



Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC on 14 September 2020

Background Paper on the Priorities of the German Presidency of the Council of the EU¹

Germany took over the Presidency of the Council of the EU on 1st July 2020. The German Council Presidency marks the beginning of the Trio Presidency with Portugal and Slovenia. It is taking place against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the slogan “Together for Europe’s recovery”.

To permanently overcome the COVID-19 pandemic, support economic recovery and remedy the social disruptions caused by the pandemic are priorities of the German government’s Work Programme. The German Council Presidency wishes to provide an impetus to question the status quo and become even better equipped to face the future. In this context the focus is on the comprehensive transformation processes of our era, such as climate change, digitisation or transformations in the world of work. In the face of increasing polarisation, Germany is committed to upholding our shared European fundamental values, above all democracy and the rule of law, and to strengthening the EU’s capacity to take action in the realm of foreign policy.

I. Europe’s Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

We will only succeed in overcoming the pandemic and its economic and social consequences if we act together, in a coordinated fashion and in a spirit of solidarity. This is why the German Presidency is pursuing a sustainable and inclusive growth strategy, at the heart of which are economic recovery, safeguarding jobs, and social cohesion in Europe. The European Green Deal will form the basis for strengthening the economy. The digital transformation should also play a key role. In order to protect the European Union’s citizens, the Presidency supports a social and employment policy based on the spirit of solidarity and sustainability.

It is important to learn from experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and work together to lay the groundwork to ensure the EU is even better equipped to respond to future challenges. Strategic European value chains, EU crisis management, safeguarding the supply of medicines, the resilience of the single market and cooperation in the Schengen area can contribute to this.

In close coordination with the United Nations, the Presidency advocates an active role for the EU in tackling development and food policy challenges.

¹ This overview is based on the programme of the German Council Presidency published by the Federal Foreign Office.

II. A Stronger and More Innovative Europe

The pandemic shows the vital need for European digital sovereignty. Germany intends to work on ensuring that Europe's skills in key digital technologies are state-of-the-art.

The Presidency aims to further develop the single market for key areas of the future and to create an efficient, innovation-friendly and future-proof regulatory framework to bolster the EU's competitiveness. In order to master the digital and environmental transformation, a competitive European industrial sector and vibrant small and medium-sized enterprises are essential. This includes modernising state aid law and a forward-looking EU structural policy that strengthens European regions' competitiveness and resilience to crises.

Further priorities include modernisation of tax policy in view of advancing digitisation, further development of the capital market union and the banking union, as well as dismantling barriers to cross-border financial services.

III. A Fair Europe

Social cohesion, social security and solidarity are the cornerstones of a fair Europe. Implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights helps to reduce inequalities within the EU. Striving to realise gender equality, priorities are the implementation of the objective of equal pay for woman and men for equivalent work as well as combating gender-based violence. Youth work programmes should be strengthened. Tackling youth unemployment is a further goal in this regard. Moreover, European policy in a democratic Europe requires a European public sphere and the participation of an active civil society that also thrives on cultural and media diversity.

IV. A Sustainable Europe

The Presidency intends to play an active role in shaping the economic, technological and social transformation process required for an ambitious climate and environmental protection policy. To this end, it is focussing on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, while also highlighting the cultural dimension of sustainable development.

During its Council Presidency, Germany intends to promote a modern and sustainable agricultural and fishing industry and safeguard the future of rural areas. Consumer protection is to be adapted to current digital and environmental challenges.

V. A Europe of Security and Common Values

The German Council Presidency wants to strengthen fundamental values and promote a cooperative and constructive approach to dealing with the issue of the rule of law. Where Member States have deficits as regards the rule of law, the Presidency advocates resolute use of the mechanisms envisaged in the European treaties.

The Presidency intends to promote democratisation of the Internet as well as a diverse media landscape and to bolster societies' resilience in dealing with false and misleading information on the Internet. Particular attention will be paid to combatting hate crime, racism, anti-Semitism and anti-Gypsyism.

Cross-border cooperation between national police authorities will be bolstered, as will judicial cooperation to combat cross-border crime; the range of various EU instruments for judicial cooperation in civil matters is also to be expanded.

The Council Presidency intends to update European migration and asylum policy, guided in this task by European values, rule-of-law and humanitarian standards. In cooperation with countries of origin, receiving and transit countries, the Presidency is pursuing a comprehensive approach to stabilising these regions and mitigating the causes of displacement and irregular migration.

VI. An Effective European Union for a Rules-Based International Order Anchored in Partnership

The Presidency's geostrategic priorities include fostering comprehensive cooperation between the EU and the United States, reaching a successful outcome in negotiations with the United Kingdom, a united and balanced policy on China and a deeper political partnership with Africa. The German Presidency emphasises the need to intensify European commitment to overcoming major international conflicts, for example in Libya and Syria.

A credible EU accession perspective for the Western Balkan states, active shaping of EU-Russia relations and effective application of the results of the Eastern Partnership Summit, as well as efforts to upgrade EU-ASEAN relations to the level of a Strategic Partnership remain central.

Germany will call for greater willingness to engage in cooperation, compromise and to find a balance of interests aiming at strengthening the effectiveness and efficiency of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The German Presidency considers a leading role for Europe to be crucial for strengthening an open and rules-based international trade system while at the same time advocating more intensive joint European activity in the area of development cooperation.

Link:

Programme of the German EU Council Presidency:

<https://www.eu2020.de/blob/2362036/e0312c50f910931819ab67f630d15b2f/07-02-pdf-programm-en-data.pdf>