

Priorities and Programme of the Latvian Presidency of the EU

January 2015

For the first time, Latvia holds the European Union's (EU's) rotating Presidency.¹ Italy and Luxembourg are its trio partners. Luxembourg will take over the presidency on 1 July. Latvia is currently ruled by a centre-right government led by the Unity party and Laimdota Straujuma. This brief is an OSEPI summary of the Latvian Presidency's priorities that are relevant to the work of the Open Society Foundations.



Latvian Presidency
of the Council of the
European Union

Overarching priorities

- **Competitive Europe** – priorities include the generation of jobs and growth, through European Commission President Juncker's Investment Plan; strengthening of the Single Market; enhancing industrial competitiveness; and the establishment of an Energy Union.
- **Digital Europe** – priorities include a strengthened data protection framework; work on the Telecommunications market package; and a Digital Single Market strategy. Cybersecurity will be addressed through the implementation of the EU Cyber Security Strategy.
- **Engaged Europe** – priority areas include the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP); Central Asia; the post-2015 development agenda; transatlantic relations; and counter-terrorism.

Home Affairs

- **Internal security** – Propelled by the Paris attacks, security will feature prominently in the Latvian agenda. The main challenge concerns the fight against 'foreign fighters'. The Presidency has called for an enhanced exchange of information between police forces and intelligence services of member-states. It has also been quoted as a push factor for accelerating negotiations on the Passenger Name Record (PNR) regulation.
- **Free movement** – Free movement and the Schengen rules will not be called into question. However, the Latvian Presidency has declared itself to be open to review specific arrangements of the Free Movement Directive in order to best implement the right to free movement and fight its abuses. Ongoing initiatives include the Smart Borders Package and the reform of the Visa Code so as to streamline the procedure for short stays.
- **Migration and asylum** – The focus will be on consolidating channels of legal migration. Particular attention will be paid to the conditions of entry and residence for researchers,

¹ The presidency of the Council rotates among the EU member states every 6 months. During this 6-month period, the presidency chairs meetings at every level in the Council, helping to ensure the continuity of the EU's work in the Council. Member states holding the presidency work together closely in groups of three, called 'trios'. This system was introduced by the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. The trio sets long-term goals and prepares a common agenda determining the topics and major issues that will be addressed by the Council over an 18 month period. On the basis of this programme, each of the three countries prepares its own more detailed 6-month programme. The current trio is made up of the presidencies of Italy, Latvia and Luxembourg. <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/presidency-council-eu/>

students and other categories of high-skilled third country nationals. Externally, the Presidency intends to strengthen cooperation with third countries, with particular attention to the EaP countries. No explicit mention is made of the Mediterranean.

- **Equality** – No clear support has been shown with regards to the Horizontal Directive, which guarantees equal treatment in areas other than the workplace to all citizens, irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation. Regarding gender equality, the Presidency will focus on the gender gap in pensions and on the Commission’s proposal for a directive to improve the gender balance on company boards (“Women on board”).
- **Procedural rights** – The Presidency intends to pursue negotiations on and finally adopt the draft Directives for procedural safeguards for children who are under suspicion or accused in criminal proceedings, on the presumption of innocence and on the provision of legal aid.
- **Data protection** – A key priority of the Presidency, Latvia will seek to reach an agreement on proposals for a regulation on data protection and a directive for the protection of personal data by competent authorities for the purposes of the prevention, investigation, detection or prosecution of criminal offences, or the execution of criminal penalties. These efforts will be complemented by delivering on the EU Strategy on Cybercrime.

Foreign Affairs

- **European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership** – Latvia seeks to strengthen the ENP in the forthcoming review process. It pays particular attention to relations with the EaP countries, and seeks to strengthen political association, economic integration, trade, mobility, people-to-people contacts, educational exchange, and engagement with civil societies. Latvia will host the 4th EaP Summit in Riga on 21-22 May 2015.
- **Trade** – The Presidency considers TTIP and Free Trade Agreement negotiations with Japan and Vietnam as the top priorities of the EU’s bilateral trade. Other priorities include the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and the implementation of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs) with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. In addition, the Presidency seeks to achieve further progress on WTO multilateral negotiations, and on the Doha Development Agenda (DDA). It encourages ongoing WTO accession negotiations, including but not limited to Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, and Serbia.
- **Central Asia** – Latvia will facilitate the 2015 review of the EU-Central Asia strategy. It will promote dialogue and cooperation in the fields of energy, transport, sustainable development, the rule of law, and education. The scaling-down of the international security presence in Afghanistan in 2015 also requires greater EU attention in meeting common challenges of terrorism, border security and drug trafficking. The implementation of regional cooperation programmes (the Border Management Programme in Central Asia and the Central Asia Drug Action Programme) will be crucial in this respect.
- **Post-2015 development goals** – The Presidency will contribute to the international negotiations leading up to the UN Summit in September 2015. Gender equality and women’s empowerment, good governance, the rule of law, human rights, and inclusive, sustainable growth are seen to be of particular importance. Other priorities include preparations for the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in July 2015; and a reflection on future relations with ACP countries.

for more information: [The programme of the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.](#)

- **Security and Emergency Response** –
 - Latvia stresses the crucial cooperation with NATO in areas of capability development, military rapid response, and training and exercises. It underlines the importance of continued progress on security and defence issues, in particular on better civil-military cooperation in addressing the EU's maritime security risks and threats, and in improving cyber defence awareness and protection.
 - Regarding the external aspects of counter-terrorism, the Presidency will particularly engage in addressing the issue of foreign fighters, the financing of terrorism, radicalization and recruitment for terrorism.
 - It also seeks to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of EU humanitarian response by following up on the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid and the EU comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises.
- **Enlargement** – The Presidency is committed to moving forward with the ongoing accession negotiations with Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. The principle of conditionality will also guide the Presidency's work in advancing the European perspective of other Western Balkan countries, with EU membership as the ultimate goal.

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