societies - negative demographic trends, the impact of technology on the labour market and the negative effects of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. It is necessary to recognise new and innovative approaches in employment policy and to focus on **youth and a better link between education, skills and labour market needs**.

In the area of healthcare the topic of a **healthy diet for children**, as a key health determinant and a prerequisite for a healthy and active European population will be of paramount importance. We will organise discussions on the need for proven effectiveness and affordability of medicines.

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY

- We will focus our efforts on successful negotiations with the European Parliament on the directive for **Posting of Workers** in the framework of the provision of services, and on the **European Accessibility Act** and the discussion for modernising EU law in the area of the **coordination of social security systems**.
- We will work towards creating a better environment in which to **develop social economy and social entrepreneurship** as a way of **providing better employment opportunities to vulnerable groups on the labour market**.
- Attention will be given to **gender equality and the role of “Women in the Digital World”**. We will strive to achieve positive results on the **Directive of the European Parliament and the Council on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers**.
- A high-level international conference will be organised on the topic “The Future of Work”, based on which we will put forward Council conclusions formulating the results of the debate on the **demographic challenges and the future of work, developing practical knowledge and skills from an early age, the right skills for the new jobs, new forms of organising work and job security**.
- Among our priorities will also be the negotiations on the Directive regarding **protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens or mutagens at work**.

- We will work actively on the adoption of the proposal for a **Council Recommendation for a European Framework of Quality and Effective Apprenticeships**.
- During the Bulgarian Presidency we will foster the debate on the future of the European Social Fund and the programmes in support of Social Europe. We will work on the implementation of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

HEALTHCARE

- In the area of healthcare, we will aim to conclude the negotiations on the proposal for amendment of the **Regulation laying down Community procedures for the authorisation and supervision of medicinal products for human and veterinary use and establishing a European Medicines Agency**.
- We will propose for adoption **Council Conclusions on healthy diet for children, a key priority of the Presidency**.
- We will promote an active debate on the topic of medicinal products, in order to find solutions to the problems related to the shortage of medicinal products for economic reasons, parallel exports and the need to provide **medicines that are proven to be effective and at affordable prices**.

COMPETITIVENESS COUNCIL

The Bulgarian Presidency will continue efforts to formulate common long and short term goals for the development of the European industry. The **Common Industrial Policy (CIP)** should achieve synergy between the instruments of the EU, by aiming to ensure sustainable economic growth, employment, access to funding and by boosting innovation amongst enterprises in the EU. Europe has great potential to develop the skills and qualifications of the workforce that are necessary to make the industry more competitive. To ensure the development of the CIP, it is of paramount importance to clearly understand existing value chains and the significant role played by SMEs within them. The appropriate strategic framework will create the conditions for the development of industrial enterprises by bringing together policies and financial instruments focused on innovation for job creation, improving qualifications and more flexible EU policies in line with global challenges. The Bulgarian Presidency will work to speed up the process of completing the Digital Single Market for the purposes of increasing the competitiveness of the European economy, promoting economic growth and expanding user opportunities for effective use of the internet. In this respect, our efforts will be focused on achieving maximum progress on all dossiers related to the Digital Single Market Strategy.

- The Bulgarian Presidency will place **emphasis on industrial policy** and will continue the work of the Estonian Presidency by stepping up progress on the Communication from the European Commission on 'Investing in a smart, innovative and sustainable industry'. We will work to formulate common long and short term goals for the development of European industry and for adopting a **Strategy for a Common Industrial Policy of the EU**. The Common Industrial Policy should cover all aspects of EU industry. Mid and long term objectives have to be in conformity with the main factors affecting industrial development: the global challenges and opportunities that the Single Market and digital technologies offer. We will propose Council conclusions on this topic for adoption at the March Competitiveness Council. The Bulgarian Presidency will work constructively with a view to making significant progress on two legislative proposals, which are of key importance to the **Digital Single Market strategy**: the Directive for Copyright in the Digital Single Market and the Regulation on Copyright in online transmission and retransmission of TV and radio.
- The Bulgarian Presidency will start working at expert level on the **package in the area of company law** as soon as it is announced by the European Commission. The goal is facilitate the use of digital solutions throughout a company's lifecycle, simplify cross-border mergers, etc.
- The Presidency will work to grant more possibilities for the **competition authorities** in the

Member States in order to enable them to be more effective in relation to enforcement matters and to guarantee the proper functioning of the internal market.

- In the area of **technical harmonisation**, based on progress made, we will continue working on the proposal establishing rules for placing on the market CE-marked fertiliser products. We will start with intensive and constructive debates on the Goods Package and on the amendment of the General Safety Regulation for Vehicles in order to deliver tangible results and achieve as much progress as possible.
- The Bulgarian Presidency will work actively to make progress on the dossiers in the **Services package**. Maximum progress will be sought in the trilogues on the proposal for a **Regulation on a Single Digital Portal**.
- In the **Research and Innovation** sector, the Bulgarian Presidency will propose for adoption Council Conclusions on the optimisation of knowledge transfer and acceleration of research results, **including broader access to research results** for industry and society throughout the EU regarding the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor – ITER, and Conclusions on the roadmap for governance and funding for the European Open Science Cloud. We will work on extending the term of the Regulation on Euratom Programme for research and training of the European Atomic Energy Community (2014-2018) in addition to the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation “Horizon 2020” until 31 December 2020. We will start work on the Proposal for a Regulation on the framework for cooperation in high performance computing (EuroHPC).
- In the light of the discussions regarding the next MFF and the 9th Research and Innovation Framework Programme, together with the study of the possibilities for promoting public-private partnerships, we will organise a European conference “Food 2030” in Plovdiv in June to provide a platform for discussion of the role of science and innovation for the future of food, healthy eating and the use of future food resources.
- In the area of the **Customs Union** the Bulgarian Presidency will focus its efforts on the two main legislative dossiers related to the controls on cash entering or leaving the Union, and the dossier on the import of cultural goods. At the high-level meeting of the Directors-General of Customs Administrations in Bulgaria, we will organise a discussion on the exchange of customs information with third countries and mark the 50th Anniversary of the EU Customs Union.

TRANSPORT, TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND ENERGY COUNCIL

During the Bulgarian Presidency, we will work to achieve positive results on the **legislative proposals of the Mobility Package** through striking a balance between the interests of the Member States and finding compromise solutions. Another focus area will be on deepening **cooperation processes in the Western Balkans region**, where one of the main objectives is developing and connecting transport infrastructure as a **driving force for growth and job creation**.

Bulgaria is part of the Presidency Trio with the ambitious goal of playing an active part in concluding the work on the initiatives of the **Digital Single Market Strategy**. The Bulgarian Presidency's main task will be to oversee the successful continuation and closure of the negotiation process towards the reform of the **regulatory framework for electronic communication**. In the area of digital connectivity, the Bulgarian Presidency will create possibilities to speed up the integration of the Western Balkans in the EU digital policies.

In the area of energy, the Bulgarian Presidency will pursue efforts towards achieving a stable **European Energy Union** and positive results on the current priority items on the agenda of the Council of the European Union, including on the initiatives presented from the "Clean Energy for all Europeans" package of legislative and non-legislative proposals. We will work on developing the **inter-grid connectivity of the Western Balkans**, in order to guarantee the **security of the region's energy supply**.

TRANSPORT

- We will work intensively on the legislative proposals of the Mobility Package **by striking a balance between the interests of the Member States and finding compromise solutions, taking into account the specificities** of the transport sector in each Member State from the standpoint of its social and economic impact. The proper functioning of the Single Market is a condition for **economic progress and social cohesion**. Some of the priority dossiers on which our efforts will be focused are: the Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 1071/2009 regarding the conditions to be complied with to pursue the occupation of road transport operator and Regulation (EC) No 1072/2009 on common rules for access to the **international road haulage market**, with a view to adapting them to the developments in the sector, the Directive regarding enforcement requirements and laying down **specific rules for posting drivers in the road transport sector**, the proposal for a Regulation regarding the **minimum requirements for maximum daily and weekly driving times, minimum breaks and daily and weekly rest periods**, and the Regulation regarding **determining location with tachographs**.

- The negotiations on the proposal for a Regulation on **safeguarding competition in air transport** will also be a priority.
- **A High-Level Ministerial Meeting** on “Multimodal Transport in Europe” will be organised in Bulgaria jointly with the European Commission.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

- The Bulgarian Presidency will prioritise the **Digital Single Market** as a source of growth and competitiveness. We will continue to seek balanced and compromise solutions on all dossiers relating to the regulatory framework in the area of telecommunications, taking into account the interests of all stakeholders. Such dossiers include the Directive establishing the European Electronic Communications Code and the proposal for a Regulation establishing the Body European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC).
- Our efforts will be focused on finding solutions, guaranteeing the protection of privacy, **personal data and the confidentiality of messages** with a view to encouraging the development of digital innovation.
- On the proposal for a Regulation on the free movement of non-personal data, our efforts will be aligned with the goals stated in the conclusions of the European Council of October 2017. The aim is to remove all unreasonable barriers which could impede the free movement of non-personal data and the functioning of the European economy. We will work to create a **clear and simplified legal environment** that allows consumers to participate fully in the Digital Single Market and make effective use of the opportunities of online communication.
- We will support measures aimed at improving resilience and achieving high standards of cyber-security in the EU, taking into account the **need to strengthen the trust of European citizens and enterprises in the digital space and in the world of digital technology** as a result of the vulnerability to cyber-threats of the web-based economy and society, particularly at a time when large-scale cyber-attacks are becoming an increasingly frequent phenomenon.
- During the Bulgarian Presidency, we will work towards the successful completion of the negotiations on the **Directive establishing the European Electronic Communications Code** and on the proposal for **Regulation on BEREC**. Intensive discussions are planned on the **Cyber-Security Act**, so that maximum progress can be made in the negotiations on the dossier during the six months of our Presidency.
- A **Digital Assembly** will take place within the framework of the Presidency, which will be organised jointly with the European Commission.

ENERGY

- The Bulgarian Presidency is committed to helping to ensure progress in the discussions on the proposals from the “Clean Energy for all Europeans” package by striking a **balance between the interests of the Member States and compromise solutions based on broad consensus**. The balanced compromise proposals should take into account the

specific national circumstances of the energy sector in each Member State from the standpoint of its socio-economic impact. Higher levels of cooperation undoubtedly contribute to the further integration of the EU energy market.

- **The diversification of sources and routes and the construction of the “Balkan” European gas hub** will be among the Bulgarian government’s most important priorities during the Bulgarian Presidency.
- The **“energy efficiency comes first”** principle is a key element of the Energy Union, and is one of the most effective ways of achieving a low-carbon economy and of creating opportunities for economic growth, job creation and investment. We will work towards the successful adoption of the proposal to amend Directive 2010/31/EU regarding the **energy performance of buildings**, and we will start trilogues on the Proposal to amend **Directive 2012/27/EU on energy efficiency**.
- As regards the Proposal for a Regulation on the governance of the Energy Union, the Bulgarian Presidency supports the European Commission’s objective of **reducing the administrative burden** and its efforts towards increasing transparency and encouraging cooperation between countries, and considers the continuation of the efforts and discussions to be appropriate for striking a balance between the security and reliability of the reporting system and the need for flexibility to enable Member States to achieve their national goals. In view of the links between the Regulation and the Directives on energy efficiency and renewable sources of energy, Bulgaria will support the current approach taken in the negotiations to review these acts in parallel.
- As regards the proposed **electricity market model**, it should be noted that the integration of renewable sources of energy will lead to a radical restructuring of the energy systems and energy mix of the Member States. When we reach a general approach on the proposal for a **Regulation on risk-preparedness in the electricity sector** and a general approach on the proposal for a **Directive of the European Parliament and the Council on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources**, as well as on the other three dossiers related to the electricity market model from the **“Clean Energy for All Europeans”** package, our efforts will be focused on launching the trilogues, and subsequently on making as much progress as possible in the negotiations with the European Parliament.
- The Bulgarian Presidency will continue to work on the proposal for a Directive on the common rules for the internal market in natural gas, taking into account the results achieved during the Estonian Presidency.
- We plan to organise a **Second Investors Round Table – Balkan Gas Hub**. The meeting will be devoted to the challenges facing gas interconnections and supplies in South-Eastern Europe. Topics related to important infrastructure projects will be discussed with a view to developing the necessary infrastructure and improving the security of energy supplies. We also plan an **Annual High-Level Meeting on Central and South-Eastern Europe Gas Connectivity**.

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES COUNCIL

The modernisation and simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy after 2020 and the budget for agriculture in the next Multiannual Financial Framework are the main priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency in the area of agriculture, where discussions will be based on the Communication of the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – “The Future of Food and Farming”. Attention will be given to the veterinary and phytosanitary area, fisheries and forestry.

AGRICULTURE

- **The modernisation and simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy after 2020 and the budget for agriculture** in the next Multiannual Financial Framework are the main priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency in the area of agriculture. We intend to organise focused debates in the Council on the basis of the Communication of the Commission regarding the future of the CAP. An exchange of views between the Ministers and the Commissioner should contribute to a better understanding of the main concerns and objectives of the Member States at a time when the Commission is drafting the legislative proposals. The Bulgarian Presidency’s goal is to assist and provide guidance for the Commission in drafting the legislative proposals. The topic will be discussed at the informal meeting of Ministers of Agriculture in Sofia in June 2018.
- The Bulgarian Presidency will continue to closely follow the **situation of agricultural markets**, particularly in sensitive sectors such as milk and dairy products, beef, pork and chicken, and fruit and vegetables. Attention will be given to price development and production levels in the sugar sector following the abolition of the quota regime. Depending on market developments, the Presidency may invite the Commission to present current information on these issues on a regular basis at the sessions of the Special Committee on Agriculture and of the Council.
- The topic of **unfair trade practices** is of paramount importance. A legislative proposal by the Commission is expected to be submitted in the first quarter of 2018. The Bulgarian Presidency will work towards ensuring progress is made on the examination of this proposal within the Council.
- Based on the work of the Estonian Presidency, the Bulgarian Presidency will attempt to finalise the Council’s initial position on the proposal for a **Regulation on Spirit Drinks**, with a view to proceeding to successful trilogue negotiations with the European Parliament.
- As regards the **forestry sector**, the Bulgarian Presidency expects to prepare the EU’s participation in the 13th Session of the UN Forestry Forum (UNFF) through the adoption

of Council conclusions. The Presidency will continue to consult on ways of renewing the negotiations on a legally binding agreement on forests. The Presidency will ensure that regular briefings to the Council on Agriculture and Fisheries by the Commission take place on the state of the **bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations**, and Member States will have the opportunity to express their views.

- In the veterinary sector, the Bulgarian Presidency will focus on **sustainable animal health management**. In this context, special attention will be given to the **role of wild animals in disease management**, through discussion of issues including observation, control, economic impact, hunting practices, regional cooperation and strategies with the aim of achieving a holistic and integrated approach to improving animal health management in the EU. In March 2018, the Presidency will organise a workshop in Sofia on the topic “The role of wildlife in the context of animal health”.
- The topic of animal welfare, and more specifically **animal welfare during transport**, will be another priority of the Bulgarian Presidency. Discussions on the harmonised implementation of the current legislation will be an important part of the Bulgarian programme. A conference on this topic will be held prior to the meeting of the chief veterinary officers in Bulgaria in April 2018.
- The Bulgarian Presidency will also continue the efforts of the preceding Presidencies on the proposal for a Regulation regarding **veterinary medicinal products and medicated feeds** with a view to making as much progress as possible during deliberations within the Council and in the interinstitutional negotiations.
- In the area of **plant health**, the Presidency will continue to work on the issues of readiness for emergency response and capacity-building of the competent national authorities in the context of recent EU legislation on plant health and official controls.

FISHERIES

- As regards **fisheries policy**, the Bulgarian Presidency will work on the multiannual management plans that are expected to be presented by the Commission in the coming months, namely on Western Atlantic and the Western Mediterranean waters, as well as those that have yet to be concluded and are still being discussed in the Council and the European Parliament (possibly those concerning the North Sea and the Adriatic Sea).
- As regards the trilogues with the European Parliament, our efforts will mainly be focused on the proposal for technical measures and the proposal for a Regulation laying down management, conservation and control measures, applicable in the Convention Area of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO).
- In addition to the above, we are expecting to hold a first exchange of views on the proposal to amend the Regulation on the control and timely adoption of the amendments to the Council Regulation on total allowable catches (TACs) and quotas.
- The external dimension of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) remains an important priority in our programme, a significant part of which will be devoted to the issues regarding the EU’s participation in sustainable fisheries partnership agreements and regional fisheries management organisations.

ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL

The Bulgarian Presidency will strive to put the emphasis on the transition towards the circular economy by ensuring the efficient use of resources and reducing harmful environmental impact with a view to achieving sustainable growth across the EU as a whole. We will work actively towards creating a favourable environment and conditions for the application of eco-innovative solutions. The main priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency in the area of environmental policy will be the **circular economy and eco-innovation**. **The improvement of air quality and better regulation** will also be among our focus areas.

- The Bulgarian Presidency will continue the work on the current initiatives under the Circular Economy Package, aiming for their conclusion. With the adoption of the Waste legislative package, clear long-term goals will be set to **boost recycling, reduce land-filling and improve waste management**.
- The Bulgarian Presidency will start discussions on the Circular Economy Mini-Package. In view of the importance of the initiatives, as part of the Mini-Package the Presidency is also planning to hold a political discussion on the Strategy on Plastics and on the topic of the interface between chemicals, products and waste at the Environment Council of March 2018.
- Linked to these initiatives is the evaluation of the implementation of the **Regulation on Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH) and the regulatory fitness test of chemical legislation (excluding REACH)**, the results of which will be addressed during the Bulgarian Presidency.
- Our efforts will be focused on promoting the use of various mechanisms, including **innovative solutions**, in order to improve air quality and protect the health of European citizens and the environment. In that regard, we plan to organise the 21st European Forum on Eco-Innovation jointly with the European Commission in February 2018, and to initiate an exchange of views between the Ministers within the Informal Meeting of Environment Ministers in April 2018.
- **Better regulation** contributes to a more effective, more efficient implementation of environmental legislation, including by reducing the administrative burden and simplifying regulatory regimes and coordination between sectoral legislation. We plan a debate on this topic at the Informal Meeting of Environment Ministers in April 2018. The issue of better regulation will also be addressed in the context of greening of the European Semester during the Environment Council in March 2018.
- The Bulgarian Presidency will work proactively towards the implementation of the provisions of the Paris Climate Agreement. In the context of the forthcoming **Conference of**

the countries (COP24) within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2018, a dialogue will take place among the parties with the aim of reviewing the common efforts towards progress in the implementation of the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement. The European Union will retain its leading and decisive role in the implementation of the Agreement. Our preparatory work and technical negotiations in 2018 will aim at to support the achievement of the ambitions for **COP24**.

- The Bulgarian Presidency will work towards achieving a maximum level of progress towards reaching a political agreement in the negotiations with the EP on the **Proposal for a Regulation on the monitoring and reporting of CO2 emissions from and fuel consumption of new heavy-duty vehicles**. This Regulation is also a necessary step in the implementation of the legislation on **HGVs CO2 emissions standards**, deliberations on which will start at Council working group level.
- During the Bulgarian Presidency, we will examine the **revision of the Regulation setting CO2 emission standards for new passenger cars and vans** at Council working group level. In view of the importance of the proposal for the automotive industry and all European citizens, a debate is planned at ministerial level during the Environment Council in June 2018, in order to establish a political direction for the process and a vision for the decarbonisation of the sector.

EDUCATION, YOUTH, CULTURE AND SPORT COUNCIL

The leading priority of the Bulgarian Presidency in the education sector is the **preparation of the next generation of the EU Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport (Erasmus+)**. We will work towards ensuring that European education programmes, measures and initiatives receive support in the future negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework, including the Erasmus+ Programme – an established instrument for improving the quality of education and training in the EU, which promotes mobility and active citizens' participation. The goal will be to safeguard the level of European investment in education, including with a view to **providing access to education and skills development at any age** and promoting digital, entrepreneurial and creative skills. We will work actively on raising political and social awareness about the **need for more investment in education and cross-sectoral cooperation, as well as public-private partnerships**.

In the area of youth, the Bulgarian Presidency will work towards promoting **youth development** and providing systematic, complete and full-fledged **youth involvement in peace development and conflict prevention**, which are the foundations of democracy.

In the area of culture, the key topic will be **cultural heritage**. It is of particular importance to us to focus the attention of European citizens and young people on cultural heritage, encouraging their pro-active involvement in the process of its socialisation, protection and promotion. At the same time, the focus will be placed on the creation of quality contemporary European content, which will be the cultural heritage for the forthcoming generations.

The European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 will be an important instrument in these processes.

In the **audio-visual area**, efforts will continue towards presenting a legislative framework that reflects the current changes in the sector while at the same time serving the needs of future consumers, authors and distributors of European cultural content, ensuring protection, equal treatment and legal certainty.

In the sport sector, the Bulgarian Presidency will work towards promoting **European values through sport**, fighting against the use of doping in sport, and establishing the concept of "sport for all" as means of integration and a bridge between tradition and innovation.

EDUCATION

- During the Bulgarian Presidency, we will work on the **interim evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme and the Guidelines for the next Programming Period**. We plan to hold a debate among the Ministers of Education and propose draft conclusions of the Council on Education, Youth, Culture and Sport.
- We will work towards achieving general agreement within the Education Committee of

the Council on the proposal for a **Council Recommendation regarding the promotion of social inclusion and shared values through formal and informal education and training** and the proposal to amend the **Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning**.

- With respect to the initiative for the creation of a European Education Area by 2025, outlined in the Commission Communication “Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture”, we will work with all stakeholders to formulate an ambitious Action Plan for digital education, developing digital skills and digital literacy. A conference on the topic will be held in Sofia in April 2018.

YOUTH

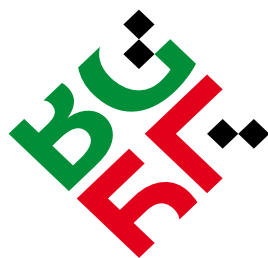
- In the area of youth, our efforts will be focused on successfully concluding negotiations with the European Parliament on the legal framework of the **European Solidarity Corps**.
- We will also organise a debate on the **role of young people as a driving force for the sustainable development and equality in Europe of the future**.
- We will propose Council Conclusions on the **role of youth in developing a flexible and favourable environment for enhancing population growth through effective partnership in Europe** as well as the **role of young people in developing a secure, united and peaceful society through the promotion the European values**.

CULTURE

- We will focus our efforts to broaden the political debate among Ministers regarding the new **on the new long-term vision for European cultural content, the future of Europe and the link between them** in the context of the **mid-term evaluation of the Creative Europe Programme** and developing the new **Work Plan for Culture as of 2019**.
- We will propose Council **conclusions** concerning the need to **foster cultural heritage in the policies of the EU** that present clear and concrete actions for consolidating cultural heritage as an important factor in extending intercultural dialogue, bringing societies closer, and promoting tolerance, and to use it as a resource for sustainable development.
- We will continue work on the development of an integrated, detailed and step-by-step **strategic EU approach to international cultural relations** through the creation of a road map.
- We will aim to maximise progress on achieving political agreement in the negotiations with the European Parliament on the **Audio-Visual Media Services Directive**.

SPORT

- A conference on **“Prevention of Doping in Professional Sport and Sport for Everyone through Education and Investigation”** will be devoted to the fight against doping.
- Council Conclusions will be proposed on **Promoting European Values through Sport**.



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