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Til underretning for Folketingets Europaudvalg fremsendes vedlagt en oversigt over det hollandske formandskabs prioriteter, som den 15. januar 1997 er blevet præsenteret for Europa-Parlamentet.

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PRESIDENCY PROGRAMME

INTRODUCTION

The Dutch Government has set out its points of departure for its Presidency of the Council of the European Union in a memorandum that has also been submitted to the Dutch Parliament. This Presidency comes at a time when the Union is facing two very far-reaching decisions. The first concerns the transition to the third phase of Economic and Monetary Union and the second is the enlargement of the Union to include the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean region. Both these decisions require thorough preparation.

The Intergovernmental Conference is an important step on the way to EMU and enlargement. It must be completed before the third phase can commence, and before talks can start with applicant countries. In the closing years of this century and the early years of the next, these two exercises will play a major role; they will also be determining factors in the peace, security and prosperity of Europe.

The Intergovernmental Conference

The Netherlands has been fortunate to inherit from the Irish Presidency the "General outline for a draft revision of the treaties" which the Dublin Summit approved as a good basis for the follow-up to the Conference.

The outline is fairly ambitious, but also realistic. In terms of policy, it contains draft solutions in the form of possible treaty amendments. At the institutional level, the outline merely considers the options. The proposed draft solutions are not compromises at the lowest possible level. They require commitment and political will from all involved - the member states, the Commission and the European Parliament - in the interests of the Union as a whole.

The outline reflects the fact that ideas and opinions are still considerably divided, particularly in the complex areas of institutional reform and enhanced cooperation/flexibility. These issues touch upon the structure of the Union itself, a structure which will come under great pressure when the EU enlarges its membership if we fail to reform it in time. At the same time, the reforms must make the Union more accessible and democratic. It is up to the IGC to achieve a substantial, cohesive and satisfactory compromise in all these areas. This is not a job for the Presidency. It is first and foremost the responsibility of all those participating in the Conference. The Presidency will do its utmost to bring the desired result nearer and, as reaffirmed in Dublin, bring the Conference to a conclusion in Amsterdam in June 1997. The IGC will also have to pay particular attention to the enhancement of cooperation between judicial authorities and police forces in connection with the free movement of persons, and to the need to strengthen the Union's external action. Finally, energetic steps will be taken to simplify treaty layout, in response to repeated requests from the European Council.

DEVELOPMENT OF EU POLICY

In the various sub-areas of internal and external policy, the Presidency will do its utmost to round off current issues and place new ones on the agenda. It will focus on the various council agendas, which are discussed briefly below. It goes without saying that close cooperation with the Commission and the European Parliament is vital to the success of any Presidency.

GENERAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Active involvement by the European Union in the Middle East peace process and further developments in former Yugoslavia. Extra focus on the Barcelona process, inter alia in the form of a follow-up conference in mid-April. Energetic implementation of the EU-US action plan: The Cyprus issue. The Presidency will attempt to organise an EU-Turkey association council. The Great Lakes area.

- Association councils with Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland and Hungary.
- Meetings with Asian countries, including the twelfth EU/ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Singapore, followed by a meeting with ASEM.
- Relations between the EU and Canada.
- Ministerial meetings between Rio and San Jos countries and the Gulf Cooperation Council, and ACP countries.
- In Union relations with Russia and Ukraine, the Presidency will focus on fleshing out action plans drawn up for these countries.
- Conflict prevention will be given further substance under the Dutch Presidency. The extent to which the EU might use embargoes as a means of tackling the export of weapons to areas of tension in Sub-Saharan Africa will be examined.
- Establishment of a European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia.

Trade policy

- Follow-up to the first ministerial WTO conference in Singapore. The conference should foster the further abolition of trade barriers, and boost activities in the field of trade and environment.
- Conclusion of WTO negotiations on the liberalisation of trade in basic telecommunications services, planned for 15 February 1997.
- Liberalisation of trade in financial services. At the end of 1997 the interim agreement concluded at WTO level is to be replaced by a final arrangement.
- Finalisation of the Information Technology Accord.

INTERNAL MARKET

The Internal Market is the basis for the further development of the Union and is also the best guarantee of further growth and more jobs. The Presidency will therefore devote a great deal of attention to the operation of the Internal Market.

- The Commission's report "The impact and effectiveness of the Internal Market" clearly shows that the Internal Market works, but that the economic results could be better. The Presidency will attempt to identify what steps need to be taken and when in order to improve the operation of the Internal Market, in consultation with the Commission and the two subsequent Presidencies.
- The SLIM exercise. A simplification of European legislation might also help the market to operate better. The first results of this exercise are promising. The Commission has undertaken to identify, in the spring, new areas of legislation that need to be examined. It is important that information be exchanged on experiences with the SLIM exercise and those of the member states in simplifying their own national legislation.
- Application of and compliance with European legislation in the different member states.

Structured dialogue will take place with the associated Central European countries at the Internal Market Council on 13 March 1997. The subject of forms and standards will be discussed. The discussions should make clear what the adoption of the "acquis" implies for the free movement of industrial products.

During the two Internal Market Councils the Presidency will attempt to round off the decision-making process on a number of directives, including:

- the directive on the protection of models;
- the directive on medical aids for in-vitro fertilisation;
- the directive on hazardous substances and preparations;
- the directive on freedom of establishment for advocates.

A number of customs matters are also on the agenda.

ECOFIN

This year will be a crucial year for the transition to the third phase of EMU. The member states are currently engaged in the process of achieving the necessary convergence in order to qualify for EMU membership. A decision will be taken on who may participate in early 1998. Employment.

EMU

During its Presidency, the Netherlands will seek to achieve the adoption of:

- the regulations on the legal status of the Euro;
- regulations concerning budgetary discipline in phase three and a European Council resolution on the Stability Pact.
- Work will also continue on the relations between the participating member states and those not initially participating in the Euro area, in particular ERM II, with a view to reaching agreement on a resolution that can be adopted at the European Council in Amsterdam.
- Finally, the Informal EcoFin will be expected to decide on the selection of the winning design for the Euro coins, on the basis of a report by a jury that is yet to be appointed.

Other activities will include regular items like the excessive deficit procedure, the broad economic guidelines and the examinations of (updated) convergence programmes.

Employment

- The process set in motion at the Council of Essen forms the framework in which the member states cooperate in their efforts to create more jobs. It is important that the EcoFin continue to play its vital role in this respect, advocating macroeconomic stability accompanied by structural reform of product and labour markets.

Together with the Commission and the Social Affairs Council, EcoFin will draw up an interim report on the employment situation in the Union, to be presented to the European Council in Amsterdam.

Sound financial management and combating fraud

- Follow-up must be given to the report of the Personal Representatives on SEM 2000, which was tabled at the Dublin Council. The Commission and the GPR will present a progress report on the follow-up activities to the EcoFin in June.
- The report of the European Court of Auditors on the implementation of the European budget. The discharge procedure will require the Council's careful attention.
- The Commission's annual report on fraud and the working programme for 1997-1998 will be discussed.

Taxation

- The activities of the Monti group will be continued by a permanent committee.
- Forthcoming Commission proposals on excise tariffs, including a proposal for an energy tax.

- Commission proposals on VAT (VAT on telecommunications, VAT committee).
- Direct taxes, including the Commission proposal to remove tax disadvantages connected with the payment of interest and royalties between associated companies.

Loans to third countries

- The size of EIB loans to the various regions. As far as the arrears of Georgia, Armenia and Tadjikistan are concerned, the Council is still awaiting the Commission's proposal for a solution to this problem.

Financial services issues

- Directive on solvency ratios.
- Directive on settlement finality. A Commission proposal is also expected on capital adequacy.

Other business

Another matter that might be taken up is the improvement of budgetary discipline in EU expenditure. The subject might be discussed during the informal EcoFin. At the January EcoFin, structured talks will be held with the countries of Central Europe that have applied for membership.

TRANSPORT

Improving the use of the existing infrastructure and controlling mobility. Maximising transport safety, while minimising the burden on the environment

Air Traffic Management (ATM).

The institutional structure of an integrated European ATM system is to be raised by the Presidency at the informal meeting of the Transport Council of 31 January/1 February, as is the European Commission's proposal concerning the accession of the EU to Eurocontrol.

Rail transport

The White Paper 'A strategy for revitalising the Community's Railways' was presented in July 1996. The focus has now been placed on transborder corridors for freight transport (Trans European Rail Freight Freeways - TERFFs). This could be the first move towards the liberalisation of rail transport in the EU (basic directive 91/440).

Fiscal measures: Euro-toll and excise duties

The proposal whereby heavy goods vehicles would be charged for the use of certain infrastructural facilities (Euro-toll) centres on passing on costs (especially external costs) to goods vehicles. This issue also affects the EU-Switzerland dossier.

Interoperability of road pricing systems

It is important to establish a European standard for road-pricing systems. The member states are developing different systems or 'modernising' conventional tolls. The systems are often not harmonised, which causes hold-ups at borders. The Presidency will make efforts, at the informal meeting of the Transport Council and in other fora, to reach a single common technical standard.

The following topics will also be looked at:

- EU negotiations with Switzerland;
- joint programme of action on transport safety; summer time;
- Pan-European transport conference in Helsinki;
- tachograph;
- PACT (pilot projects on combined transport).

Air transport

- airport security. This relates both to airworthiness checks at EU airports on aircraft from third countries ('ramp checks') and the establishment of a European Aviation Safety Authority;
- the phasing out of noisy aircraft within the EU;
- excise duty on kerosene.

Sea transport

- strategic document on the future of maritime Europe;
- external policy and EU shipping agreements with China and India;
- registration of passengers on passenger ships;
- minimum qualifications for seafarers;
- promotion of short sea shipping along EU coasts.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND POST

Further liberalisation of these sectors. There will be particular focus on issues such as the abolition of monopolies, the creation of scope for competition, the extent of regulations and the establishment of what is referred to as a universal service.

Telecommunications

The Presidency will contribute to the creation of the necessary regulatory framework via the co-decision procedure. To this end the necessary conciliation procedures will take place during the Presidency.

- Review of the Open Network Provision (ONP) directive and voice telephony; the aim of this review is to adapt existing regulations to the liberalised market (1 January 1998). At issue here are points such as the installation of peripheral equipment, access to operator and alarm services, contract supervision, and promoting the supply of voice telephony services at EU level. Steps will also be taken to develop the legislative framework for the universal service in this field. An effort will be made to reach a common position;

- Green Paper on numbering policy: the Green Paper summarises the main tasks of a European numbering policy (number portability when transferring to a competitor, restructuring of national numbering schemes and scope for personal numbers) and makes proposals for promoting competition. Instrument: a Council resolution;
- conciliation procedures: these include an interconnection directive (rights and obligations of parties concerned in the linking of networks, for instance the duty to give competitors access to the 'own' network), a decision concerning guidelines for trans-European networks in the telecommunications field, a permit directive, and a directive relating to data protection in telecommunications. The Presidency will play an important role in conciliation procedures between the Council and the EP.

Post

The liberalisation of the postal sector is proceeding less smoothly. The Presidency wishes to seek solutions for this dossier in consultation with member states and the Commission.

THE ENVIRONMENT

The Presidency wishes EU input at the impending international negotiations on sustainable development and climate policy to be active and constructive. It will focus, within the EU, on pursuing environmental policy geared to implementation.

- Climate (in connection with the third Conference of Parties to the Climate Change Convention, to be held in October 1997);
- car dossier (various directives relating to air pollution);
- Framework Directive on Water (integration of water policy);
- Council conclusions on IMPEL (Implementation Community Environmental Law) communication (enforcing environmental policy).

Beginning of the debate at Council working group level (possibly with initial exploratory debate at the Environmental Council of June 1997) on EU biodiversity strategy (also within the framework of the CSD) and the EU acidification strategy.

The Presidency will take two initiatives:

- Improving the quality of EU legislation. Together with the European Commission, the Presidency will organise a workshop on the integration of national and European environmental legislation.
- Integration of environmental and industrial policies. This issue is on the agenda of the informal meeting of the Environmental Council in April 1997; discussion will centre on the medium and small-sized business sector with a view to determining the factors that encourage this sector to invest in the environment and establishing how these can be fostered by the government. It will be prepared by the Presidency and the European Commission.

The Presidency will also organise a conference of ministers on Regional Planning and Regional Policy, which will incorporate a presentation of the Cities Policy. A look will also be taken at the first draft of a European Regional Development paper.

Meeting with applicant countries (Central European countries) within the framework of the structured dialogue. This will take place during the Environmental Council of 3 March 1997. Attention will focus on one theme: climate policy/conservation of energy.

SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Employment and socio-economic policy coordination alongside financial and economic integration within the framework of EMU.

Employment and the labour market

- Preparation of the interim report in connection with the annual joint report on employment.
- Further operationalisation of the Employment and Labour Market Committee established on 2 December 1996. Employment indicators will also be developed in this context.
- Safety and health at work (e.g. chemical agents in the workplace).
- The informal meeting of the Social Affairs Council (February 1997 in Rotterdam) will focus on the theme of employment.

Equal opportunities and work

- Conference on the combating of international trafficking in women (April 1997 in The Hague).
- Finalisation of the directive relating to the distribution of the burden of proof (between plaintiff and respondent) in cases of alleged sexual discrimination.
- Finalisation of the 'Kalanke' directive. Its aim is to draw a clear line between permissible and impermissible forms of positive discrimination in labour relations.

Labour relations

- Further development of the Social Dialogue between employers and employees at Union level. The Commission recently issued a statement on this subject, which will be used as a basis for concrete proposals to be discussed during the Presidency.
- During the spring of 1997 the 'Davignon' Committee will report on possible solutions with respect to the dossier on the European Company, which has now dragged on for a number of years.

ENERGY

Further liberalisation of the energy market and energy conservation.

The Presidency will address the further liberalisation of the energy market (gas directive and conciliation procedure for the electricity directive) and focus on energy conservation (scope for voluntary multiannual agreements in an EU context).

The theme of sustainable energy will also be high on the agenda. In addition special attention will be paid - with some assistance from the previous Presidency - to the contribution to be made on the theme of energy at the Conference of Parties to the Climate Change Convention, scheduled for the autumn of 1997.

As a result of the EU White Paper on Energy published in December 1996, the Commission is working on a large number of announcements and proposals which will appear during the Presidency.

RESEARCH

The main points of the Fifth Framework Programme on Research and Technological Development.

The Research Council of 14 and 15 May 1997 will attempt to reach conclusions on the main points of the Fifth Framework Programme on Research and Technological Development: structure, focal points and possibly allocation of resources. The programme is to commence at the end of 1998. Three important concerns will be the information society and research that contributes to it, reinforcement of the European public-sector research infrastructure and the relationship with the Eureka programme.

The Research Council will in part be attended by associated Central European countries. That part will be devoted to the specific wishes of those countries with regard to the Fifth Framework Programme.

Other points on the Research Council's agenda include:

- the Innovation Action Plan;
- the cooperation agreement with the US;
- assessment of the present Framework Programme by the Davignon Committee.

INDUSTRY

The focus will be on the competitiveness of the European market, notably in the field of the information society.

- Further elaboration of the point relating to the competitiveness of the information, communication and technology industry (ICT).

The aim is to position this sector - which is very important to Europe - as advantageously as possible, so as to exploit the potential offered by the information society. This could cover issues such as R&D efforts to develop new products and services, size-related aspects and access to markets. With Commission support, the Presidency plans to commission an external study of the position of the ICT industry in Europe. The informal meeting of the Industry Council on 1 and 2 February will discuss the results, particularly the effects of the policy pursued to date and new approaches to be taken.

The following topics will also be discussed:

- A Commission document on the competitiveness of EU industry - in relation to benchmarking.
- A strategy document to be produced by the Commission concerning the deadlock in the shipbuilding dossier, which came about through the United States' failure to ratify the OECD agreement. A look will also be taken at various other Council aid dossiers and the fifth aid overview.

CONSUMERS

Consumer policy and the working of the market

Proposals for directives on:

- access to the courts
- consumer credit
- comparative advertising
- price per standard unit weight

Attention will also be devoted to the Dutch approach to consumer policy, in which the emphasis has shifted from regulations to protect the consumer to the establishment of frameworks within which the consumer can operate as a market player.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Making progress in ensuring safe blood supplies

The Presidency will highlight the following public health issues:

- an action programme for health monitoring (within the context of health-related activities), designed to ensure the adequate planning of future European health policy within the framework of article 129 of the EC Treaty. A conciliation procedure will be started;
- an epidemiological surveillance network to ensure permanent communication between the Commission and the competent health authorities in each member state. A common position will have to be established;

- the safety of and self-sufficiency in blood supplies in the European Union. The Irish Presidency organised a conference on blood supplies in Adare, on the basis of which the Council adopted a resolution on 12 November 1996. The Presidency wishes to use this resolution and the additional proposals put forward by the Commission as a basis for Council recommendations. The directive may also be tabled for amendment;
- the quality and safety of organs and tissues. A resolution will be drawn up on the quality and safety of organs and tissues in which the focus will be placed on the optimum use and non-commercialisation of organs and tissues;
- the EU-US group responsible for the communicable diseases early warning network;
- communicable forms of Spongiform Encephalopathy;
- the second report on the health of the population of the European Union (women and health);
- public health aspects of drugs;
tobacco and tobacco advertising;
- professional standards among doctors;
- orphan drugs and rare diseases.

AGRICULTURE

The farm prices package for the 1997-1998 season and structural reform of the market organisation for beef. Animal welfare and veterinary inspection directives.

Common Agricultural Policy

During the latter half of the Dutch Presidency, the proposals on structural reform of the market organisation for beef, which the Commission will probably submit to the Council in May 1997, will play an important role. The need to reform the market organisation has clearly emerged and has been highlighted by the BSE crisis. The proposals will deal, in particular, with ways of achieving a closer match between supply and demand on the beef market.

The most important topic to be discussed during the informal Agriculture Council of 25 to 27 May 1997 will be the reform of the Community dairy policy. The Commission will probably submit a discussion document on this subject to the Council in April 1997.

The structured dialogue with the Central European countries:
the most important subject of discussion will be the adjustment of the veterinary policies of the countries in question to bring them into line with the 'acquis communautaire'. Agreements were reached with the Irish Presidency on thorough preparations to ensure a productive dialogue on this subject.

- Reform of the market organisation for olive oil.

- Reform of the market organisation for tobacco.

Veterinary policy

- the promotion of policy on animal welfare at EU level. Work on the current proposal to amend the directive on minimum standards for the protection of veal calves will be actively continued.
- Proposals will be submitted to amend the directive on the welfare of animals during transport (standards for staging points and stricter requirements governing the kinds of vehicles used);
- (possibly) initiation of the discussion of the yet to be submitted proposal amending the directive on the minimum standards for the protection of battery hens;
- relations between the EU and third countries; much attention will be devoted to the proposal amending directive 90/675/EEC (laying down the principles governing veterinary checks on products entering the Community from third countries). The proposal envisages an amendment to the directive within the context of the harmonisation of veterinary control and inspection systems for the import of products from third countries.

Phytosanitary policy

- Combating and monitoring brown rot (to be submitted)

Phytopharmaceutical policy

- Annexe VI (uniform principles for the evaluation of plant protection products) of Council Directive 91/414/EEC concerning the placing of plant protection products on the market (to be submitted). The proposal encompasses amendments to the directive to bring it in line with a judgment of the European Court of Justice on annexe VI.

Animal feed

- Proposal on novel feed (to be submitted). The proposal covers the marketing of feed produced with the assistance of, for example, biotechnology.

FISHERIES

- It is essential that agreement be reached on the fourth Multiannual Guidance Programme, as this is an instrument with which an attempt can be made to achieve a balance between fishing fleet capacity and fish stocks.
- During the last regular conference of ministers of North Sea states, it was agreed that an interim conference would be held to discuss the relationship between fisheries and the environment. The Presidency will therefore focus on preparing the main points of the EU contribution to this conference.

- Proposal for a directive on multi-year objectives and strategies with regard to the maintenance of fish stocks.

EDUCATION

The relationship between developments in the field of information and communications technology and the requirements to be met by education

- White paper on education and training
The Commission is planning to draw up a summary report giving its views on the results of the discussions conducted at various levels within the EU and putting forward proposals on follow-up to the White Paper. The objective is to reach final political conclusions on the White Paper in the Education Council.
 - Within the context of objective 4 of the White Paper, the Presidency will produce a memorandum on language policy within the Union, in which attention will be devoted to, for example, policy on the language of the neighbouring country.
 - Green Paper on education, training and research; obstacles to transnational mobility
This Green Paper will be discussed in the informal Education Council. The Commission is planning to publish a summary report during the latter half of the Presidency. Conclusions will be reached on this document in the Council.
 - Information and communications technology and teacher training
This will be the main topic of discussion in the informal Education Council of 2 and 3 March 1997. Attention will be devoted to the impact of information and communications technology on society, the requirements to be met by education as a result, and the joint action that can be taken by the Ministers of Education of the EU in this regard.
 - School security
A meeting of experts and senior government officials will be organised in the early stages of the Presidency to exchange experiences on this subject. The Presidency plans to prepare draft conclusions on school security in cooperation with the Commission.
- Attention will also be devoted to:
- Socrates (budgetary needs);
 - mobility of student grants;
 - quality assurance in higher education;
 - adult education.

CULTURE

Due regard for the impact Union action may have on culture

- Cultural aspects of Union action

The main topic of discussion of the informal meeting of 6 to 8 April is the means by which account is taken of culture in European Union decision-making. The Cultural Affairs Council will also devote attention to this issue.

- Ariane

The Presidency will initiate a conciliation procedure. Agreement has been reached with the European Parliament on practically all points. An effort will be made to resolve the dispute with the EP on the budget.

- Raphael

Here too, agreement has yet to be reached with the EP on the budget. The Presidency will initiate a conciliation procedure.

Directive concerning television without frontiers

The Council and the European Parliament have reached agreement on a number of points. Differences still exist, however, which will probably have to be solved by means of a conciliation procedure. The main problems relate to general public access to direct, uncoded sport broadcasts and the violence chip. The Presidency will launch a substantive discussion on the subject of sport broadcasts.

The question of how the Irish compromise proposal on the film and audiovisual productions guarantee fund might be amended in the light of the views put forward on the matter during the Cultural Affairs Council of 16 December 1996 will also be looked at.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

The practical aspects of Article 130v of the Treaty concerning the pursuit of a coherent policy towards developing countries. The future of Lom.

In practice, the Union's policy affects the interests of developing countries in a wide variety of areas. This calls for effective coordination of the strategies pursued by the various ministerial councils. In this respect the Presidency as well as the Commission has a special responsibility. It has been decided to adopt a pragmatic approach to the existing areas of Council interest and topical issues, and to examine the connection between them where relevant. Within this approach attention should be given to the following themes in view of their multidisciplinary and topical nature.

Food security/fisheries

As a large food producer and provider of food aid, the Union is in a position to effect the follow-up to the World Food Summit of November 1996.

As far as food security is concerned, attention will also be given to the relationship between bilateral fisheries agreements and the advancement of the fisheries sector in developing countries.

Development cooperation and conflict management

The Commission has promised to flesh out the communication on conflict prevention in Africa. Given the actual situation on the continent, it would seem appropriate for the discussion to focus primarily on the scope for conflict management, or the de-escalation of current conflicts. In addition to aid, attention should also be given to good governance, human rights, democratic principles and elections as important aspects of an integrated approach to the problems. The scale of military expenditure by developing countries and the transfer of conventional arms to them likewise merit attention.

Development and migration

Given the scale of the migration problem in developing countries, it is desirable that the debate on migration be continued, on the basis of the conclusion reached on this matter by the Development Cooperation Council in May 1996. This will be a means of contributing to the integrated discussion on curbing the adverse effects of migration flows both in developing countries and in Europe.

Post-Lom debate

The Lom IV Convention is due to expire in 2000. The Commission will shortly publish a green paper on the future of this cooperation between the Union and 70 Lom countries in the fields of aid and trade. The Presidency is willing to promote debate on the post-Lom situation by hosting an informal conference of ministers to discuss the matter (Maastricht, 18-19 April 1997).

Research, development and cooperation

The Presidency will also devote special attention to research, development and cooperation by hosting a European conference on "Research, partnerships for sustainable development" (Leiden, 11-13 March 1997). The Development Cooperation Council, chaired by the French, drew attention to the importance of this sector in a statement of June 1995.

The Informal Development Council will be primarily concerned with the question of coherence.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

The fight against illicit drug trafficking, international organised crime, racism and xenophobia

The Presidency will continue those activities in the fields of justice and home affairs which have been launched as part of the multiannual work programme. The basis for this is the resolution adopted by the Council on 14 October 1996, which sets out the priorities for JHA cooperation in the period from 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1998. As far as this matter is concerned the council has expressed the desire to focus on a limited number of issues.

The Presidency will build on this and on the conclusions of the Dublin European Council, bearing in mind that the Council has emphasised its intention to do everything within its powers to combat organised crime. In this connection the Presidency would point to the importance of the report which the High Level Group appointed by the European Council will have to finalise. The Presidency is in favour of continuing the informal JHA councils, which have by now demonstrated their worth.

The Presidency has also identified a number of specific themes for cooperation in the field of justice and home affairs. They embrace efforts to combat illicit drug trafficking

- international organised crime
- racism and xenophobia.

The reason for selecting these issues is that they are currently regarded as the gravest dangers facing the Union.

As far as drugs are concerned, the Presidency will focus on improved practical cooperation in the fight against illicit trafficking, on the exchange of experience in the prevention of drug use, on joint action to combat addiction and to prevent and curb illicit drug trafficking. It is essential for the Member States to arrive at a joint approach which the citizens of Europe can recognise. A powerful boost will also be given to addiction prevention, notably by means of the action programme which has already been launched for this purpose.

Effective cooperation in the fields of asylum and immigration, police and customs affairs and judicial, criminal and civil matters is also required. Here, too, emphasis will be placed on practical measures.

The Netherlands is particularly concerned to see Europol become operational as soon as possible.

The Dutch work programme
Some of the spearheads of the Dutch work programme are listed below. The leitmotif here is practical cooperation, since this is the kind of cooperation most apparent to the people of Europe.

- Asylum and immigration

The issues to which the Netherlands attaches importance include practical cooperation in the implementation of the Dublin Agreement and the continuation of the discussions concerning the Eurodac system. Practical cooperation is also important as regards the return of nationals of third countries.

- Police and customs cooperation

The Netherlands' priority in this context is to work towards making Europol effectively operational. In addition to the efforts that all Member States will have to make to ensure that the Europol Convention is ratified at national level, implementation regulations in respect of Europol still need to be finalised.

Another priority is the fight against drugs, in so far as it concerns improved practical coordination at the European level to combat organised crime, especially drug-related crime. Attention will also be given to the prevention of organised drug-related crime.

- Judicial cooperation in criminal and civil matters

When it comes to cooperation in criminal matters, the Netherlands will continue to combat fraud and corruption with undiminished vigour. More work needs to be done on instruments developed under previous Presidencies, for example by adopting the explanatory reports regarding the Fraud Agreement and the 1st Protocol to this Agreement with a view to expediting ratification of these agreements by the Member States. In addition, the Netherlands will devote extra attention to specific issues, such as the transborder deployment of special investigation methods, cooperation in intercepting satellite communications and, where necessary, measures to reinforce cooperation in combating offences involving the dissemination of information on the Internet.

- "Horizontal" issues

The following are some of the subjects which merit special attention in various fields of cooperation:

- the fight against trafficking in human beings, including children, for the purpose of sexual exploitation
- the fight against organised crime (including the dissemination of child pornography) on the Internet.

- Relations with third countries

Finally, the Netherlands will also give priority to the structured dialogue for JHA cooperation with the countries of Central Europe, notably with respect to the JHA acquis concerning asylum matters as described in the work programme for these countries.