

Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC 9–10 July 2017, Tallinn

Background Information

Priorities of the Estonian Presidency of the Council of the EU

As of July 2017, Estonia will hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first time in its history. The overarching aim of the Estonian Presidency is to ensure that the EU remains united and decisive. Estonian ambition as the Presidency country is to provide a fresh perspective and to contribute to a Europe that is prosperous, safe, modern, inclusive, and sustainable.

The motto of the Estonian Presidency is “**Unity through Balance**”. These three words perfectly sum up the most important task for the Estonian Presidency: to maintain Europe’s unity and to ensure that nobody feels rejected or left out. At its core, unity shows its true value in action. Europe needs to be decisive. A mere declaration to stand and act for unity is not enough, the Union must act as one. Europe must be smart and flexible where possible, and steadfast where needed. Both the Member States and the institutions need to take responsibility, be in the service of the people, and improve the lives of the citizens. Estonia’s role as the Presidency country is to find a balance between the different views, traditions and interests in Europe today to achieve the best possible outcome for the European citizens. There must be a balance between how we as humans relate to nature, and how we adapt to rapid technological change. Balance is also reflected in the results; it is a European compromise and a new unity. Europe needs to come together now more than ever.

Estonia’s Presidency priorities are inspired by the spirit of the Bratislava summit and the Rome Declaration, which also include our contribution. Estonia will focus on the following:

1. **An open and innovative European economy** is key to staying competitive in the modern borderless world. An economy, whether large or small, can only be successful if it is open – to opportunities, trade, change, and original ideas. The single market is one of EU’s greatest assets. Estonia will work to protect and promote the four freedoms of the EU. Also, Estonia intends to keep the business environment predictable, clear, and transparent, which is the only way to ensure a thriving economy. Regulations must be smart and simple; providing services and starting businesses in the EU must be as easy as possible. The spirit of entrepreneurship should not be weighed down by bureaucracy. On the other hand, dynamism needs to be balanced by stability and necessary safeguards – be it in the banking sector, energy markets, or empowering consumers. All in all, in order to be competitive and ensure new economic growth we must take into account Europe’s traditional strengths, for example, our industrial base, and the way we protect our workers.

2. **A safe and secure Europe.** The EU was born 60 years ago as a peace project. Unfortunately, protecting our citizens and ensuring peace and stability in the world are no longer self-evident and have returned to the top of the EU agenda. The migration crisis, international terrorism and organised crime are all sources of instability and risk. Most importantly, Member States have to be able to trust each other's and the EU's ability to protect its borders. During its Presidency, Estonia will work towards making the financing of terrorism more difficult, improving cooperation between the police and the security forces, and using cutting-edge information exchange systems. Our resilience against external threats will increase through the development of our military capabilities, by including an increase in our defense expenditure. NATO will remain a key partner, and strong transatlantic ties continue to be essential. Estonia will continue the work on the migration crisis and on reforming the Common European Asylum System. It is also important to develop the existing partnerships further, build new ones, and promote stability and prosperity in the immediate neighborhood, both to the east and south, as well as in the Middle East and across Africa. Only by acting together and preserving the EU's unity on the global stage can the EU keep its citizens safe, while promoting peace, prosperity, and stability.
3. **A digital Europe and the free movement of data.** Europe must take advantage of the benefits of technological progress that is bringing continuous change to citizens, businesses, and governments. The future of the world is digital. The Estonian Presidency will focus on advancing the digital single market, on the increased use of e-solutions and electronic data, and on the development of cross-border e-services. To achieve this, the free movement of data should become a fundamental freedom. However, we need to find ways to ensure that data is used in a secure way for our individual and collective benefit. We are well aware that rapid change and new technologies always create vulnerabilities; our task will be to balance these risks and benefits fairly. Overall, a digital society can mean greater rather than lesser engagement, transparency and inclusion. We need to seek a sustainable balance between innovation and tradition.
4. **An inclusive and sustainable Europe** supports equal opportunities for high quality education, employment, access to services and development of skills. The term "equal opportunities" also signifies fair mobility when moving across borders, the right to go abroad to study, work or stay without being discriminated. We also need to adjust to changes in the labour market and in working life. Estonia will work to ensure a sustainable Europe. Estonia cares about and is committed to achieving a cleaner environment. Technology and nature are not opposites; we can use the first to protect and ease pressure on the latter. Estonia as the Presidency country is focused on being smart and doing more with fewer resources, reducing waste and increasing recycling.

For further information: eu2017.ee