

Til

udvalgets medlemmer og stedfortrædere

Hovedprioriteterne for det belgiske formandskab

Som forberedelse til Europaudvalgets rejse den 6.-7. juni til det kommende formandskabsland, Belgien, omdeles vedlagte dokument fra det kommende formandskab med tilhørende kort resumé. Dokumentet var optrykt i Agence Europe den 17. maj 2001.

Med venlig hilsen

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Prioriteringerne for det belgiske formandskab.

Det belgiske formandskab har i et dokument¹ identificeret *6 hovedtemaer* for deres formandskab:

- Uddybe debatten om fremtidens Europa
- Forbedre arbejdsforhold, skabe lige muligheder og bekæmpe udstødelse og fattigdom
- Fremme bæredygtig økonomisk udvikling og en fælles økonomisk politik
- Skabe et europæisk område med frihed, sikkerhed og retfærdighed
- Fremme af bæredygtig udvikling og forbedring af livskvalitet
- Udvidelsen og styrkelse af EU's eksterne dimension

I papiret uddybes hvilke politiske topprioriteter man særligt vil arbejde for.

1. EU's interne politikker

Her er forberedelsen af *euro'ens introduktion* den 1. januar 2002 naturligvis en hovedopgave. Formandskabet vil endvidere inkludere en stærk *social dimension* og prioritere udviklingen af en europæisk social model, herunder opstilling af kvalitative og kvantitative beskæftigelsesindikatorer. Vedrørende socialt ansvar vil man særligt fokusere på pensionssystemernes bæredygtighed. Herudover vil der blandt andet blive arbejdet videre på at implementere *skattepakken*.

Inden for retlige og indre anliggender vil Belgien prioritere etablering af en fælles *asyl- og migrationspolitik*, og kampen mod illegal indvandring vil blive intensiveret. Fremskridtene inden for udviklingen af et område af frihed, sikkerhed og retfærdighed skal desuden evalueres på Det Europæiske Råd i Bruxelles-Laeken december 2001. Endelig er det formandskabets ambition af opnå politisk enighed om en permanent Eurojust-enhed (samarbejdsenhed mellem de nationale anklagemyndigheder).

Det belgiske formandskab vil gennem opstilling af præcise mål og konkrete indikatorer arbejde for at sætte gang i den *strategi om bæredygtig udvikling*, som vil blive godkendt på Det Europæiske Råd i Gøteborg juni 2001. Der nævnes en række andre indsatsområder på miljøområdet, herunder at man vil forsøge at sætte energi og miljøskat på den europæiske dagsorden igen. Formandskabet er desuden fast besluttet på at få oprettet *en permanent fødevareautoritet*, hvor belgierne foretrækker en uafhængig myndighed. Formand-

¹ Dokument fra den belgiske premierministers hjemmeside og optrykt i Agence Europe den 17. maj 2001

skabet vil endvidere forsøge at opnå politisk enighed om et EF-patent.

2. Udvidelsen

Udvidelsen fremhæves som en hovedprioritet under formandskabet. Man vil følge den opstillede tidsplan og prioritere, at EU etablerer fælles positioner. Ansøgerlandene vil blive vurderet efter deres egne fortjenester.

3. EU's eksterne politikker

Formandskabet vil arbejde for at forbedre effektiviteten og sammenhængen i EU's eksterne handlinger samt for at give respekt for menneskerettigheder en fremtrædende plads i EU's udenrigspolitik. Man vil arbejde videre med udviklingen af den europæiske sikkerheds- og forsvarspolitik, hvor man på Bruxelles-Laeken topmødet skal kunne erklære EU for operationel inden for krigsstyring. Det kræver, at der bliver afholdt endnu en konference med henblik på at vurdere, om EU har den nødvendige kapacitet, og man vil fortsætte forhandlingerne om en permanent aftale om samarbejde mellem EU og NATO.

Formandskabet vil prioritere relationerne med Rusland, ønsker at EU skal involveres mere i fredsprocessen i Central-Afrika, og vil endelig også rette særlig opmærksomhed på Balkan samt Mellemøsten.

4. Fremtidens Europa

Det belgiske formandskab fik på Det Europæiske Råd i Nice til opgave at af søge rammerne for debatten om fremtidens Europa gennem en deklaration på Bruxelles-Laeken topmødet. Deklarationen skal indeholde en dagsorden, metode og tidsplan for debatten. Ved forberedelsen af denne deklaration vil man trække på en lang række aktører såsom Europa-Parlamentet, Kommissionen, de nationale parlamenter samt lade sig inspirere af debatten i medlemsstaterne samt tænketanke, eksperter og forskningsinstitutioner. Ansøgerlandene vil også blive inddraget.

Det belgiske formandskab vil ud over de fire punkter, som blev godkendt i Nice, udvide dagsordenen for fremtidens Europa til at omfatte det bredere spørgsmål: Hvordan skal det politiske liv struktureres i en udvidet union? Det understreges, at ambitionen er, at deklarationen stiller de rette spørgsmål, men ikke at den giver endelige svar.

Afslutningsvis nævnes, at man også vil engagere sig i spørgsmålene om klimaforandringer og Kyotoprotokolen samt arbejde for en ny WTO-frihandelsrunde.

THE BELGIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION 1 JULY – 31 DECEMBER 2001 PRIORITIES NOTE.

From 1 July till 31 December 2001, Belgium takes over the Presidency of the European Union. This Presidency comes at a crucial moment of the European integration. A couple of months ago, the European Union adopted a new treaty, which must make enlargement possible. The Union is preparing itself for the circulation of the Euro. The Union is developing a European social model and intends to become by 2010 the most dynamic knowledge-based economy of the world with high economic growth and social protection, and low unemployment rate and inflation. The Union has set itself the goal of creating an area of freedom, security and justice, as well as an area where quality of life, food safety, protection of the environment and sustainable development is central. Finally, the Union is currently developing the instruments through which Europe can perform in a powerful and unified way.

During its presidency Belgium wishes to make progress over a wide range of policy domains of the Union. In this way the Union should become more transparent, more efficient, more coherent and more powerful and should have a larger democratic legitimacy. Therefore, the Belgian Presidency will, at its start, present an ambitious and detailed programme with clear goals for every policy domain and for every European Ministerial Council.

With this in mind the Belgian Government has identified six main themes for the Presidency :

- deepening the debate over the future of Europe;
- improving quality of work, advancing equal opportunity and combating exclusion and poverty;
- promoting sustainable economic growth and a common economic policy;
- creating a European area of freedom, security and justice;
- promoting sustainable development and improving quality of life;
- enlarging the European Union and strengthening the external dimensions of the European Union.

The Belgian Presidency would also like to point out certain political top priorities which must be achieved in the second semester of 2001. For each of these top priorities the Belgian Presidency wants to achieve tangible results, in close co-operation with the European Parliament, the European Commission and all Member States.

1. INTERNAL POLICY DOMAINS : THE EUROPEAN UNION MUST FIND ANSWERS TO THE CHALLENGES OF TODAY AND TOMORROW.

The introduction of the Euro.

On 1 January 2002, the Euro becomes a tangible reality. Never before has the European Union so radically entered the lives of the citizens. For the first time in the history of the Union, citizens will be faced with a concrete, tangible result of European integration. A successful introduction of the Euro will increase the trust of the citizen in the Union as well as the credibility of the single currency.

A successful preparation for bringing the Euro coins and notes into circulation, is one of the most important aims of the Belgian Presidency. A monthly monitoring by the Commission and the Euro group should make it possible to closely watch the measures taken by each Member State. In this context, it will be verified in particular whether these measures run parallel.

In addition, a huge information campaign will be launched. The Euro is still not sufficiently well known. Such campaigns are necessary so that the physical introduction of the Euro can be organised smoothly and serenely for the whole of the European population. Through this communication, it will be particularly necessary to remove possible worries of both citizens, specially the vulnerable social groups, and business.

Indicators relating to quality of work.

The Belgian Presidency will include a strong social dimension and will pay special attention to the development of the European social model. Special emphasis will be put on quality of work, larger participation of employees with regard to economic mutations, equal opportunity, modernising social protection, combating social exclusion and poverty and the sustainability and re-financing of pensions.

The aim of full employment and the efforts towards quality of work must go hand in hand. During the European Council of Stockholm in March 2001, Belgium was given the task of refining and establishing the qualitative as well as the quantitative employment indicators. On the quantitative level, the presidency will bring improvements in employment statistics, amongst others in the field of the employment rate. On the qualitative level, just as every year in the second semester, the National Action Programmes regarding employment will be assessed during the Belgian presidency. In this assessment, quality of work will be a central concern. On the basis of the national action plans and the work of the Commission, a series of quality indicators will be elaborated as a first step towards a European strategy in this field.

Modernising social security and the sustainability of pensions.

The European Union has an important responsibility in the field of social security. All Member States are faced with the same challenges in this field. : ageing populations, rising health care costs, the need to adapt social security to new realities such as changed family forms or new forms of work. The Belgian presidency is determined to focus discussions on the sustainability of pension schemes. Between 2000 and 2040, the ratio between the pensioned population and the rest of the European population will double. The aim is to

achieve, by the end of 2001, agreement on some common goals that guarantee permanent security for pensioners and guarantee at the same time public finances.

The external aspect of the fiscal package.

Bringing into circulation of the Euro notes and coins signifies an important step on the way to a real single market. This internal market is as yet unfinished, amongst others in the field of the integration of the financial markets. The Belgium presidency, in co-operation with the Commission, therefore plans to work further on implementing decisions which were taken at the end of last year about the fiscal package (savings tax, tax regulations for businesses, interests and royalties). The negotiations with third countries, and especially with Switzerland, will be continued with a view to a final agreement on the draft directive concerning savings tax in 2002.

An impetus to a common asylum and migration policy.

At the European Council of Tampere in October 1999, an ambitious and detailed action programme was approved which should lead to the establishment of a common area of freedom, security and justice. This implies an open and a controllable area which is based on the European principles of openness, freedom and hospitality, solidarity, non-discrimination, respect for human rights and human dignity and respect for the value of a multi-cultural society.

At the European Council of Brussels-Laken in December 2001, the Belgian presidency will assess the progress.

The presidency will give priority to the establishment of a common asylum and migration policy. Regarding asylum, emphasis will be put on harmonising asylum granting procedures and reception of refugees. Refugees are entitled to protection by the European Union. This starting point must not be touched, definitely not in the year of the 50th anniversary of the Geneva Convention. But it is all the same necessary to develop burden sharing schemes which are fairer, and to establish more precisely which Member State should deal with a particular asylum request.

Regarding immigration, an impulse will be given to an umbrella policy encompassing the different aspects of the problem: prevention and development of partnerships with the countries of origin, the management of migration flows, integration and employment.

The Presidency will intensify the combat against illegal immigration, first and foremost regarding trafficking in human beings and smuggling of human beings. The candidate Member States should be included in strengthening the common rules for controlling the external borders of Schengen. In the future and with the support of the Union, they will be associated with this control system. Specifically, in the context of combating trafficking in human beings, a "high impact" type action will be organised at the future external borders of the European Union.

A permanent European unit of magistrates : Eurojust.

The Belgian Presidency is determined to reach a political agreement in the second semester of 2001 regarding the setting up of a definite Eurojust. Eurojust is a permanent unit of magistrates with power of enquiry, established in Brussels. The purpose of Eurojust is to

strengthen co-operation between the Member States in criminal matters, as well as to combat international crime. Hence Eurojust must become the judicial equivalent of Europol.

Sustainable development and the need for a better quality of life.

The challenge for sustainable development lies both in making it possible for citizens to live in a healthy environment and putting economic progress to the service of man, through continually improving living standards and quality of life. This pre-supposes a re-orientation of a number of non-sustainable production and consumption patterns. This re-orientation is one of the major concerns of the Belgian Presidency. Central to it is the implementation of the European strategy for sustainable development, which will be approved by the European Council of Göteborg in June 2001. This new strategy aims to direct the whole of the policies of the European Union towards sustainable development in its three aspects (economic growth, social cohesion and environment protection).

The Belgian presidency will give a first impetus to the implementation of this strategy, specifically through establishing precise goals and concrete indicators. Besides, the presidency will lay special emphasis on integrating the environmental dimension as well as sustainable development in the transport policy of the Union. The Belgian presidency will for instance try to reach an agreement on the second package of measures relating to maritime security. Moreover, the presidency wishes to achieve in the course of the second semester of 2001 a common position on a new regulation concerning the prevention and sustainable management of waste and the promotion of environment-friendly products, as well as a common position on the regulation of tractability and labelling of genetically modified organisms.

Further, the Belgian presidency plans to put energy and environment taxation once again on the European agenda.

The European Food Authority.

Recent agricultural and food crises have clearly shown that, in the area of consumer protection, absolute priority must be given to food safety. The Belgian presidency is determined to establish, by the end of this year at the latest, a permanent European food authority. The presidency favours an independent agency rather than a body with merely an advisory capacity such as proposed by the Commission. The institution of such an agency should be combined with strengthening controls on the complete food chain, namely through Europeanising the CONSUM programme ("Contaminant Surveillance System", the Belgian programme that monitors the agricultural food chain) and the introduction of a positive list regarding the composition of animal fodder, within the context of restructuring a sustainable and enduring agriculture.

The Community patent.

Research and development are the engines of employment and economic growth. The European Union still allocates substantially fewer means on research and development than the United States and Japan. This has to be remedied through the creation of a European area for research and innovation. The Belgian Presidency will work actively towards this goal and wishes to reach a political agreement regarding the Community patent in the second semester of 2001 as well as a common position on the sixth framework programme for research and development.

2. DETERMINEDLY CONTINUING WITH ENLARGEMENT : TOWARDS THE RESTORATION OF THE EUROPEAN IDENTITY.

From a historical viewpoint, the achievement of enlargement touches the very soul of the European Union. It is about sharing common values such as political democracy, respect of human rights, social protection of the weak, protection of minorities, market economy and peaceful co-existence within the rule of law. Through enlargement, the geographical, political and cultural identity of Europe is resumed. Consequently, enlargement is one of the most important priorities of the Belgian presidency.

The presidency, in co-operation with the Commission, will continue the accession negotiations according to the schedule and the timetable approved by the European Council of Nice in December 2000. Priority will be given to the establishment of common positions of the Union, and on wide orientation discussions at the European Councils of Ghent and Brussels-Laken. Each Applicant State will be treated on its own merits and on the basis of a complete and effective implementation of the *acquis communautaire*.

3. THE EXTERNAL DIMENSIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION : TOWARDS THE STABILISATION OF THE EUROPEAN CONTINENT AND A STRENGTHENING OF THE EUROPEAN VOICE IN THE WORLD.

The Belgian Presidency will advance the efforts of previous presidencies to improve the efficiency and the coherence of all external actions by the European Union and its Member States. This implies a more prominent role for the Secretary General/High Representative and the strengthening of consultations between the latter and the Commission.

Respect of human rights is one of the basic principles of Belgian foreign policy. The Belgian presidency is determined to give this issue a prominent place in the determination of the common foreign and security policy of the European Union.

The Belgian presidency will work at the implementation of the Cotonou agreements via co-operation with countries in conflict and the association of civil society.

The European Security and Defence Policy.

Public opinion favours a further development of Europe's own defence identity, as was shown by a recent Euro barometer. This development is central to the Belgian presidency. The European Council of Brussels-Laken in December 2001 must declare the European Union operational in terms of crisis management. This means that by the end of the presidency the structures must be permanent and the procedures must be approved. The Belgian presidency will take all initiatives necessary to achieve this aim. The operational implementation of the European security and defence policy pre-supposes a balance between gradual capacity increases, development of instruments and political support for the European foreign policy.

To make this possible, a second conference will take place during the presidency to examine the capacities necessary to achieve the Headline Goal in 2003. Besides, the presidency will continue negotiations with a view to reaching a permanent agreement on co-operation between the European Union and NATO.

However, the European Union should not limit itself to the question of what it can do in a conflict close to its borders, which has escalated into a violent crisis. The Union should also be prepared to answer the question of what it can do to prevent the conflict from escalating into violence. The Belgian presidency will continue the activities connected with crisis prevention and the civilian aspects of crisis management. The emphasis will lie on the police aspect, on training of personnel, on strengthening the rule of law and on civil protection.

Russia.

The Belgian presidency will pay special attention to relations between the European Union and Russia. It is in the interest of both parties to develop a strategic partnership and intense co-operation. The presidency will propose an action plan for the implementation of the EU-Russia common strategy.

During the European-Russian Summit in October, special attention will be given to economic relations between the two parties, to the consequences of the enlargement of the Union, in particular for the region of Kaliningrad, to the development of a European security and defence policy, as well as to questions in connection with justice and internal affairs. As far as the political dialogue with Russia is concerned, the stabilisation of the situation in the Caucasus and the strengthening of the rule of law will also be discussed.

Central-Africa.

The Belgian presidency wishes to bring about a greater involvement of the European Union in the peace process in Central Africa and the region of the Great Lakes. Along with the competent authorities, the presidency will draw up an inventory of humanitarian and rehabilitation needs in crucial sectors such as public health, education, infrastructure and justice, as well as needs concerning the democratisation process. On the basis of this inventory, the Belgian presidency will propose an action plan with a view to peace and development in Central Africa.

The Balkans.

The Belgian presidency will pay special attention to this region and wishes in particular to pursue the process launched at the Zagreb Summit. Essential to that process is regional co-operation and economic development. The presidency will attempt to move forward with the negotiations on stabilisation and association treaties with the countries of the region. During the second semester of 2001, such an agreement could be concluded with one or more countries.

Together with the High Representative and the Commission, the Belgian presidency will do its utmost to develop the contributions of the Union to the efforts of the international community to maintain the peace and security in the Balkans.

The Middle East Peace Process.

In close co-operation with the High Representative, the Belgian Presidency will continue the actions of the Fifteen and encourage the parties to resolve their disputes through dialogue and negotiations so that the peace process can be taken up again. The Belgian presidency will keep close contacts with the United States and all the parties involved in the region.

The Belgian presidency will make sure that the Euro-Mediterranean partnership remain dynamic.

4. THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION : TOWARDS AN AMBITIOUS DECLARATION OF BRUSSELS-LAKEN.

With the new Treaty of Nice, the door has been opened once and for all for the biggest enlargement operation in the history of the European Union. We all speak of enlargement but in reality it will be a mutation. A Union with 25 or 27 or even more member States will look completely different to the Union that we know today. It is therefore absolutely essential to already begin thinking about how the European Union should look after enlargement, which competence it must have, how it should be financed, which institutions it must have, the manner in which it will take decisions, and so on.

The European Council of Nice in December 2000 approved a "Declaration on the Future of the Union". This declaration calls for a wide and profound debate on the future of the European Union. Such a debate should include not only the member States, but also the candidate member States, the national parliaments, the European parliament and the broad public opinion.

The Belgian Presidency was given the task in Nice to draw the parameters of this debate by the end of 2001 in the Declaration of Brussels-Laken, which in its turn should lead to a new Intergovernmental Conference in 2004. In preparing this Declaration, the presidency will draw upon several sources:

- the broad debate that in the meanwhile has been set into motion in all the Member States. Indeed, this debate must continue even after 2001. Still, the Belgian presidency will try to compile a series of provisional results and to draw conclusions from the ongoing debates, which could be useful for the Declaration of Brussels-Laken;
- the contributions of the European Parliament and the European Commission;
- the contributions of the national parliaments;
- the contributions of the constitutional regions;
- the many studies and the numerous suggestions from research institutions, think tanks and experts;
- the close contacts which the presidency will keep with each Member State.

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs will exchange ideas during their informal meeting in September. The Heads of States and Governments will get this opportunity at the informal European Council in October and the formal European Council in December. The candidate Member States will participate in this debate during a special meeting with the Foreign Affairs Ministers of the European Union.

The Declaration of Brussels-Laken must state the agenda on the debate on the future of Europe, the methods to be employed and the timetable.

With respect to the agenda, it is not the intention to already formulate definitive answers. That will not happen before the end of the ride. On the contrary, it is definitely the intention to stimulate the debate through specific questioning on everything pertaining to the future of Europe. In the "Declaration on the Future of the Union" which was approved in Nice, four themes are mentioned which must be dealt with in the debate. The Belgian Presidency, however, does plan to widen the agenda into a global project for Europe. This project must provide the answer to the fundamental question of "how to structure political life in an enlarged Union?". In order to guarantee that all questions about the future of the Union can be broached, a framework must be established in Brussels-Laken. This should be possible taking into account that much broader concepts lie behind mere institutional issues.

Thus, the objectives of the European Union are to a large degree determined by the organisation of competence ("Kompetenzordnung"). Indeed, according to part of the public opinion, the Union sometimes interferes too much with the life of the citizen; the Union sometimes makes unjustified use of the legal basis offered by the treaties to encroach upon the competence of the Member States. To listen again to the citizen is a guarantee for the integration process.

The aim of the new competence organisation could be to define more clearly the competence of the Union and that of the Member States. But this new organisation of competence must not paralyse the integration dynamics. According to recent studies, public opinion wishes the European Union to take charge of its own defence identity, of a true common foreign policy and of a common asylum and migration policy.

Other elements of the debate are also determining the future of Europe : the financing of the European Union, the decision making procedures, the institutional architecture and the inter-institutional balance, the role of the regions, the treaty structure, a modernised *méthode communautaire* and the role of social dialogue and of civil society – all these topics must be addressed.

The Belgian presidency under no circumstance wishes to attempt to formulate answers for all these subjects. But it does hope that during the European Council of Brussels-Laken, a declaration can be approved which will ask the right questions and in this way open the necessary doors for a wide, profound debate in the years to come.

5. CONCLUSION.

The Belgian Presidency is ambitious. It is evident from the political top priorities that it has identified. Still, a presidency is influenced in an increasingly important way by current affairs and continuity.

Events during recent presidencies have shown that the programme of a presidency can be very heavily influenced by external factors which are touched by current affairs. That will undoubtedly be the case for initiatives that the presidency wishes to take in the Balkans, the Middle East and Central Africa.

But there are still other fields onto which the Belgian presidency is keen to venture :

- climate change and the Kyoto Process : climate change threatens the future well being and economic progress of the whole planet. Effective international action is vital to reduce emissions. The position of the new American Government has thrown the whole issue into confusion. The Belgian presidency will in any case try to get the Kyoto process once again on a smooth path, if necessary with a few adjustments to the new situation.
- the new negotiation round regarding the World Trade Organisation : in the following weeks and months, it will become clear whether there will be a possibility of holding a new trade round. The Belgian presidency will do its utmost to help achieve this. The United States and the European Union are the main protagonists who must provide the impetus for the possible starting of a new trade round. The crucial issue is to develop a balanced and global agenda, in which the concerns of the developing countries are specially taken into account.

So, a presidency does not stand on its own. It has to take into account the current events. Besides that, it must also enrol itself in an evolutionary process. The Belgian presidency fully wishes to take into account the continuity of the European process. The presidency will continue with the initiatives and activities of the preceding presidencies and, where necessary and wished, prepare the initiatives of the next presidencies. To help answer, in a period of less than six months, the challenges of the European Union, the Belgian presidency strives for a balanced progress in the different activity domains of the Union. To this end, concrete and special attention will be given to the sixteen points and fields mentioned above.

To act upon these points and domains will bring in its wake sensitive decisions and presumes the co-operation of all Member States, candidate Member States, European institutions, social partners and regional actors. The decisions will demand courage and political vision. But if Europe can progress in all these fields, a further step will have been set towards a balanced unification process. That is the ambition of the Belgian presidency.

