

**Results of the Hellenic Presidency
of the Council of the European Union
1 January – 30 June 2014**



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Europe: Our Common Quest

The fifth Hellenic Presidency of the Council of the European Union concluded its mission and handed over to Italy. The Hellenic Presidency conducted its work at a period heavily affected by the ongoing economic crisis and its devastating effects in the social sphere. It was a period characterized by severe criticism of the EU and its way of functioning. This criticism and discontent were rather eloquently demonstrated during the recent European Parliament elections, when EU citizens proved to be quite vocal in their demand for a better Europe.

During the first semester of 2014, the Hellenic Presidency labored in an effort to lead the Union to a hopeful future, the future that the peoples and citizens of Europe deserve. We tried to turn the EU into a mature and potent political actor, one that, having learned from its past mistakes and delays, is capable of effective management of both internal as well as external challenges and opportunities. Our primary aim was to deliver tangible results for EU citizens under particularly difficult conditions. Our main objective was to find realistic solutions to the Union's very real and pressing problems.

During the Hellenic Presidency, 71 pieces of legislation were concluded. Work continued even after the European Parliament recess and agreement was reached within the Council on over 15 legislative acts.

Cooperation with the European parliament as well as with all EU Institutions has been exemplary. Since assuming the duties of the Presidency, Greece attempted to prioritize its work so as to reflect all issues of major impact to the average European citizen:

Further Integration of the EU and the Eurozone

First among the main priorities of the Hellenic Presidency has been tackling the EMU and eurozone's architectural deficiencies, which have been given new prominence due to the recent economic crisis. In this context, Greece paid special emphasis to EMU deepening, and particularly to the completion of the Banking Union. The conclusion of the Single Resolution Mechanism Regulation (SRM), together with the Inter-Governmental Agreement on the Single Resolution Fund (SRF), constitute a major step towards the completion of the Banking Union. Other important financial files have also been concluded, aiming at enhancing the transparency, soundness and responsibility of the financial system, at ensuring the financial markets' stability, whilst protecting the rights of private investors and consumers.

Growth – Jobs – Cohesion

On Jobs and Growth, (a) the approval of the own resources legislative package will ensure timely and steady financing of EU policies, in the framework of the Multiannual Financial Framework. (b) The agreement on the funding of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund secures the unimpeded funding of the new Common Fisheries Policy. Moreover, (c) the adoption of legislation, in the framework of the Single Market Act I and II, will further contribute to our common goals, namely enhancing the competitiveness of the European economy as a whole, by providing the necessary facilitation and safeguards to EU citizens and businesses.

Agreement was also reached on the participation of the Union in the capital increase of the European Investment Fund (EIF), thus further enhancing its capacity of restoring normal lending to the economy, and in particular to SMEs. Important investment files were also concluded, like the innovation investment package, that introduces a new generation of public and private partnerships facilitating innovation projects. Progress was made in the field of telecommunications and infrastructure with the adoption of two Directives (a) one aiming at reducing the cost of high-level electronic communications networks, and (b) one regulating alternative fuels infrastructure.

Migration – Borders – Mobility

In the field of border and migration management, which presents a major challenge not only for the European South, but for the Union as a whole, the Hellenic Presidency concluded two legislative files revising the list of countries whose citizens need to issue a visa before entering the EU, thus instituting a visa liberalization regime with another 20 third countries, including the Republic of Moldova. Other important and difficult achievements were the adoption of the directive on the conditions of entry and stay of third-country nationals in the context of Intra-Corporate Transfer (ICT), as well as the FRONTEX Regulation.

A major breakthrough has been the adoption at the June 2014 European Council of the Post Stockholm Strategic Guidelines for legislative and operational planning in the area of freedom, security and justice on which the Presidency, and the Council as a whole, has put a lot of work throughout the first semester of 2014. The Guidelines focus attention on (a) the implementation of the principle of solidarity in the areas of asylum, border and migration management, (b) the linkage between migration and the Union's foreign policy (cooperation with third countries, "more for more" principle), (c) the development of effective return, readmission and visa policies, (d) continuous attention to an effective internal security framework. This development marks a turning point on what has so far been perceived as migration management. It testifies that handling of migration is not a problem for the countries of the south, but a European problem, affecting the security of the European borders and the social cohesion in all European countries.

The Horizontal Thematic of Maritime Policies

The horizontal thematic of the Hellenic Presidency has been to redefine and relaunch EU maritime policies in all their aspects, including security, growth and energy. A key component of this has been the European Maritime Security Strategy, adopted by the June 2014 General Affairs Council and endorsed by the European Council of the same month. It is the first time that the EU is developing a holistic, cross-sectoral strategy of this kind, which will result in better protecting and promoting security and economic interests of EU and its member states at sea. This Strategy is a clear testimony that when political will exists, it is possible for the EU to overcome red tape practices and make good and full use of the unique ability it possesses to compose views, policies, ways and means so that it better safeguards security and prosperity of EU citizens.

GENERAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL (GAC)

European Semester - Growth and Jobs

In preparation of the European Council sessions in March and June, the GAC debated important issues related to Growth and Jobs, namely the EU 2020 Strategy, industrial competitiveness, climate and energy, taxation.

The European Semester process aims at developing and implementing the jointly agreed priorities to support growth and jobs, underpinned by the Stability and Growth Pact and the Europe 2020 Strategy. The process is at the heart of the EU's stronger post-crisis economic governance arrangements. The GAC coordinated the works of the different Council configurations involved in this process. The main messages were reflected in the synthesis report prepared by the Presidency and adopted by the GAC at the March session.

In June, the GAC further debated on growth, competitiveness and jobs thus paving the way for the endorsement by the EC of the country specific recommendations.

The effective management of the fourth European Semester cycle was an important objective of the Greek Presidency. The June European Council concluded the 2014 European Semester cycle by endorsing the country specific recommendations, designed to guide M-S in their structural reforms, employment and fiscal policy and their national budgets while promoting sustainable growth, reinforcing national ownership and preserving social dialogue.

Cohesion Policy/Regional Policy

EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region

Together with the European Commission and the other Adriatic and Ionian countries, the Hellenic Presidency prepared the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region (EUSAIR). The Strategy aims at fostering sustainable growth and jobs creation in the Adriatic and Ionian macroregion. More specifically, it intends to use the opportunities offered by Blue Growth and tourism so as to improve the connectivity and the attractiveness of the region, whilst safeguarding the region's environmental protection.

In this framework, the Hellenic Presidency and the European Commission organized a High level Conference on the EUSAIR on 6-7 February, in Athens. This conference allowed the finalization of public consultations with the stakeholders of the region and the recording of the region's needs. The conclusions of the conference fed the EUSAIR Communication that the Commission presented on 24 June.

Implementation of the Cohesion Policy legislative package

In the framework of the preparatory work for the implementation of the legislative package of the Cohesion Policy, four Commission Delegated Regulations were concluded under the Greek Presidency: one on the European Code of Conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds, one supplementing the Common Provisions Regulation for the European Structural and Investment Funds, one with regard to specific rules on eligibility of expenditure for cooperation programmes and, lastly, one with regard to the detailed rules concerning the principles for the selection and management of innovative actions in the area of sustainable urban development to be supported by the European Regional Development Fund.

Informal Ministerial Meeting on Cohesion Policy

Illustrating the great importance it attached to the Cohesion and Regional Policies of the EU, the Greek Presidency organized an Informal Ministerial Meeting on Cohesion Policy, on 24-25 April. At the meeting, attended by Ministers responsible for Cohesion and the Commissioner for Regional and Urban Policy, Mr Hahn, a wide exchange of views was held on urban development issues, ways

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to increase financial support to SMEs as well as on the possibilities to have a more structured and regular high-level strategic discussion on Cohesion Policy, twice a year, at a specially dedicated session of the General Affairs Council.

Solidarity

Adoption by both the Council and the EP of the amendment of the Regulation establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund

The EU solidarity fund's purpose is to provide financial assistance in the event of natural disasters and express European solidarity to disaster-stricken regions within Europe. The new regulation is aimed at making the EU solidarity fund more responsive and simpler to use, while also strengthening the incentives for disaster prevention and risk management.

Adoption of Council Decision on the rules and procedures for the implementation of the solidarity clause

The solidarity clause provides for the Union and its member states to act jointly in assisting another member state being the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or man-made disaster. Invoking the solidarity clause is a prerogative of the member state affected. While relying on existing instruments and structures, the decision adopted today provides for a close cooperation of all relevant actors at member state and EU level who will work hand in hand for a rapid, effective and coherent response. The decision also provides for an immediate activation of the Integrated Political Crisis Response arrangements (IPCR), a mechanism approved in June 2013 by the Council. This will allow a rapid involvement of the political authorities across the EU in order for the Council to ensure the strategic direction of the response and to take appropriate action to the benefit of the member state affected.

Outermost regions: adoption of five Council Decisions on special tax and duties measures for Madeira, the Azores, the Canary Islands and the French overseas departments

According to the TFEU, outermost regions can benefit from special measures, mainly tax and duty reductions, so as to counterbalance these regions' natural disadvantages due to size and distance from metropolitan Europe, that affect their economic and social conditions. During the Hellenic Presidency, the Council adopted all five proposals presented to it by the Commission as regards the Union's outermost regions. The Decisions concern the outermost regions of Portugal, namely the autonomous regions of Madeira and the Azores, as well as the Canary Islands of Spain, and the French overseas departments. Their aim is to help preserve these regions' vulnerable economic activities, whilst avoid any negative impact to competition conditions within the internal market.

Maritime Policies

Adoption of the EU Maritime Security Strategy

The June General Affairs Council adopted the European Maritime Security Strategy. Work on this important achievement was conducted in the framework of the Friends of Presidency Group, based on the relevant Joint EEAS-European Commission Communication. The adoption of this Strategy is important for two reasons (a) Member states managed to clearly define common interests and threats at Sea for the EU and its member states. Member states managed to organize more effectively our action and response to challenges at a domain that is crucial for the security and prosperity of our citizens. At the same time, the field of maritime security was broadened to cover areas beyond defense and to include growth and jobs, so as to highlight the great potential the Sea holds for dealing with recession and unemployment, with due respect to the environment. Energy security and development of indigenous sources of energy could not but be part of such a Strategy, especially today. The EU's Blue Energy Strategy and the Ocean Energy Forum created in June 2014 are also significant in this regard. (b) Member states agreed that we must take advantage of all

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ways we have and introduce synergies between institutions and policies, so that no opportunity to produce tangible results is missed when promoting strategic interests of EU and its member states at Sea. No new structures were created, nor needs for extra funding generated. It was confirmed in practice that the demand of the EU citizens for better and more effective Europe was understood and member states acted upon it.

First reading agreement with the EP on the framework for maritime spatial planning

Maritime spatial planning is a process by which the relevant member state authorities analyse and organise human activities in marine areas to achieve ecological, economic and social objectives. This Directive is an essential part of the ambition to develop "Europe's Blue Economy", in the context of EU's Integrated Maritime Policy, and forms part of the horizontal thematic of the Hellenic Presidency aiming at relaunching and refocusing on the EU's Maritime Policies. It is aimed at contributing to sustainable growth of maritime economies and the sustainable development of marine areas; it is envisaged to have substantial consequences in the sector of tourism, as well as the environment, mainly by enhancing land-sea connectivity.

Adoption of Council Conclusion on Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP)

The conclusions include the achievements and future developments in the area of Integrated Maritime Policy.

Enlargement

In line with the Council conclusions of 17 December 2013, the Greek Presidency has been fully committed to advance the enlargement process. Greece remains committed to the strategic objective of European integration of the Western Balkans region, as the basic means of promoting peace, stability, economic development and prosperity in SE Europe. Following up on another Greek initiative, the Thessaloniki Agenda, the framework for enhanced relations between the EU and the countries of the region, adopted during the 2003 Hellenic Presidency, Greece organized an EU-Western Balkans Ministerial Conference in Thessaloniki, in May 2014. The key messages of the Conference were the reaffirmation of the EU's unequivocal commitment to the European perspective of the region and the confirmation of the Western Balkan countries' commitment to the demanding EU-related reforms. These messages are not devoid of political significance, especially in the present socio-economic circumstances, and cannot be taken for granted. The same Conference focused on the achievements and main challenges of the enlargement policy in the Western Balkans and discussed a framework for the promotion of key infrastructure projects in the energy and transport sectors, with a view to better connecting the Western Balkans internally and with the EU. Such projects can promote competitiveness and growth in the region as well as the connectivity of the entire European continent.

With regard to the European integration of each Western Balkan country, it should be mentioned that the Hellenic Presidency saw the opening of accession negotiations with Serbia, worked for the achievement of consensus on granting Albania candidate status, and contributed considerably in achieving significant progress in the accession negotiations with Montenegro. EU relations with Kosovo* were also moved forward, with the negotiations of the Stabilization and Association Agreement; in the same period, the EU decided to intensify its cooperation with Bosnia&Herzegovina in order to help the country progress towards the EU. As regards the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, there was a follow-up of its progress according to the Council conclusions.

Finally, as regards Turkey, the Hellenic Presidency remains supportive of Turkey's EU accession bid. In this respect, the Presidency made efforts and thoroughly explored the possibilities for achieving tangible progress. The EU-Turkey Association Council, held in Luxemburg on 23 June 2014, provided an opportunity to review the state of relations between the European Union and Turkey.

Non-EU Western Europe

Negotiating mandate for an EU-Switzerland institutional framework agreement

The Council adopted a decision authorising the opening of negotiations on an agreement between the EU and Switzerland on an institutional framework governing bilateral relations. Relations with Switzerland are currently based on a complex system of more than 120 sector-specific agreements covering a wide range of EU policies, including Swiss participation in many areas of the EU's internal market. After developments in Switzerland on the migration referendum, the opening of negotiations is depending on a solution compatible with EU relevant legislation.

EU relations with the Principality of Andorra, the Republic of San Marino and the Principality of Monaco

The Presidency also managed to achieve tangible progress on almost all issues regarding the adoption of a Council decision authorizing the opening of negotiations with the three aforementioned states on one or more framework agreements governing their association with the EU. Given the special relations of these countries with certain EU member states, the finalization of the text of the decision will need more time and will probably be concluded during the next Presidencies.

Institutional issues

First reading agreement with the EP on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations

The new regulation constitutes a breakthrough in institutional issues, a qualitative leap for European representative democracy that will enable truly transnational European political parties to play their role in bridging the gap between national and EU politics. Among the most important innovations introduced by the regulation are: a) the establishment of European legal personality for European political parties and European political foundations, b) the reinforced control of respect to EU values by European political parties and foundations, c) the fact that the verification of the requirement for granting European legal status, registration and eventual de-registration of European political parties will be managed by an independent Authority, in consultation with a committee of independent persons, d) the increased flexibility for funding of European political parties and European political foundations, without any increase of the share of EU budget allocated to European political parties.

Informal meetings

The EU better governance has been among the Presidency's priorities. Therefore, we circulated relevant ideas and put crucial institutional issues on the agenda of informal high-level meetings in Athens, namely the January EU Directors' General informal meeting and the May informal GAC. The Dutch proposal about reviewing subsidiarity principle in the EU was extensively discussed. Also an exchange of views was held on the issues of the inter-institutional relations after the last elections, as well as on the GAC's reinforcement of its strategic and coordinating role within the Council.

Our starting point was that the Treaties in force, which were concluded after long and difficult negotiations, are adequate for the EU effective functioning and provide opportunities not yet fully exploited. In this context, the Presidency achieved a constructive exchange of views on controversial issues. The incremental approach, that the Presidency suggested and implemented, resulted in some useful initial guidelines on the way forward. Greece is of the view that the focus should not be on limiting the Commission's action, but on its enhanced accountability to a strong and democratic EP, along with a reinforced vision of solidarity and unity.

Work still ongoing for future Presidencies

The Permanent Representatives Committee endorsed the Hellenic Presidency's initiative to complement the Common Understanding on delegated acts as regards the consultation of experts. Following the endorsement, the Commission will have a first presentation of its position until the end of July 2014, before the opening of negotiations among the three institutions.

The Hellenic Presidency held a first debate at the March 2014 General Affairs Council, based on the Commission Communication regarding the establishment of a Rule of Law mechanism for the protection of the fundamental values of the European Union. This proposal, an initiative of four member states, was also the subject of an informal exchange of views at Coreper level in June.

Nuclear issues

Council agreement on a framework for the nuclear safety of nuclear installations

The Fukushima nuclear accident in Japan in 2011 brought renewed worldwide attention to the measures needed to minimise risk and ensure the most robust levels of nuclear safety. The revised directive introduces EU-wide nuclear safety objectives that aim to limit the consequences of a potential nuclear accident as well as address the safety of the entire lifecycle of nuclear installations (siting, design, construction, commissioning, operation and decommissioning of nuclear plants), including on-site emergency preparedness and response.

The directive further strengthens the independence and role of the national regulatory authorities. As the consequences of a nuclear accident can go beyond national borders, close cooperation, coordination and information exchange between regulatory authorities of member states in the vicinity of a nuclear installation is encouraged.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL (FAC)

Common Foreign and Security Policy – Common Security and Defence Policy

According to the institutional framework established by the Treaty of Lisbon, the Presidency of the Foreign Affairs Council was assigned to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The European External Action Service, which assists the High Representative in his/her role, was accordingly assigned the Chairmanship of the Political and Security Committee as well as of the vast majority of the related Working Groups.

However, the rotating Presidency retains the Chairmanship of the Working Group “External Relations Counselors” (RELEX), in the framework of which technical and legal decisions are adopted, to implement the relevant political ones in the field of foreign affairs. These decisions include, inter alia, the imposition of restrictive measures and the establishment of Operations and Missions in the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). During the Greek Presidency, more than 70 legal acts were adopted. The most important ones are mentioned below:

Council Decision and Regulation concerning the Iranian nuclear programme, suspending some of the restrictive measures, following the adoption of the Joint Plan of Action by the E3/EU+3 and Iran.

Adoption of Guidelines for the EU Special Representatives (EUSRs), revising and developing the ones adopted in 2007 in order to adjust them to the framework of the Lisbon Treaty. In particular, the procedures concerning the appointment of EUSRs and the definition of their mandates were updated, the issues of the termination of their mandates were further clarified and the reporting and evaluation mechanism of the EUSRs was elaborated in greater detail.

Council Decisions extending the mandates of two EUSRs, the ones for Human Rights and Afghanistan, until 28 February 2015.

Council Decision and Regulation prohibiting the import of goods from Crimea and Sevastopol, as a result of their illegal annexation.

Council Decision on the revision of the functioning of the “EU Institute for Security Studies”.

Council Decision on the revision of the functioning the “EU Satellite Center”.

Council Decision on the establishment of the new Common Foreign and Security Policy (CSDP) military operation in the Central African Republic “EUFOR RCA” as well as on the designation of Larissa EU Operation Headquarters as the Operation Headquarters of the operation (OHQ). It was followed by the Council Decision on the launch of the Operation (written procedure).

Council Decision on the establishment of the new CSDP civilian mission “EUCAP Sahel Mali” in Mali.

Council Decisions on the renewal of the mandate of the CSDP military operation EUTM Mali as well as of the mandate of the CSDP civilian missions EULEX Kosovo, EUCAP Sahel Niger, EUPOL COPPS, EUBAM Rafah.

European Neighbourhood Policy

Southern Dimension

The developments taking place in the last three years in the countries of the Southern Neighbourhood are of a paramount importance. It has been proven that time is necessary for the transition to produce sustainable results. Our Southern Neighbours should be supported in their reform efforts. We moved towards this direction during the previous semester, utilizing fully the

traditional bonds which Greece shares with the countries of the Middle East and North Africa and in close cooperation with the Mediterranean member states.

Our goal was and remains for the E.U. to maintain high on the agenda its relations with its Mediterranean partners. In this context, Greece hosted in Athens the 3rd Ministerial Meeting of the E.U. and of the League of Arab States (10-11/6/2014) and the Ministerial Meeting of the Union for the Mediterranean on Environment and Climate Change (13/5/2014). We also placed under the auspices of the Hellenic Presidency, in collaboration with the League of Arab States, the Conference of the *Economist* on “Europe and the Arab World: Fortifying Political, Business and Investment Ties” (5-6/5/2014).

A southern Mediterranean Investment Coordination Initiative (AMICI)

The Vice-President of Government and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic, Mr. Evangelos Venizelos, presented in Council the joint Greek-Italian initiative AMICI, that aims at rationalizing the use of available funding and resources for public investments in the countries of the Southern Dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, thus minimizing the risk of overlaps and maximizing the effectiveness of the actions taken, through the enhanced strategic coordination of the main actions, aiming at improving the investment environment in these countries, particularly for SMEs, at attracting foreign investments and at enhancing the political dialogue and cooperation at regional level. The Hellenic Presidency moved forward with the implementation of the initiative, through the creation of a special working group that will list all existing EU financing instruments, means and programmes and that will submit its conclusions and proposals to the Council. Based on the working groups’ proposals, a coordinating platform of investments in the region will be created by the end of the Italian Presidency.

Eastern Partnership

In the margins of the European Council of 27 June 2014 the Association Agreements/Deep Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (AA/DCFTAs) with Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, as well as the remaining trade chapters of the same Agreement with Ukraine were signed. Earlier in the semester, in the margins of the European Council of 6 March 2014, the EU has signed the political chapters of the Agreement with Ukraine. The AA/DCFTAs are aiming to enhance the political cooperation and the gradual economic integration of the Partners. Together with the European institutions, the Presidency has worked at a tight schedule to shorten the period of signature of the AA/DCFTAs and to complete the lifting of visa requirements for Moldovan citizens on 28 April 2014. From the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis, the EU has adopted a firm and determined stance on issues of international law and has extended important political, financial and technical support to Ukraine. The Greek Presidency has organized bilateral visits with Eastern Partnership countries, namely Ukraine, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Azerbaijan and has supported the cooperation with Eastern Partners according to the needs of each Partner and without dilemmas concerning their choices.

Development Cooperation

First reading agreement with the EP on setting 2015 as the European Year of Development

The Decision sets 2015 as the European Year for Development, aiming at enhancing EU citizens’ information, direct participation and active engagement with the Union’s development cooperation policies, so as to instil a sense of co-responsibility and solidarity between European and developing countries’ citizens.

Adoption of Council conclusions on a rights-based approach to development cooperation

The Council promotes the horizontal integration of human rights in the definition, drafting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all development policies and programs. This

approach is based on the premise that human rights principles and models are both the aim and the means towards effective development cooperation.

Adoption of Council conclusions on an EU development and cooperation results framework

The Council welcomed the relevant Commission Staff Working Document and stressed the need to improve development assistance monitoring and evaluation. The Council aims at enhancing the accountability, transparency, and visibility of EU development assistance.

Adoption of Council conclusions on the EU Development Aid Targets

The Council reported to the European Council on the Union's commitments and achievements as regards its Official Development Assistance. The Council, taking into account the continuing budgetary restraints of the Union and its member states, expresses its concern as regards the current levels of EU Official Development Assistance and reiterates the EU's commitment towards achieving its development aid targets and its comprehensive approach to the mobilization of funds and other means by all available resources (public/private, national/international) in support of developing countries.

EU common position on the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation

The Council adopted conclusions on the EU common position for the first high-level meeting of the global partnership for effective development cooperation, which will take place in Mexico City on 15/16 April 2014. The conclusions focus on the mobilization of domestic resources, on the role of the private sector in development, on South-South cooperation and on triangular cooperation, as well as on the challenges for Middle-Income Countries.

Adoption of Council conclusions on the role of the private sector in development

The Council highlights the importance of supporting private sector development in EU partner countries and of enhancing the cooperation between the private sectors of the EU and partner countries. It also recognizes the decisive role the private sector plays in poverty reduction, sustainable development and inclusive growth.

The Hellenic Presidency also presented a chair summary of discussions in the relevant working group as regards the challenges and opportunities arising from innovation and private sector engagement in the humanitarian field, that could function as a reference document for future discussions on the subject.

Adoption of Council conclusions on gender equality and women's empowerment in development 2010-2015

The Council welcomed the 2013 report on the implementation of the EU Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development 2010-2015. It reiterated its commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment as basic principles and values of the EU and its developmental policy, noting that the achievement of the Action Plan's targets is a central element of the Union's rights-based approach to development cooperation.

European Development Fund

The Council amended the regulation on the implementation of the 10th European Development Fund (EDF), as regards the Commission's management of the EDF bridging facility in the transition period between the 10th EDF (2007-2013) and the 11th EDF (2014-2020), until the entry into force of the legal acts underpinning the 11th EDF, i.e. the internal agreement and the implementation regulation. The Council also amended the financial regulation of the 10th EDF, as regards the management of resources in the transition period between the 10th EDF (2007-2013) and the entry into force of the legal acts underpinning the 11th EDF (which is to cover the period 2014-2020). Finally, the Council adopted a Decision on the financial contributions of Member States for the financing of the European Development Fund in 2014.

Relations with ACP countries (Africa – Caribbean – Pacific)

On 17-19 March 2014, the Hellenic Presidency welcomed in Strasbourg the 27th ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly and represented the EU Council in the deliberations. In the margins of the Assembly, the Presidency also organised, in partnership with the European Investment Bank, a highly successful workshop on private sector development and investments on renewable energy sources in ACP countries.

The Hellenic Presidency also co-chaired the ACP-EU Council of Ministers that took place in Kenya, on 19-20 June 2014. ACP and EU countries agreed on a joint declaration for a global development agenda for the time after 2015, once the current Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) reach their target date. In the margins of the Council, a roundtable was organised, where the Presidency, represented by Deputy Foreign Minister Kyriakos Gerontopoulos, presented the Greek and European experience on issues of renewable energy sources and climate change.

In the field of legislature, the Council adopted a decision on the EU position within the ACP-EU Council of Ministers as regards the revision of Annex IV to the ACP-EU Partnership Agreement. The review is intended to align the agreement with the new financial regulation applicable to the EU budget and the provisions for implementation of the instruments for external action under the EU multi-annual financial framework 2014-2020.

Finally, the Council also adopted two decisions on the application of article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement as regards Zimbabwe and Madagascar. More specifically, the Council decided to extend and suspend the application of article 96 measures against Zimbabwe, as a result of the latter's holding of elections in the summer of 2013, while it decided to lift the afore-mentioned measures against Madagascar, in light of the latter's Presidential elections, held in December 2013, as well as the subsequent swearing in of a new government after many years of absence of democratic institutions.

Adoption of Council conclusions on Small Island developing states

The Council adopted the EU common position for the third international conference on Small Island Developing States, to be held in Apia, Samoa, from 1 to 4 September 2014.

Humanitarian Aid

EU Aid Volunteers

Following the adoption and official publication of the regulation establishing the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps, the Hellenic Presidency organised, in cooperation with the Commission a specialized experts' seminar on the needs assessment of the corps.

Evaluation of the implementation of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid

The Hellenic Presidency analysed the conclusions and recommendations of the final draft of the evaluation report on the Action Plan for the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, as well as the relevant evaluation report.

Trade

First reading agreement with the EP on the exercise of the Union's rights for the application and enforcement of international trade rules

The new Regulation enables the EU to take the appropriate countermeasures against attitudes and practices of third countries that violate obligations stemming from international multi- and bilateral trade agreements of which the EU is a signatory, to the detriment of the interests of Member States. This Regulation shall, consequently, enhance the credibility of the EU as a trade partner.

First reading agreement with the EP on a framework for managing responsibility linked to investor-state dispute settlement tribunals established by international agreements to which the EU is party

This new policy, part of a broader EU framework for investment protection policy, is a key element of the EU's investment policy, establishing new rules on investment in negotiations with key trading partners. It specifies how cooperation between the Commission and the member states should be structured in specific cases, managing the financial consequences of investor-state disputes. It settles two major issues: the allocation of responsibility (defendant) and the allocation of financial responsibility. The new Regulation specifies particularly complex legal issues that have very important economic consequences on the EU and member states' budgets.

Trade in environmental goods

The Council adopted conclusions and negotiating directives on a "green goods initiative" for the liberalisation of trade in environmental goods. Welcoming this initiative by WTO members, the Council called for a rapid start to negotiations as the first step towards establishing it on a multilateral basis. It expressed support for the elimination of tariffs on a broad range of products that contribute to green growth, environmental protection and sustainable development. It emphasised the need to explore the ground for the liberalisation of environmental services, including trade-related services, and to address non-tariff barriers to environmental goods and services.

Adoption of Council conclusions on the Union's Approach on responsible sourcing of minerals

The conclusions recall that trade in minerals holds great potential for development. However, when minerals are sourced from conflict-affected and high-risk areas their trade can intensify or perpetuate violent conflict and undermine development, stabilization efforts, good governance, human rights and the rule of law. Breaking the links between conflict and minerals extraction is a complex challenge and one that is critical to stability and peace. The Union's approach on responsible sourcing of minerals is in line with the general EU strategy on raw materials.

Trade Agreements with third countries

The Council adopted negotiating directives a) for the negotiations with Gabon according to Article XXVIII of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) 1994 and b) for the negotiation of an investment protection agreement with Myanmar/Burma.

The Council also adopted a decision on the conclusion of the Revised Memorandum of Understanding with the United States of America regarding the importation of beef from animals not treated with certain growth-promoting hormones and increased duties applied by the United States to certain products of the European Union. It also adopted a decision on the conclusion of the Agreement in the form of an Exchange of Letters between the European Union and the People's Republic of China pursuant to Article XXIV:6 and Article XXVIII of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) 1994 relating to the modification of concessions in the schedules of the Republic of Bulgaria and Romania in the course of their accession to the European Union.

Finally, during the Hellenic Presidency, the EU signed an Additional Protocol to the Free Trade Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Korea, of the other part, to take account of the accession of Croatia to the European Union. Furthermore, negotiations continued intensively for the conclusion of a TTIP with the United States, as well as with Japan for the conclusion of a Free Trade Agreement, following the positive result of the examination of the progress of negotiations clause by the Council.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL (ECOFIN)

EU - EMU – Eurozone integration

First reading agreement with the EP on new rules for damages under national law for infringements of competition law provisions

Infringements of EU competition law such as cartels or abuses of dominant market positions cause serious harm, not only to the economy as a whole, but also to businesses and consumers. The new directive will harmonise and ensure the effective enforcement of antitrust damages rules within the EU, thereby allowing the victims of a cartel to receive full compensation for both the actual loss suffered and for lost profits.

First reading agreement with the EP on migration to Union-wide credit transfers and direct debits

The new proposal amends the Regulation on the Single Euro Payments Area so as to delay its full entry into force by six months (until the 1st of August 2014), thus avoiding any consequent disruption of payment systems. The Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA) will result from the merging of all retail payment markets in the euro area. Within SEPA, all euro payments will be treated as domestic payments and the current differentiation between national and cross-border payments will cease.

Adoption of recommendation approving Lithuania's adoption of the euro on 1st January 2015

The member states agreed with the Commission's assessment that Lithuania has achieved a high degree of sustainable convergence with the euro area, and that it therefore fulfils the conditions for adopting the euro as its currency. The recommendation will be referred to the European Council for discussion and to the European Parliament for an opinion before a decision is taken.

Banking Union

First reading agreement with the EP on the Single Resolution Mechanism

The aim of the Regulation is to create a single resolution authority to stand side by side to single supervision authority, coupled with the creation a single resolution fund. It constitutes the final step towards the completion of the Banking Union, one of the chief priorities of the Union over the past years and its most important achievement towards EMU integration since the adoption of the euro in 2002. The new Mechanism ensures that any decisions as regards the resolution of Eurozone banks will be taken in a coordinated and effective manner, thus minimizing its negative effects on financial stability and breaking the vicious circle of interdependence between banks' lending capacity, sovereign debt and governments' credit ratings.

Long-term financing of the economy

First reading agreement with the EP on the participation of the Union in the capital increase of the European Investment Fund

The decision provides for the purchase on behalf of the Union of 450 additional shares of the European Investment Fund, in the context of the latter's capital increase. These shares, each with a nominal value of 1,000,000 €, aim at improving SMEs' access to finance, at developing capital markets loans to SMEs, at supporting the EIF's role as primary investor in venture capital markets and at enhancing its role at micro-financing and at socially beneficial investments.

General Approach of the Council on European long-term investment funds (ELTIFs)

The agreement aims at creating a new investment tool for the non-banking financing of the European economy. Finding new sources for long-term financing is a very crucial parameter for putting the European economy back to the path of growth. Long Term Investment Funds (ELTIF's) are designed to contribute to the development of infrastructure projects. According to the Regulation's provisions, investment should focus for example on schools, hospitals, social housing, motorways, industrial production units and other projects with significant added value for the EU citizens, rather than on short-term speculative projects.

The new tool will also be important for financing of small and medium companies (SMEs), many of which have limited alternative sources of finance.

One of the main objectives of the Regulation is to establish harmonised rules of functioning and supervision of the ELTIF's, so that it is possible to promote an ELTIF which has been created and authorised in one Member State to other Member States (passporting), enhancing thus the efficiency and functioning of the internal market.

The agreement does not provide for a redemption right of the investor before the expiry of the lifecycle of the ELTIF. Nevertheless, many important safeguards have been added for the protection of retail investors. A retail investor shall be able to invest in an ELTIF if his portfolio's value is at least 100.000 euros and should never invest more than 10% of this total portfolio in an ELTIF, given the illiquidity of this product.

Moreover, financial advisors and managers should evaluate carefully the profile of the investor and conduct a suitability test, before they propose to him to participate in the ELTIF's capital. Finally, the units or shares of an authorised ELTIF shall not be marketed in the Union without prior publication of a prospectus, which shall include the information necessary for investors to be able to make an informed judgement regarding the investment proposed to them, and, in particular, the risks attached thereto.

Reform of the financial sector supervisory framework

First reading agreement with the EP on the markets in financial instruments Regulation and Directive (MiFID/MiFIR)

The "MIFID" proposals are aimed at promoting the integration, competitiveness, and efficiency of EU financial markets. They set out to amend and replace existing rules for markets in financial instruments, which have been outpaced by market and technological developments, by two new legislative instruments: 1) a Regulation improving transparency and competition of trading activities by limiting the use of waivers on disclosure requirements and by providing for non-discriminatory access to trading venues and central counterparties (CCPs) for all financial instruments, and requiring derivatives to be traded on organised venues; and 2) a Directive amending rules on the authorisation and organisational requirements for providers of investment services and on investor protection.

The proposals cover the provision by banks and investment firms of services such as brokerage, financial advice, dealing, portfolio management and underwriting. They set out to ensure that all organised trading is conducted on regulated trading venues: regulated markets, multilateral trading facilities and organised trading facilities. Strengthened requirements are introduced in relation to organisation, transparency and market surveillance in all three types of venue.

First reading agreement with the EP on the payment accounts directive (PAD)

The draft directive is intended to enable consumers to make informed choices when opening a payment account, by improving the transparency and comparability of information on account fees. It will also enable consumers to switch accounts more easily, whilst eliminating discrimination based on residency. Thus, the directive is expected to achieve a dual goal: contribute to market

integration in the banking services sector, as well as to the financial inclusion of all EU citizens and residents in the afore-mentioned market.

First reading agreement with the EP on undertakings for collective investment in transferable securities (UCITS)

This Directive was drafted in response to the Madoff scandal. It enhances investor confidence and protection by introducing additional safeguards as regards depositary functions, avoids excessive risk taking by establishing appropriate remuneration policies and harmonises at a European level administrative sanctions.

First reading agreement with the EP on key information documents for investment products (PRIIPs)

The draft regulation, part of a package of proposals intended to boost consumer trust in financial markets, sets out to ensure that retail investors always receive the information they need to take informed decisions. It covers packaged retail and insurance-based investment products (PRIIPs), specifically investment funds, structured deposits and life insurance policies with an investment element. The investment products targeted are usually sold by either banks or insurance companies.

General Approach of the Council on money laundering and terrorist financing Directive and Regulation (AMLD/AMLR)

This new legislative package updates the current framework and strengthens the available tools for the fight against money laundering and terrorism financing. The agreed text integrates the revised recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), going even well beyond FATF's Recommendations in some of its provisions, establishing even stricter and more binding rules.

A key aspect of the Directive is the enhancement of the provisions of compulsory storage of the data of beneficial owners of companies or other legal entities. It also ensures the access of judicial or other authorities, including the Financial Intelligence Units to these data, in case there is a well-founded suspicion of money laundering. The authorities will be able to access the data without alerting the entity concerned, avoiding thus prior warning (tipping-off) of the suspects through the companies.

With regard to the transfer of funds, the Regulation provides for verification of the identity of the payer for all transactions irrespective of the amount transferred, when the transaction is made with cash or anonymous e-money.

The new legislative framework responds to the demand of the international community for greater transparency of ownership of companies and follows the G7 commitments.

Regulation on improving securities settlement and on Central Securities Depositories (CDS)

The Hellenic Presidency conducted the final technical trilogues with the EP and finalized the text of the Regulation, thus confirming the political agreement reached between the EU institutions during the Lithuanian Presidency.

Taxation

Adoption by the Council of the taxation of savings income directive

The amended directive is intended to ensure the taxation of interest and other similar income that has been generated in one member state by residents of another member state according to the legislation of the country of tax residence. It constitutes a decisive step in the fight against tax evasion and tax fraud. By enlarging its scope, the directive is intended to cover new types of savings income, and products that generate interest or equivalent income, reflecting recent changes to savings products and developments in investor behavior. This would include life insurance contracts, as well as a broader coverage of investment funds. Moreover tax authorities, using a

"look-through" approach, would be required to take steps to identify who is benefiting from interest payments.

Political agreement of the Council on the amendment of the parent-subsidiary Directive

The proposed amendment to the EU's parent-subsidiary directive would enable member states to avoid losses in tax revenues from corporate groups. Furthermore, it would help create a level playing field between groups with parent companies and subsidiaries located in different countries and those that have all entities based in a single member state.

Council approval of the introduction of a financial transaction tax (FTT) in 11 member states through the "enhanced cooperation" procedure.

The Council had decided to allow enhanced cooperation on the FTT to proceed after a proposal for an EU-wide FTT failed to obtain unanimous support. The participating countries are Belgium, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Austria, Portugal, Slovenia and Slovakia. The new proposal retains the objectives of the initial proposal, namely: harmonising the features of the FTT within the participating member states; enabling the financial sector to make a fair and substantial contribution to tax revenues; and complementing regulatory and supervisory measures by creating a disincentive to transactions that do not enhance the efficiency of financial markets.

Adoption of Council conclusions on the Code of Conduct – Business Taxation

The June 2014 ECOFIN Council adopted Council conclusions on the implementation of a code of conduct aimed at eliminating situations of harmful tax competition, in the light of a six-monthly report of the results of the relevant working group.

EU Budget

Adoption by the Council of the own resources legislative package

The own resources legislative package comprises of three legislative files that were all adopted by the Council during the Hellenic Presidency. The own resources legislative package is related to the EU's multiannual financial framework (MFF) 2014-2020. Its adoption ensures the unimpeded flow of revenue to the EU budget and, thus, the timely and steady financing of EU policies.

First reading agreement with the EP on the adjustment for the years 2011 and 2012 of the remunerations and pensions of the EU officials and other servants

The two regulations are based on an exception clause which allows the Council and the European Parliament in case of a serious and sudden deterioration in the economic and social situation within the EU to deviate from the standard adjustment method, which is aimed at ensuring a parallel evolution of the purchasing power of national officials of eight member states with EU civil servants. For 2011, the salaries and pensions of EU officials have been frozen, taking into account the financial and economic crisis affecting a number of member states in autumn 2011, the high levels of unemployment, public deficit and debt. For 2012, the adjustment of remuneration and pensions has been set at 0.8%, reflecting the economic recession in the EU, the deterioration of the social situation and the continuing high levels of unemployment, public deficit and debt in the EU. If the standard adjustment method had been applied, the EU officials' salaries and pensions would have increased by 1.7% in each of these years.

First reading agreement with the EP on amendments to the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union

The new Regulation amends the EU's so-called financial regulation in order to take into account the outcome of the negotiations on the multiannual financial framework for the years 2014-2020. The new regulation includes in particular the carry-over rules for the emergency aid reserve and for projects financed under the connecting Europe facility. The EU financial regulation contains all the

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principles and rules for the implementation of the EU budget and is applicable to all areas of EU expenditure and all revenue.

Financing of political parties

The Council reached a first reading agreement with the EP on the amendment to the regulation as regards the financing of European political parties. The new Regulation provides for the necessary amendments to the Financial Regulation as regards the financing of European political parties, following the afore-mentioned adoption of the Regulation on the statute and funding of European political parties (see: General Affairs Council).

Discharge for 2012

The Council adopted a recommendation to the European Parliament on the discharge to be given to the Commission for implementation of the EU's general budget for 2012.

Guidelines for the Budget of the Union for 2015

The Council adopted Council conclusions on the guidelines of the EU budget for 2015.

Excessive Deficit Procedure

In the context of implementation of the Stability Pact, the Council initiated and closed excessive deficit procedures for Croatia, and adopted decisions abrogating previous Council decisions on the existence of excessive deficits in Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, the Netherlands, Austria and Slovakia, confirming that these countries have reduced their deficits below 3% of GDP, the EU's reference value for government deficits. The Council also adopted Terms of Reference on the review of the methodology for the assessment of effective action in the context of the Excessive Deficit Procedure.

Statistics

The Council reached a first reading agreement with the EP on the amendment of Community statistics relating to trading of goods between Member States. The new Regulation's aim is to align the existing legal framework with the new institutional framework, and to increase the exchange of confidential data between the competent national authorities of member-states, thus enhancing the quality of EU statistics on internal trade and the overall system's effectiveness.

Macro-financial assistance to EU neighbourhood countries

First reading agreement with the EP to provide macro-financial assistance to Tunisia

The decision grants up to €300m in loans to Tunisia to support its economic stabilisation and reforms and to cover its balance of payments needs. Tunisia's economy was significantly affected by the 2010 Arab Spring and by regional unrest that followed, as well as by a weak global economic environment. The macro-financial assistance will be made available for a period of two and a half years, starting from the first day after the entry into force of a memorandum of understanding to be agreed between Tunisia and the EU. It will have a maximum maturity of 15 years.

Adoption of Council decision to provide macro-financial assistance to Ukraine

The Decision grants the provision by the EU of macro-financial assistance of up to 1 billion euros, with the aim to support Ukraine in meeting its immediate external financing needs. The assistance complements the resources made available by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other donors in the context of the stabilisation and reform programme recently launched by the Ukrainian authorities and is conditional on the implementation of reforms focusing on public finance management and anti-corruption, trade and taxation, the energy and financial sector reforms.

Work still ongoing for future Presidencies

The Presidency presented four compromise proposals and a progress report at the ECOFIN Council as regard the Directive restructuring the Community framework for the taxation of energy products and electricity.

The Council also adopted a progress report and Council conclusions on the way forward of work on the Directive as regards a common, standard VAT return.

The Presidency achieved the unanimous adoption by the member states and the Commission of the text on the amendment of the Regulation on European statistics that was subsequently handed over to the Italian Presidency for its further negotiations with the EP. The Presidency also achieved remarkable progress as regards the Regulation on the provision and quality of statistics for the macroeconomic imbalances procedure (MIP).

The Presidency labored to progress discussions at technical level on the Regulation on indices used as benchmarks in financial instruments and financial contracts and on the Directive on payment services in the internal market.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS COUNCIL (JHA)

JUSTICE

Justice for Growth

First reading agreement with the EP on the European Account Preservation Order

The aim of the proposed regulation is to facilitate cross-border debt recovery by creating a European procedure leading to the issue of a European Account Preservation Order. This will be available to citizens and businesses as an alternative to national procedures, but will not replace them. It will apply only to cross-border cases. By means of this new European procedure a creditor will be able to block funds held by the debtor in a bank account in a member state and thereby prevent the debtor from dissipating such funds with the aim of frustrating the creditor's efforts to recover his debt. Under specific conditions, it will also be possible for a creditor to obtain information on the existence of account(s) of the debtor in a specific member state.

First reading agreement with the EP on the recognition and enforcement of judgments in civil and commercial matters

The aim of the proposal is to amend the Brussels I regulation so as to allow the rules of that regulation to be applied also by two courts common to several member states: the Unified Patent Court and the Benelux Court of Justice. Those two Courts established by international agreements may exercise jurisdiction in matters falling within the scope of the Brussels I regulation, i.e. the new European patent law.

General Approach in Council on insolvency proceedings

The new legislation will make cross-border insolvency proceedings more efficient, quicker and effective, with a view to ensuring a smooth functioning of the internal market and its resilience in economic crises, thus responding to the need for small and medium businesses to survive the current financial crisis. The new Regulation institutes for the first time pre-bankruptcy proceedings, so as to offer viable enterprises a second chance at survival. It also contains stricter provisions against forum shopping and improves cooperation and coordination between the national insolvency registries of the member states.

Adoption of Council conclusions on the EU anti-corruption report

It is the first time that the Council adopts conclusions on corruption tendencies and on existing policies for combating them within the Union. The conclusions stress that the report is a valuable tool to consolidate anti-corruption efforts and promote high anti-corruption standards across the EU and that it should be seen as a next step in advancing the establishment of an EU-wide area based on integrity values, one that will help promote growth and prosperity. The conclusions invite member states to make further efforts to encourage anti-corruption prevention measures and effectively enforce anti-corruption laws and policies at national level, while noting that the situation varies from one member state to another.

Adoption of Council conclusions on the civil and commercial justice systems of the member states

The conclusions constitute an initiative of the Council and member states in response to the Commission's Communication on a 2013 Justice Scoreboard. They represent the political position of the Council as regards the evaluation procedure of the national justice systems, particularly in the areas of civil and commercial justice. They highlight member states' concerns about duplication of work and the importance of contextualisation when considering the analysis of any data in this area.

They also acknowledge that some areas of judicial work are very difficult to measure because of the fact that the most important aspect of its functioning is the quality of the judicial decisions which is difficult to quantify. According to the text, any work in this area must be objective and treat all member states equally, taking into account the specific characteristics of national justice systems. Moreover, the results of any such exercise should in any case be of a non-binding, non-compulsory nature and should not lead to any kind of ranking of member states.

Data Protection

Partial general approach in Council on the data protection package

The data protection package aims to enhance legal certainty for enterprises and citizens, to reduce administrative burden, to ensure a comprehensive data protection enforcement regime across the Union, to improve the effective exercise of citizens' rights, as well as the effective supervision and enforcement of data protection. The partial general approach includes the provisions on territorial scope, the respective definitions of "binding corporate rules" and "international organisations", and the transfer of personal data to third countries or international organisations.

Criminal Law

First reading agreement with the EP on the protection of the euro against counterfeiting by means of criminal law

The proposed directive aims to establish minimum rules concerning the definition of criminal offences and sanctions in the area of counterfeiting of the euro and other currencies. It also introduces common provisions to strengthen the fight against those offences and to improve their investigation. Euro counterfeiting has caused the Union at least 500 million euros since the currency's introduction in 2002.

General approach in Council on procedural safeguards for children in criminal proceedings

The Directive is the fourth measure on the basis of the Roadmap on Criminal Procedural Rights that was adopted in 2009 and aims at enhancing procedural rights in criminal proceedings. The proposal aims at ensuring that children are able to understand and follow the criminal proceedings to which they are subject, and that they can exercise their right to a fair trial. The proposal also seeks to prevent re-offending by children and foster their social integration.

Fundamental rights and citizenship

Adoption of Council conclusions on the application of the EU charter of Fundamental Rights

The conclusions underline that the Charter is the cornerstone for the effective and systematic protection of fundamental rights in the Union framework and is fully binding on the Union institutions and on the member states when the latter are implementing Union law, while acknowledging that it complements national systems of protection of fundamental rights and does not replace them.

Adoption of Council conclusions on preventing and combating all forms of violence against women and girls, including female genital mutilation

The conclusions were drafted following the publication of an EU-wide survey carried out by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) recommending actions to tackle violence against women, which was presented at a conference in Brussels, on 5 March 2014 hosted under the auspices of the Hellenic Presidency and entitled "Violence against women across the EU: Abuse at home, work, in public and online". The conclusions call on EU institutions and member states to implement comprehensive actions to combat phenomena of violence and their root causes and

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propose measures for the elimination of female genital mutilation Union-wide. In this context, the Presidency, in collaboration with FRA, also organized a seminar in Thessaloniki, on 28-29 April 2014, on "How can EU Member States combat hate crime effectively? Encouraging reporting & improving recording".

Work still ongoing for future Presidencies

The Presidency presented a text at the June JHA Council outlining the progress of discussions so far on the Regulation on the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) and on the Regulation on the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust).

The Presidency labored to progress discussions on the Regulation establishing a European Small Claims Procedure and creating a European order for payment procedure.

HOME AFFAIRS

Migration and Mobility

Presentation to the European Council and adoption by the latter of Strategic Guidelines for the Future Development of the Justice and Home Affairs Area (post-Stockholm)

Since the Lisbon Treaty introduced major changes in the freedom, security and justice area, future developments in this field should be discussed in the light of Article 68 TFUE which provides that the European Council "shall define the strategic guidelines for legislative and operational planning" in this regard. The European Council in its 27-28 June 2013 conclusions mandated the future Presidencies to start discussions on the future strategic guidelines in the area of freedom, security and justice with a view to its June 2014 meeting. Building on the work of the Lithuanian Presidency, the Greek Presidency continued the debate at the informal ministerial meeting in Athens on 23-24 January and at the Justice and Home Affairs Council in March 2014.

The new text refocuses attention on the principle of solidarity and its particular implementation in the areas of asylum, border and migratory flows management. It includes immigration issues in the Union's foreign policy, while it connects them with the issue of cooperation with third countries. On the cooperation with third countries, the text introduces the "more for more" clause, and includes the development of effective return policies as well as the readmission and visa policies.

Adoption of Council conclusions on the evaluation of the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM)

The Conclusions reiterate that the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility constitutes the framework for the European Union's foreign policy and relations with third countries in the areas of migration and asylum. The Conclusions also include recommendations towards enhancing GAMM's implementation.

Asylum

Adoption of decisions on the signing of Arrangements with the Swiss Confederation, the Principality of Liechtenstein, the Republic of Iceland and the Kingdom of Norway on their participation in the European Asylum Support Office

The Council adopted four decisions, by which it grants its permission for the signing, on behalf of the European Union, of the Arrangement with these four non-EU western European Countries as regards the modalities of their participation in the European Asylum Support Office. The European Asylum Support Office plays a key role in the concrete development of the Common European Asylum System. It was established with the aim of enhancing practical cooperation on asylum

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matters and helping member states fulfil their European and international obligations to give protection to people in need.

Border Control

First reading agreement with the EP on rules for the surveillance of the external sea borders in the context of Frontex operations

The regulation provides member states participating in FRONTEX operations with clearer, updated and binding rules to be applied in the course of these operations. This will result in greater effectiveness and legal certainty in operations at the external sea borders. The regulation is one of the actions contained in the Commission communication on the work of the Task Force Mediterranean and it will be one of the key tools which the EU has at its disposal to improve the surveillance of the external sea borders and to contribute to preventing, for example, tragedies at sea such as the recent ones in the Southern Mediterranean.

Adoption of Council conclusions on terrorism and border security

The conclusions were elaborated following discussions held during the informal JHA Council in Athens, in January 2014, on the threats posed by terrorism to border security. They encourage member states to exchange best practices and lessons learned regarding border management capabilities, as well as development and cooperation concerning awareness raising of border guards on counter-terrorism matters, also in cooperation with Frontex.

Visa Policy

First reading agreement with the EP on two revisions of the list of third countries exempt from visa requirements

The first amendment to the Regulation provides for granting visa liberalisation to Moldova. The agreement on the Regulation was celebrated by the visit of an official Moldovan delegation, headed by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova, to Athens on the day of entry into force of visa liberalization for Moldovan citizens entering the EU.

The agreement on the second amendment was reached at the beginning of February and it implies the transfer of 19 third countries from the negative list to the positive list, providing visa liberalisation for these countries regarding short stay Schengen visas. According to the amended regulation the nationals from Colombia, Dominica, Grenada, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Peru, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu, the United Arab Emirates and Vanuatu will be exempt from the visa requirement when travelling to the Schengen zone. This exemption will come into force only when bilateral agreements on visa waiver between the Union and the countries concerned have been concluded in order to ensure full reciprocity.

First reading agreement with the EP on a simplified regime for visa control at the borders of Croatia and Cyprus

This decision will make it possible for Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus and Romania to recognise Schengen visas for the purposes of transit or short stay in their territories. This will allow for the simplification of controls of Schengen visa holders at these countries' borders.

Visa Information System: extension of operations

The Hellenic Presidency managed to finalise the timetable for the extension of operation of the Visa Information System (VIS) to the remaining final group of third countries. The extension of operation should be completed by 30 June 2015. The third countries included in this final group are

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very important as far as political, migration and tourism issues are concerned, containing the Eastern Partnership countries, Russia, China, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Schengen Evaluation

During the Hellenic Presidency, the Council prepared and adopted conclusions on the Schengen evaluation of the Czech Republic, Malta, Slovenia, Slovakia and Denmark. The Council also adopted Council conclusions on the Schengen evaluation of Greece on the follow-up to the Schengen evaluation conducted in 2010-2011. The conclusions testified to the effective implementation and completion of the “HELLAS – SCHENGEN” National Action Plan as regards the correct implementation of the Schengen acquis on the country’s land, sea and air borders.

Cooperation and Verification Mechanism for Bulgaria and Romania

The Greek Presidency prepared and negotiated with the Member States draft Council Conclusions on the progress made by Bulgaria and Romania under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism. The Conclusions were approved by General Affairs Council, on the 18th of March. The document reflects in a fair and balanced way the progress made under the CVM benchmarks as well as the remaining work to be done, urging Bulgaria and Romania to finalize the Mechanism’s implementation process.

UK opt in/opt out to Schengen acquis – ongoing work

The Hellenic Presidency, in the relevant Friends of the Presidency group, finalized the list of Schengen acquis measures that the UK will opt in and drafted a relevant report, that was presented in the June JHA Council, without, however, arriving at an agreement.

Legal Migration and Integration

First reading agreement with the EP on the entry and residence of third country nationals in the framework of intra-corporate transfer

The proposed directive is of major importance in the framework of the European policy on legal migration. It is aimed at creating an EU-wide scheme for attracting highly-qualified managers, specialists and trainee employees in the framework of transfers from an undertaking outside the EU to an entity of that undertaking established in a member state. It harmonizes member states’ national policies in the field of intra-corporate transfer, thus reinforcing the EU framework as regards legal migration.

Adoption of Council conclusions on the integration of third-country nationals legally residing in the EU

The conclusions set the context for cooperation between the member states in the area of integration of third-country nationals legally residing in the EU. The EU member states reaffirmed their commitment to the common basic principles for immigrant integration policy in the EU, as established ten years ago, while setting them in the policy context of today, through the definition of new areas where there is need to develop integration policies and actions.

Signature of a joint declaration establishing a mobility partnership between Tunisia and the European Union and its participating member states

The mobility partnership constitutes an important tool for the implementation of the EU strategy for cooperation with third countries in migration and asylum matters, in the context of effective migratory flows management. The agreement provides for a) better organization of legal migration and mobility facilitation, b) prevention and combating of illegal migration and human trafficking, c) promotion of international protection and enhancement of the external dimension of asylum and d) maximizing the developmental impact of migration for both countries of origin, as well as destination.

Illegal Immigration

Adoption of Council conclusions on EU Return Policy

The adoption of these conclusions was an initiative of the Hellenic Presidency, so as to commit member states to a more effective EU return policy in the next years and thus contributing to the production of added value in the effort towards sustainable immigration management. The conclusions start by pointing out that the focus should be placed on a more effective implementation and thorough consolidation of the existing rules rather than on new legislative initiatives. They also underline that a key challenge for a more successful EU return policy should be to strengthen cooperation between the EU and third countries, in particular as regards identification and documentation of returnees.

Update of the EU Action on Migratory Pressures – A Strategic Response

The action contains a non-exhaustive list of strategic priority areas where efforts to prevent and control migratory pressures need to be upgraded and monitored. Its adoption effectuates the strategic oversight of the implementation of critical activities, so as to achieve the action's goal of providing tangible and realistic solutions as regards illegal immigration management.

Europe of safety

Revision and adoption by the Council of the EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism

The revised Strategy describes the way the Union and its member states intend to combat radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism, given the threat's constantly evolving character, as well as the greater understanding of the phenomenon acquired over the last five years. The main objective of the strategy is to prevent people from becoming radicalised, being radicalised and being recruited to terrorism and to prevent a new generation of terrorists from emerging. To do so, the revised strategy proposes the implementation of ten actions:

- promote security, justice, and equal opportunities for all
- ensure that voices of mainstream opinion prevail over those of extremism
- enhance government communications
- support messages countering terrorism
- counter online radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism
- train, build capacity and engage first-line practitioners across relevant sectors
- support individuals and civil society to build resilience
- support disengagement initiatives
- support further research into the trends and challenges of radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism
- align internal and external counter-radicalisation work

Adoption of Council conclusions on multinational modules under the Union Civil Protection Mechanism

The conclusions encourage member states to create multinational modules, by offering operational capacities (material and human resources) to the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, thus enhancing the Union's disaster response capacity.

Adoption of Council conclusions on the post 2015 Hyogo framework for action

The conclusions define the EU position in view of the March 2015 World Conference for the revision of the Hyogo framework on global, regional and national efforts for building resilience to disasters, across the entire disaster management cycle (prevention, preparedness, response and early recovery).

Law enforcement cooperation and training

First reading agreement with the EP on the European Police College seat

The decision allows CEPOL to move its seat from Bramshill (United Kingdom) to Budapest (Hungary) as from September 2014, following the information from the United Kingdom that it could no longer host CEPOL. This will ensure CEPOL's independence and autonomy, while allowing for the smooth relocation of its offices with no disruption to its educational activities.

General approach in Council on the Europol regulation

The new Regulation will render Europol more effective, responsible and with a strengthened data protection regime, so as to better assist member states in crime prevention and fight.

Adoption of SPOC (Single Point of Contact) Guidelines for international law enforcement information exchange

The guidelines were an initiative of the Hellenic Presidency, that met with widespread approval by member states. The adopted guidelines text forms the basis for the operation of Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) within the member-states that the Commission is promoting as a nodal point for the processing and transmission of all incoming and outgoing requests for law enforcement cooperation.

Customs cooperation

The Council adopted conclusions on the Governance Reform of the EU Customs Union, following the High-Level Seminar organised in Athens and the relevant Athens declaration. The Council also adopted conclusions on cooperation with the People's Republic of China. Finally, the Council adopted a Report on customs involvement in the EU Policy Cycle for Serious Organized Crime.

Work still ongoing for future Presidencies

The Hellenic Presidency managed to reach an agreement in Council on the Approach for the way forward on the Smart Borders Package. The approach includes a study of selected issues and a pilot project to test the result of the study, so as to ensure the adoption of the best possible options both technically and economically.

The Presidency managed to reach an agreement on the outlines on the future role of the Standing Committee on operational cooperation on internal security (COSI). It also prepared a proposal on the future actions of COSI that will be implemented by the Italian and following Presidencies.

Following a Dutch proposal that met with the JHA Ministers' approval at the March JHA Council, the Presidency prepared a proposal for an EU Pilot Project on return policy, to be applied to four third countries: Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Ghana. Discussions will resume during the Italian Presidency, with the drafting of specific strategies for each country based on existing EU and member states instruments and tools.

The Presidency achieved the formation of a core team for the implementation of Consular Cooperation Initiatives, as well as the definition of a catalogue of five third countries where these initiatives will be implemented as a pilot project.

The Presidency labored to progress discussions on the Directive on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, pupil exchange, remunerated and unremunerated training, voluntary services and au pairing, on the Directive on Consular Protection for citizens of the Union abroad, and on the Regulation on New Psychoactive Substances.

EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL POLICY, HEALTH AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS COUNCIL (EPSCO)

Employment

First reading agreement with the EP on the posting of workers directive

The Directive will enhance the application of the regulatory framework of the internal market, whilst safeguarding the respect of the rights of employees. The agreement provides for a comprehensive and transparent legal framework that will ensure the rights of posted workers, combat “social dumping” and allow for the unimpeded functioning of enterprises within the Single Market. Finally, the social protection aspect of the EU was further highlighted, by placing particular emphasis on combating falsified self-employment, false posting and undeclared employment.

First reading agreement with the EP on enhanced cooperation between Public Employment Services

The aim of the decision is to formalise the current heads of public employment services (HoPES) informal advisory expert group and turn it into a fully-fledged network. The creation of the PES network is a positive contribution to wider ongoing efforts to make existing structures more effective in tackling the unemployment crisis, by restoring well-functioning labour markets that provide for the necessary employment opportunities. Strengthening PES cooperation is all the more important at a time when unemployment has reached high levels in most member states. The new network will allow the coupling of the labour supply and demand market at an EU level, the effective organization of professional and geographical mobility, as well as the exchanges of best practices in the field of tackling unemployment and social exclusion.

First reading agreement with the EP on the organization of a labour force sample survey

The labour force sample survey is the biggest European household research, producing results as regards union-wide employment and unemployment rates, as well as people out of the labour market. The results of the labour force sample survey provide the indices for three of the primary targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy. Each year, the survey is supplemented with ad hoc sections, serving certain European policy initiatives. The Regulation amendment aims at aligning the labour force sample survey legal framework with the Lisbon Treaty.

Common EU position in the context of the International Labour Organisation (ILO)

The EU member states adopted a Council decision on the position to be adopted on behalf of the European Union at the 103rd session of the International Labour Conference concerning amendments to the Code of the Maritime Labour Convention. It is the first time that the EU member states participating in the ILO prepared a common position on behalf of the EU, instead of simply relying on their ad-hoc coordination. The amendments concern the liability of shipowners with respect to compensation for claims due to death, personal injury and abandonment of seafarers.

Youth Employment

Adoption by the Council of a recommendation on a quality framework for traineeships

The financial and economic crisis has had serious consequences for the job prospects of young Europeans. It is therefore important to push forward measures that will improve their future prospects for entering the labour market. A good-quality traineeship can have a decisive and positive impact on an individual's employability and transition into regular employment. The recommendation provides guidelines and tools to the member states, trainees, traineeship providers and all other stakeholders in order to ensure that traineeships become an efficient means of easing transitions from training or inactivity to employment. It addresses two shortcomings: insufficient

learning content and inadequate working conditions. The new recommendation will support the implementation of the Youth Guarantee schemes by EU member states.

Social Policy

Agreement in principle of the Council on the Tripartite Social Summit for Growth and Employment

Social dialogue remains essential within the framework of economic governance in the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy, in particular in the annual European Semester cycle. The social summit has played a major role in facilitating exchanges of views on employment and social aspects with the European social partners at the highest level in the margins of the European Council. The decision aims to adapt the Council decision of 2003 setting up the tripartite social summit (TSS) to the institutional changes brought in by the treaty of Lisbon, reflecting the recent practical arrangements of the TSS.

Gender issues

Council conclusions on women and the economy

The conclusions are based on a report prepared by the European Institute for Gender Equality and focus on the vital issue of equal economic independence. Employment is the bedrock of economic independence. Yet not all workers have full-time jobs. Part-time work has the potential to enhance women's economic independence. Working part-time can also facilitate work-life balance. On the other hand, it can also create unfair differences in pay, working conditions and career advancement. The conclusions include a set of three new indicators. These indicators will improve our understanding of the labour market experience of women and men by showing the rates of full-time equivalent work, part-time work and self-employment for women and men. The indicators also give an insight into the extent to which part-time work is a voluntary preference. Finally, the conclusions recommend the inclusion of a gender equality pillar in the Europe 2020 Strategy.

Work still ongoing for the future Presidencies

The Hellenic Presidency presented progress reports on the Proposal for a Directive on improving the gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges and related measures, on the Proposal for a Directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, on the Proposal for a Regulation on a European Network of Employment Services, workers' access to mobility services and the further integration of labour markets (EURES), and on the Proposal for a Decision on establishing a European Platform to enhance cooperation in the prevention and deterrence of undeclared work.

Health

First reading agreement with the EP on the conduct of pharmacovigilance activities by the European Medicines Agency

The draft regulation is aimed at ensuring the funding of strengthened post-authorisation monitoring of medicines for human use ("pharmacovigilance") conducted at EU level. It is expected to provide the means to finance the work of addressing the safety concerns and maintain high standards of quality, safety and efficacy of medicinal products. The Regulation also provides for reduced fees for SMEs, as well as for fee exemption for micro-enterprises. Finally, high safety medicinal products, like generic, homeopathic or herbal medicinal products will benefit from fee reductions.

Adoption of Council Conclusions on the economic crisis and healthcare

The conclusions outline the impact that the economic crisis had on the healthcare systems in the EU and suggest ways to make it more resilient. They note with concern that public health expenditures has decreased in many member states since 2009, and that although most member states have universal coverage, in practice many people have problems in accessing healthcare services when they need them. Recalling the discussions at the informal meeting of health ministers in Athens on 28-29 April, which stressed the importance of health reforms to overcome the crisis, the conclusions identify a number of areas where action is needed. These include considering innovative ways of integration between primary and hospital care, and promoting the implementation of information and communications technology and eHealth solutions.

Adoption of Council Conclusions on nutrition and physical activity

The conclusions build on the outcomes of the Athens high-level conference on "Nutrition and Physical Activity from Childhood to Old Age: challenges and opportunities" held on 25-26 February 2014. They take stock of the current situation, where more than half of the adult population in the EU is overweight or obese according to the body mass index of the WHO. They note that up to 7% of EU health budgets is spent each year directly on diseases linked to obesity and deplore the low consumption of fruit and vegetables and the high intake of saturated fats, trans fatty acids, salt and sugar, as well as the shift towards sedentary lifestyles. The conclusions also set out a number of measures to be undertaken in order to promote healthy diet and physical activity, in order to reduce the burden of chronic and non-communicable diseases such as hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, stroke and osteoporosis. They call, for instance, on the member states and the Commission to support the implementation of national food and nutrition action plans, and to promote action to reduce the exposure of children to advertising, marketing and promotion of foods high in saturated fats, trans fatty acids, added sugars or salt.

COMPETITIVENESS COUNCIL (COMPET)

Single Market

Completion of the Single Market Act I legislative package

In the Single Market sector, the Hellenic Presidency successfully completed the Single Market Act I legislative package, presented by the Commission in April 2011, with the exception of the proposal on the taxation of energy. Greece achieved the adoption of the Regulation on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the internal market (e-idas), and successfully completed negotiations with the EP as regards the Posting of Workers Directive, the two remaining files of the Single Market Act I legislative package, while also presenting a progress report on the final file on the taxation of energy. This result is a major success of the Presidency and a suitable crowning of its efforts, achieved under a very tight timeframe, given the EP's scheduled dissolution in April 2014, in view of the recent European elections.

First reading agreement with the EP on electronic invoicing in public procurement

The directive will contribute to improving the functioning of the internal market by reducing the obstacles to entering the market, especially for SMEs, and by solving the problem of the compatibility of different e-invoicing systems in various member states. The processes will become faster and less costly. It forms part of the on-going modernisation of the public administration sector in the member states, and particularly of the major overhaul of the EU public procurement directives. This new initiative, along with the adopted Basic Accounts Directive and the Directive establishing measures to reduce the cost of deploying high-speed electronic communications networks, constitutes main pieces of legislature contained in the Single Market Act II, presented in October 2012.

Research and Innovation

Agreement with the EP on the Innovation Investment Package

The innovation investment package, which implements the Innovation Union strategy to stimulate the creation of growth and jobs, will contribute to pool research and innovation investments up to 22 billion € in sectors facing major societal challenges in the next seven years. These initiatives will entail great multiplying effects, not only for the Research and Innovation landscape in Europe, but also for enhancing the industrial participation in Horizon 2020, while simultaneously addressing key societal challenges for our citizens.

The package comprises of nine Decisions, four on public-public partnerships and five on public-private partnerships for investment in research and development in sectors ranging from active and assisted living, clinical trials, and innovative medicines, to fuel cells, clean sky, electronic components, metrology, bio-based industries and support for research performing SMEs. They will be further developed on research programmes jointly undertaken by member states with the participation of the Union.

Adoption of Council conclusions on progress towards the realization of the European Research Area

The conclusions address a number of specific issues to be taken into account in developing the ERA in order to achieve a genuine single market for knowledge, research and innovation. The ERA is expected to reinforce excellence for research across Europe, thereby increasing Europe's global competitiveness and its capability to tackle major societal challenges successfully. The following priorities were identified for achieving a reinforced ERA partnership for excellence and growth:

–More effective national research systems

Results of the Hellenic Presidency
of the Council of the European Union

- Optimal transnational cooperation and competition
- An open labour market for researchers
- Gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research
- Optimal circulation, access to and transfer of scientific knowledge.

Adoption of Council conclusions on the implementation of the roadmap for the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures

Research infrastructures refers to facilities, resources and related services used by the scientific community to conduct top-level research. They may be ‘single-sited’ (at a single location), ‘distributed’ (a network of resources) or ‘virtual’ (with services provided electronically). These key infrastructures have not only been responsible for some of the greatest scientific discoveries and technological developments, but are also influential in attracting the best researchers from around the world and in building bridges between research communities and scientific disciplines. The conclusions acknowledge the work done by the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) on prioritisation of projects for implementation and welcome plans to update the ESFRI roadmap with new research infrastructures of pan-European interest. ESFRI has identified three projects that are strategically relevant for Europe and are ready for development:

- the European Plate Observing System (EPOS),
- the European Life-Science Infrastructure for Biological Information (ELIXIR), and
- the European Spallation Source

Space

First reading agreement with the EP on establishing a Space Surveillance and Tracking Support Programme

The decision aims at establishing a European surveillance and tracking service (SST) that will enhance the security of space infrastructures and the safety of satellite operations. The SST support framework will be complementary to related activities carried out under Union programmes such as ‘Horizon 2020’, ‘Copernicus’ and ‘Galileo’. By networking the existing space surveillance and tracking infrastructures, the programme will allow for early warning in case there is a danger of collision between satellites or with any other space debris. The SST support framework should contribute to ensuring the long term availability of European and national space infrastructure facilities and services which are essential for the safety and security of the economies, societies and citizens in Europe and the peaceful use and exploration of outer space.

Adoption of Council conclusions on a shared EU-ESA vision for space fostering competitiveness

The conclusions focus on the steps to be taken in order to provide proposals on improving the efficiency of relations between the EU and the European Space Agency (ESA), bearing in mind the broader space policy context and Europe's long-term strategic vision, which includes ambitious political objectives for autonomy and industrial competitiveness.

Company law

First reading agreement with the EP on the disclosure of non-financial and diversity information by certain large companies and groups

The new measures will require certain big EU companies to draw up, on a yearly basis, a statement relating to environmental, social and employee-related matters, respect for human rights, anti-corruption and bribery matters. The statement will have to include a description of the policies,

outcomes and the risks related to those matters. Where a company does not pursue policies in relation to these matters, it will have to explain why this is the case. The new measures are aimed at strengthening the company's transparency and accountability, while limiting any undue administrative burden, and ensuring a level playing field across the EU. Corporate Social Responsibility is an enabling tool for business productivity and contributes to a smart and sustainable growth. It is not only for shareholders but also for stakeholders and citizens that it adds value.

General approach in Council on the protection of undisclosed know-how and business information (trade secrets) against their unlawful acquisition, use and disclosure

The new framework aims at making it easier for national courts to deal with the misappropriation of confidential business information, remove the trade secret infringing products from the market and make it easier for victims to receive compensate on for illegal actions. It will promote innovative companies, ensure fair and honest competition and create a secure environment conducting to innovation, the exchange of valuable know-how and cross-border commercial activities within the internal market. This will empower companies to continue investing with more confidence in research and innovation in Europe.

Intellectual Property

Adoption of Council decision on the signing on behalf of the EU of the Marrakesh Treaty to facilitate access to published works for persons who are blind, visually impaired, or otherwise print disabled

The Marrakesh treaty establishes a set of international rules which ensure that there are limitations or exceptions to copyright at national level for the benefit of persons who are blind, visually impaired, or otherwise print disabled and enable the cross-border exchange of accessible format copies of published works that have been made under limitations or exceptions to copyright.

Technical harmonization

First reading agreement with the EP on the harmonization of laws making available on the market of pressure equipment

The directive is aimed at reinforcing and simplifying the market surveillance for the free movement of pressure equipment in the internal market. Such equipment is widely used in the process industries (oil and gas, chemical, pharmaceutical, plastics and rubber and the food and beverage industry), high temperature process industry (glass, paper and board), energy production and in the supply of utilities, heating, air conditioning and gas storage and transportation. Its implementation will help solve technical problems through technical harmonization, but also contribute to the protection of citizens' health. The new directive is in line with the Single Market Act and its emphasis on regaining consumer trust in the quality of market products, and on enhancing market surveillance.

First reading agreement with the EP on the harmonization of laws making available on the market of radio equipment

Radio equipment includes products such as mobile phones, GPS/Galileo receivers and wireless car door openers. Manufacturers, importers and distributors will have to respect a set of clear obligations so as to ensure the compliance of radio equipment placed in the EU market. Moreover, the alignment of radio equipment rules with other legislation applicable to the internal market for products will lower compliance costs for businesses, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Results of the Hellenic Presidency
of the Council of the European Union

Work still ongoing for the future Presidencies

The Presidency presented progress reports at the May COMPET Council on the Proposal for a Directive on package travel and assisted travel arrangements and on the Revision of European Trade Mark System.

TRANSPORT, TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND ENERGY COUNCIL (TTE)

TRANSPORT

Road transport

First reading agreement and adoption by the Council and the EP of the decision on the deployment of the interoperable EU-wide eCall

The EU-wide eCall is expected to speed up the emergency services' response time by 40% in urban areas and 50% in the countryside, bringing down the number of fatalities and reducing the severity of injuries suffered in road accidents. It will also cut down congestion caused by accidents and the number of secondary accidents at unsecured accident sites. The eCall equipped vehicles will immediately alert emergency services, even if the driver or passengers are unconscious or otherwise unable to call for help. The decision has already been published and the system will have to be deployed in all member-states by 2017.

General approach in Council on type-approval requirements for the deployment of the eCall in-vehicle system

The purpose of this proposal is to introduce in the EC motor vehicle type-approval system a requirement for fitting an eCall in-vehicle system. It requires new types of passenger cars and light commercial vehicles to be constructed so as to ensure that in the event of a severe accident an emergency call to the 112 emergency number is triggered automatically or manually. This forms part of a set of EU legal acts for ensuring the deployment of the 112-based eCall service by 1 October 2015. The Regulation complements the Decision on the deployment of the interoperable EU-wide eCall, concluded during the Hellenic Presidency.

Political agreement in Council on maximum authorized dimensions and weights of lorries

The new draft directive aims to improve the vehicles' aerodynamics, fuel efficiency and road safety, within the limits imposed by the geometry of road infrastructures. To this extent, the proposal grants derogations from the maximum dimensions of vehicles for the addition of aerodynamic devices to the rear of vehicles or to redefine the geometry of the cabs for tractors. In this way, drivers' field of vision, safety and comfort is also improved. Moreover, the proposal facilitates intermodal transport and promotes the use of alternative fuels through targeted derogations from the maximum dimensions/weights of the vehicles. For example, the use of clean fuels will be promoted by authorising a weight increase of one ton for alternatively fuelled vehicles, to take account of the weight required for the alternative fuel technology.

Railway transport

Political agreement in Council on the technical pillar of the fourth railway package

The technical pillar of the fourth railway package comprises of three legislative acts, concerning the interoperability of the rail system within the European Union, railway safety, as well as the amendment of the EU Agency's for Railways founding regulation, so as to render it a real European authority in the fields of interoperability and safety. The completion of the fourth railway package is expected to increase economies of scale for railway undertakings across the EU, reduce administrative costs and speed up procedures. It should also help to avoid any covert discrimination in the issuing of safety certificates and vehicle authorisations.

According to the Council's position, a dual system of vehicle authorisations and safety certifications will be set up, with the ERA acting as a one-stop-shop for authorising vehicles intended for cross-border operations and issuing safety certificates to railway undertakings involved in cross-border

traffic, while national safety authorities will still have an important role in carrying out the necessary assessments.

Adoption by Council of the Shift2Rail Joint Undertaking regulation

The new entity will manage a research and innovation work programme to support the development of better rail services in Europe. Shift2Rail's goal is to double the capacity of the railway transport system, reduce its life-cycle cost by 50% and decrease unreliability and late arrivals by 50%. The innovative technologies and solutions to be developed, demonstrated and validated by Shift2Rail are expected to boost the EU rail sector's competitiveness vis-à-vis other modes of transport and foreign competition, as well as to create jobs and increase exports.

Water transport

First reading agreement and adoption by the Council and the EP of the regulation on a Community-fleet capacity policy to promote inland waterway transport

The recently published regulation broadens the scope of the reserve funds called Inland Waterway Funds, from social matters and the safety of the working environment, to other types of support measures, like the encouragement of innovation and environmental friendliness. This amendment will allow a very efficient and environmentally friendly means of transport to receive some much needed and undisposed funds in times of economic crisis.

First reading agreement and adoption by the Council and the EP of the directive on marine equipment

The directive aims to ensure that the equipment placed on board vessels flying the flag of an EU member-state will comply with international and European requirements. As proof of compliance a particular logo, the wheel mark, will be affixed to the equipment. This is the maritime equivalent of the CE-marking on, for example, household appliances. The main objectives of the directive are to improve safety at sea and prevent maritime pollution through the uniform application of the requirements set by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), and to ensure the free movement of marine equipment within the EU.

First reading agreement and adoption by the Council and the EP of the regulation on the European Maritime Safety Agency's funding so as to respond to pollution caused by ships and oil and gas installations

EMSA's pollution response includes information, cooperation and coordination activities and, crucially, operational assistance, i.e. detection and clean-up of oil spills. The agency has contracts with a network of standby anti-pollution vessels to complement member states' response capacity. These ships are ready to intervene rapidly, usually within 24 hours. Affected coastal states can request this assistance through the Community Civil Protection Mechanism. While EMSA pays for the contracts for these vessels when they are on standby, the costs of actual clean-up operations are covered by the countries themselves. In addition, EMSA provides a satellite-based oil spill detection and monitoring service called CleanSeaNet.

Previously EMSA's remit covered only monitoring of and response to pollution from ships, but in 2013 its tasks were extended to pollution caused by oil and gas installations. The new regulation is intended to ensure that the agency has the funds needed to carry out these tasks.

Adoption of Council conclusions on the Mid-Term Review of the EU's Maritime Transport Policy until 2018 and Outlook to 2020

The conclusions incorporate the Athens Declaration endorsed by the maritime transport ministers at their informal meeting on 7 May. They are intended to provide input not only for the Commission's upcoming mid-term review of the EU's maritime transport policy but also for the further development of the EU's Maritime Transport Policy up to 2020. The text covers all aspects of

maritime transport, organised under six headings: a) European Shipping in globalised markets, b) Human Resources, Seamanship and Maritime Know-how, c) Quality Shipping as a key competitive advantage, d) Working together on the international scene, e) Exploiting the full potential of short-sea shipping and sea transportation services for business and citizens in Europe and f) Lastly, Europe should be the world leader in maritime research and innovation.

Air transport

Adoption by Council of the regulation on a Joint Undertaking to develop the new generation European air traffic management system (SESAR)

Set up in 2007, the SESAR joint undertaking is a public-private partnership which manages the development of the Single European Sky Air Traffic Management Research (SESAR) project. It involves the active participation of the European Commission, Eurocontrol and European industries. The new, recently published mandate to continue the development of SESAR reflects the time-frame of the Union's 2014-2020 financial framework and allows an extra four years to close down ongoing projects.

The SESAR project aims to modernise air traffic management in Europe, putting an end to the current fragmentation. It should provide the Union, by 2030, with a high-performance air traffic control infrastructure that will support the development of safe and environmentally-friendly air transport. SESAR is the technological pillar of the Single European Sky (SES) initiative.

Early second reading agreement and adoption by the Council and the EP of the regulation on noise-related operating restrictions at Union airports

The new Regulation harmonises and strengthens rules on how authorities take decisions to set operating restrictions at EU airports to limit nuisance from aircraft noise. Noise is a significant issue for the people living in the vicinity of airports. The new Regulation aims to strike a balance between citizens' quality of life in terms of protection from aircraft noise, and the needs of air transport. The new rules are designed to identify the most cost-efficient way of tackling aircraft noise at each individual airport, with operating restrictions being a last resort option only.

Work still ongoing for future Presidencies

The Hellenic Presidency presented progress reports at the June TTE Transport Council on the Regulation establishing common rules on compensation and assistance to passengers in the event of denied boarding and of cancellation or long delay of flights and on air carrier liability in respect of the carriage of passengers and their baggage by air and on the Regulation establishing a framework on market access to port services and financial transparency of ports.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

First reading agreement and adoption by the Council and the EP of the regulation on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the internal market

The new Regulation was the product of intense negotiations between the Council and the European Parliament. It lays down conditions for mutual recognition of electronic identification; sets rules for trust services, in particular for electronic transactions; and creates a legal framework for electronic signatures, seals and time stamps, electronic documents as well as electronic registered delivery services and certificate services for website authentication. It also constitutes the basic regulation of the European Union for establishing a reliable digital world for online transactions. Furthermore, it aims to technically establish and legally enhance all tools required by EU citizens, public services, and the private sector, in order to have a safe transition to digital infrastructure. The objective of the regulation is to expand and cover, at EU level, the mutual identification and acceptance of common systems of e-identification, ID e-authentication, e-signatures and similar trust services for

transactions, thus contributing to the establishment of a digital single market and an EU roadmap for stability and development.

First reading agreement and adoption by the Council and the EP of the directive on reducing the cost of deploying high-speed electronic communications networks

The recently published directive forms part of the Hellenic Presidency's priorities in the telecommunications sector, aiming at the integration of the Digital Single Market. Its purpose is to make it easier and cheaper to roll out high-speed electronic communications networks, among other things by promoting the joint use of infrastructure, such as electricity, gas and sewage pipes. It is expected to facilitate universal broadband coverage, enabling broadband deployment in remote or scarcely populated areas. As a result, more citizens will gain access to information society, and therefore, a considerable prerequisite for development will have been achieved. This proposal also utilizes resources that were so far neglected (e.g. power line networks), while suggesting better use of existing infrastructure by more networks. This will entail cost reduction and better broadband deployment.

Moreover, this directive aims to simplify the existing legal framework, remove red tape, and resolve issues within building installations. It also aspires to facilitate synergies for benefiting more from building and employing infrastructure. The single framework of rules for installation of high-speed networks will lift all obstacles hindering the single market. These obstacles are mostly due to the existing complex regulatory framework that blocks further development and growth of businesses. Lastly, it creates a negative impact on competitiveness, and discourages investment.

Work still ongoing for future Presidencies

The Hellenic Presidency presented progress reports at the June 2014 TTE Telecommunications Council on the Proposal for a Regulation laying down measures concerning the European single market for electronic communications and to achieve a Connected Continent and on the Proposal for a Directive concerning measures to ensure a high common level of network and information security across the Union (NIS).

ENERGY

First reading agreement on the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure

The new directive aims to reduce transport's dependence on oil and to cut back its greenhouse gas emissions, ensuring the build-up of alternative fuel infrastructure and the implementation of common technical specifications for this infrastructure in the Union. It is a step that will bring better quality of life for EU citizens and efficiency in transport. It also intends to promote economic growth and job creation in the EU, in particular in small and medium-sized enterprises.

Political agreement in Council on the quality of petrol and diesel fuels and the promotion of renewable energy sources

The aim of the proposed directive is to start a transition to biofuels that deliver substantial greenhouse gas savings when provisional estimated indirect land-use change (ILUC) emissions are also reported. The Hellenic presidency focused on two aspects in its compromise text: a stronger encouragement for advanced biofuels, while leaving flexibility for member states, and some additional elements to reflect considerations on estimated ILUC emissions and the possible impact of EU policies on biofuels as regards the environment and cross-compliance in respect of agriculture and climate policies. The agreement acknowledges and addresses the ILUC phenomenon, starts a transition to biofuels with lower ILUC risks and provides a clearer investment perspective while protecting investments made.

Adoption of Council conclusions on Energy prices and costs, protection of vulnerable consumers and competitiveness

The conclusions focus on energy prices and costs without prejudice to future initiatives to be taken in other areas, in particular, the 2030 climate and energy framework and EU energy security. The conclusions cover three parts: internal energy market, external dimension and consumers. The Council reaffirms the urgent need to complete the internal energy market by 2014 and develop interconnections so as to put an end to any isolation of member states from European gas and electricity networks by 2015. It calls for the effective application and enforcement of EU rules on market integration and further cost-effective measures on energy efficiency in the whole energy chain while striving for a level playing field for companies operating within the EU. In addition, the Council stresses the need for all relevant sectors to reduce their energy consumption by improving energy efficiency based on cost-effective energy saving measures. The Council stresses the importance of ensuring a level playing field and of mitigating the energy costs differential with competitors in third countries. Furthermore, the Council calls for a coherent approach in the EU's energy relations with third countries. It stresses the need for the Commission and the member states to examine ways of strengthening the bargaining power of the EU and its member states vis-à-vis external suppliers. Key steps towards enhancing the EU's energy security as part of a comprehensive energy security strategy were consequently considered in this regard. The Council underlines, in particular, the importance of strengthening the role, rights and awareness of consumers. It focuses, too, on the importance of the following options designed to combat energy poverty and to assist vulnerable consumers.

Work still ongoing for future Presidencies

The Hellenic Presidency conducted a wide range of discussions at the relevant working groups and at the ENVI and TTE Energy Councils in its efforts to finalise the EU Policy package on an EU Climate – Energy Framework for 2030. In this context, the Presidency drafted a roadmap outlining the future work programme until the October 2014 European Council, when the EU Heads of State and Government are supposed to arrive at a final decision.

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES COUNCIL (AGRIFISH)

Agriculture

First reading agreement with the EP on information provision and promotion measures for agricultural products in the internal market and in third countries

The draft regulation aims to adapt the existing EU legal framework to the very competitive environment the EU faces today. It increases up to 85% the EU budget allocated to information provision and promotion measures for agricultural products in the internal market and in third countries, and provides that measures should follow a strategy of identifying priorities on markets and products or messages to be highlighted. As the CAP reform encourages farmers to organise themselves, the scheme will be opened up to new beneficiaries, such as producer organisations. The draft regulation provides also the development of new technical support services for stakeholders, favouring the exchange of information or good practices and allowing their expertise to be developed.

Adoption of Council decision on negotiating agreements with third countries on trade in organic products

The new Decision should better balance the negotiations on agreements between the EU and third countries on trade in organic products which are currently established on a system of unilateral equivalency. The current system leads to a recognition by the EU of third countries standards for organic products as equivalent to its own without any reciprocity for EU organic products exported to these countries. Organic farming is a dynamically growing sector of the EU economy, with high-end products for which there is a growing global demand. The new system will ensure that EU producers and enterprises are not put at a disadvantageous position in the current globally competitive market.

First reading agreement with the EP on trade arrangements applicable to goods resulting from the processing of agricultural products

The new regulation aligns the Commission delegated authorities to the Lisbon Treaty. It concerns certain agricultural products that are used in the production of processed agricultural products, as well as of products not falling within Annex I of the TFEU.

First reading agreement with the EP on farm structure surveys and survey on agricultural production methods

The amended Regulation will ensure the 2016 funding for farm structure surveys, and will at the same time ensure the maximum EU funding for the surveys of Croatia.

First reading agreement with the EP on the honey directive

The new Directive introduces amendments as regards to honey labelling, thus aligning it with the Lisbon Treaty. It also clarifies the nature of pollen in honey, following a relevant EU Court decision. Pollen is explicitly classified as a constituent and not an ingredient of honey. However, it is specified that the presence of genetically modified pollen in honey must be mentioned at the labelling of the product, since genetically modified pollen is not EFSA approved.

Adoption of Council conclusions on the implementation of provisions on producer organisations, operational funds and operational programmes in the fruit and vegetables sector since the reform in 2007

The Commission report states that the 2007 reform has generated an increase in the share of the total value of EU fruit and vegetable production marketed by producers' organisations. However, it notes also that the degree of organisation between producers remains low in some Member States

and that there are differences in the degree of organisation between producers in different Member States and in different regions. The Council therefore believes that producer organisations should continue to play a central role in achieving the objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for the fruit and vegetables sector. It invites the Commission to review and analyse the underlying reasons and possible improvements to better achieve the objectives set by the CAP in this sector, and, after an adequate period of implementation of the new regulation, if appropriate, take the necessary initiatives.

First reading agreement with the EP on imports of rice originating in Bangladesh

The purpose of the new Regulation is to align the existing legal framework, that establishes the conditions to apply to the preferential import arrangements granted by the EU to rice originating from Bangladesh, on the Lisbon Treaty.

Animal health, veterinary and phytosanitary issues

First reading agreement with the EP on electronic identification of bovine animals

The new proposal aims to a) take into account the new technology in electronic identification of bovine animals, b) simplify the existing regulatory framework as regards bovine identification, and c) align the existing regulatory framework to the Lisbon Treaty.

First reading agreement with the EP on computer databases which are part of the surveillance networks in the Member States

This amendment was made necessary by the amendment to the afore-mentioned regulation on electronic identification of bovine animals because the elements of the computer databases laid down in the previous directive did not include any reference to electronic means of identification.

Fisheries

First reading agreement on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund

The Regulation will ensure the unimpeded funding of the Union's new Common Fisheries Policy, thus ensuring the effective implementation of its set goals. Fishermen will be assisted in their transition towards sustainable forms of fisheries, and coastal communities in diversifying their economies. Projects funded through the Fund will focus on job creation, placing particular emphasis on small scale fisheries and aquaculture, as well as on improving the quality of life on European coastal areas. The EMFF regulation is the last of the 3 pieces of legislation in the CFP reform package, which is now completed.

First reading agreement with the EP on enhanced financing for member states under financial pressure or instability

The amendment is aimed at ensuring a correct implementation of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) programmes in member states whose financial resources are under pressure. The regulation allows the Commission to make increased payments under co-financing to these countries for the period of application of support mechanisms, so as to enable them to continue implementation of fisheries policy programmes and to continue to disburse funds to projects. However, these provisions have no impact on the EU budget as the overall allocation for the period 2007-2013 is not modified.

Early second reading agreement with the EP on measures concerning incidental catches of cetaceans in fisheries

The Regulation will enable the Commission to ensure the effective protection of cetaceans.

Results of the Hellenic Presidency
of the Council of the European Union

First reading agreement with the EP on a multiannual recovery plan for Bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean

The purpose of this regulation is to transpose into EU law the latest International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT) recommendation modifying the recovery plan for the bluefin tuna in the Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean, so as to better adapt the fishing seasons to the activity of the fleets.

Report of the Inter-institutional Task Force on Multiannual Plans for fisheries management

The tripartite inter-institutional task force of the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission reached an agreement on the content of the multiannual Plans for fisheries management, that constitute the main fisheries management tool, in line with the revised Common Fisheries Policy, with the aim of achieving the sustainability of fishing activities. The task force's report sets the basic principles and information that must be included in the multiannual plans for fisheries management.

Forestry

First reading agreement with the EP on the establishment of a FLEGT licensing scheme for imports of timber into the European Community

The new Regulation aims to align the FLEGT licensing scheme with the Lisbon Treaty so as to ensure the effective tracing of imports of timber and timber products into the European Community.

Adoption of Council Conclusions on a new EU forest strategy

The Council welcomed the new EU Forest Strategy published by the Commission in September 2013. The strategy is aimed at putting forests and the forest sector at the heart of the policy for achieving a green economy and to value the benefits that forests can sustainably deliver, while ensuring their protection.

Work still ongoing for future Presidencies

The Hellenic Presidency presented a report on the evaluation of the impact assessment of the proposal for a regulation on organic production and labelling of organic products. It also informed the Council on the progress achieved so far, on the completion of the impact assessment and the assessment of the effectiveness of the indicative checklist, in the context of the Impact Assessment Pilot Project.

The Presidency also informed the AGRIFISH Council on the progress achieved so far on the Regulation on the production and making available on the market of plant reproductive material, on the Regulation as regards the aid scheme for the supply of fruit and vegetables, bananas and milk in the educational establishments, and on the Regulation determining measures on fixing certain aids and refunds related to the common organisation of the markets in agricultural products

The Hellenic Presidency prepared a compromise proposal as regards the amendment to the Regulation on the landing obligation that will be used in future negotiations of the next Presidencies with the EP.

ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL (ENVI)

Effective environmental protection

First reading agreement with the EP on the European environmental economic accounts

The new regulation broadens the scope of the current law by introducing new environmental economic accounts modules: a module for environmental protection expenditure accounts, a module for environmental goods and services sector accounts and a module for physical energy flow accounts. These new modules correspond to the Union's priorities as regards green growth and resource efficiency. The amended regulation represents another step in increasing the available economic data related to the environment and ensuring their international comparability; it will be used, among others, to evaluate progress towards reaching the Europe 2020 objectives related to climate and the environment.

First reading agreement with the EP on shipments of waste

The new regulation contains strengthened measures to ensure a more uniform implementation of the waste shipment regulation throughout the EU. From now on, member states are obligated to draft inspection schemes based on risk assessment, while, as of 2018, inspection results and subsequent measures taken must be made public on a yearly basis. The regulation also reinforces the cooperation and the exchange of information among member states.

First reading agreement with the EP on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species

The regulation lays down rules to prevent, minimise and mitigate the adverse impacts of the introduction and spread, both intentional and unintentional, of invasive alien species on biodiversity, the related ecosystem services, as well as other economic and social impacts.

Political agreement in Council on the restriction or prohibition of GMO cultivation in the territory of a member state

The aim of the proposal is to provide a sound legal basis in the related EU legal framework in order to allow member states to restrict or prohibit the cultivation, in all or part of their territory, of GMOs that have been authorised or are under authorisation at EU level.

Climate change

First reading agreement with the EP on an EU greenhouse gas emission allowance trading scheme, in view of the implementation of a single global market-based measure to international aviation emissions

In line with the outcome of the 38th International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) Assembly held in September 2013, there should be a single global market-based measure applying to international aviation emissions from 2020 onwards. The new regulation is intended to maintain the momentum reached within the ICAO and to facilitate progress at the upcoming 39th session in 2016, by limiting the scope of application of the greenhouse gas emission allowance trading only to flights effectuated within the European Economic Area until 2016.

First reading agreement with the EP on the technical implementation of the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

The Regulations sets rules that ensure the technical implementation of the Kyoto Protocol within the EU for the period 2013-2020. The new rules are necessary as regards the effective implementation and respect of the Union's, the member-states' and Iceland's commitments, while at the same time ensuring the respect of relevant EU law.

International Environmental Cooperation

Adoption of Council conclusions on the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety

The conclusions will allow the EU to have a solid negotiating position at the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD (COP 12) that will take place in Pyeongchang from 6 to 17 October 2014. Key topics to be discussed are, for instance, the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, resource mobilisation and marine and coastal biodiversity. In the conclusions the Council confirms the EU and its member states' strong commitment to the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its related Protocols and to the implementation of the decisions adopted by their governing bodies, in particular the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its Aichi Targets. In addition, the Council calls for the objectives of the CBD and those of the Strategic Plan and its Aichi Targets to be reflected, as appropriate, in the Sustainable Development Goals' targets and indicators. The Council stresses the need for the post-2015 framework to support the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and to tackle the causes of biodiversity loss.

International meetings and events

During the Hellenic Presidency took place the third Meeting of the Open-ended Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Committee for the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing (Pyeongchang, 24-28 February), the first preparatory meeting of the UN Environment Assembly (Nairobi, 24-28 March) and the sixth Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention in conjunction with the Second meeting of the Parties to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Protocol (Geneva, 2-5 June).

Work still ongoing for future Presidencies

The Hellenic Presidency conducted a wide range of discussions at the relevant working groups and at the ENVI and TTE Energy Councils in its efforts to finalise the EU Policy package on an EU Climate – Energy Framework for 2030. In this context, the Presidency drafted a roadmap outlining the future work programme until the October 2014 European Council, when the EU Heads of State and Government are supposed to arrive at a final decision.

The Presidency conducted an orientation debate on the clean air package at the June 2014 ENVI Council. It also informed the Council on the progress achieved so far on the Directive on packaging waste to reduce the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags, as well as on the Regulation on the monitoring, reporting and verification of carbon dioxide emissions from maritime transport.

EDUCATION, YOUTH, CULTURE&SPORT COUNCIL (EYCS)

EDUCATION

Adoption of Council Conclusions on efficient and innovative education and training to invest in skills

The conclusions are a first response to the education-related messages of the 2014 Annual Growth Survey, and focus primarily on the need for education and training systems across the EU to improve skills performance in order to ensure that young people and low-skilled adults acquire the kind of skills and competences relevant to today's labour market. The conclusions call in particular for a more innovative approach to education and training, notably by incorporating digital forms of learning into mainstream education, as well as urging member states to make full use of the new generation of financial instruments, in particular the Erasmus+ Programme and the European Structural and Investment Funds.

Adoption of Council conclusions on quality assurance supporting education and training

Promoting quality in all sectors of the education and training system is an important priority for all member states, although ensuring quality and transparency is important not just at national level but at European level too, as an increasing number of students participate every year in cross-border mobility schemes, not least those funded by the new Erasmus+ Programme. The conclusions address specific issues such as the quality of cross-border education and the extent to which quality assurance arrangements could be developed in other areas of education and training.

Adoption of Council conclusions on effective teacher education

The education and training of teachers - both in preparation for, and throughout, their careers - is a crucial element in ensuring high quality teaching, which in turn is a key factor in achieving better learning outcomes and educational success. The conclusions highlight the importance of identifying the professional competences which teacher educators themselves need, as well as the knowledge, skills and attitudes which they should be helping future teachers to develop. Member states are also invited to use the funding opportunities in EU instruments, such as the Erasmus+ Programme and, where appropriate, the European Social Fund.

Adoption of Council conclusions on multilingualism and the development of language competences

Linguistic diversity is a fundamental component of European culture and intercultural dialogue and being able to communicate in a language other than one's mother tongue is a key competence that contributes to the mobility, employability and personal development of European citizens, in particular young people, in line with the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy for growth and jobs. The conclusions invite member states to adopt and improve measures aimed at promoting multilingualism and enhancing the quality and efficiency of language learning and teaching. They also define the criteria for an EU-wide survey of language competences which the Commission proposes to launch in 2016-17.

YOUTH

Adoption of Council conclusions on promoting youth entrepreneurship to foster social inclusion of young people

The conclusions focus on fostering social entrepreneurship, creativity, innovation and green jobs and invite member states to recognize the importance of entrepreneurial education from an early age, highlighting the role of non-formal and informal learning to ensure the autonomy and the personal development of young people, as well as to facilitate their successful integration into the

labour market and to combat youth unemployment, whose levels remain staggeringly high Union-wide. In particular, the “social entrepreneurship” model, primarily aimed at contributing to the general good of society, can appeal to young people and give them the chance to provide innovative responses to the current economic, social and environmental challenges.

Adoption of Council resolution on the structured dialogue process, including the social inclusion of young people

The aim of the structured dialogue with young people is to serve as a forum for continuous joint reflection on the priorities, implementation and follow-up of the European cooperation in the youth field, involving a wide range of young people and youth organisations in the consultations at all levels in the member states, at the EU Youth Conferences and during the European Youth Week.

Adoption of Council resolution on a European Union Work Plan for Youth 2014-2015

The new Work Plan for Youth should give priority to 1) the development of youth work and non-formal and informal learning and its contribution to addressing the effects of the crisis on young people, 2) the enhanced cross-sectorial cooperation within the framework of EU strategies and 3) empowerment, with a special focus on access to rights, autonomy, participation and active citizenship within and outside the EU.

CULTURE

First reading agreement with the EP on the return of cultural objects unlawfully removed from the territory of a member state

The Directive aims to improve the efficiency of the mechanisms to secure the return of cultural objects classified as national treasures; this is largely achieved by broadening the definition of national treasures eligible for return, by extending the deadlines for the initiation of return proceedings, by utilizing the Internal Market Information System to improve administrative cooperation and information exchanges between national authorities, and by placing the burden of proof on the possessor for compensation purposes.

Early second reading agreement with the EP on the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020-2033

The Decision effectively ensures the continuation of the European Capitals of Culture institution into the years 2020 to 2033. Originally proposed in 1985 by the then Greek Minister of Culture, Melina Mercury, the main aim of the European Capitals of Culture is to showcase Europe’s cultural richness and diversity.

Adoption of recommendation for a Council Decision designating the European Capital of Culture for the year 2018 in the Netherlands

Leeuwarden is designated as “European Capital of Culture 2018” in the Netherlands.

Adoption of Council conclusions on cultural heritage as a strategic resource for a sustainable Europe

The conclusions underline that cultural heritage, be it tangible, intangible or digital, is a strategic resource in which modern Europe - one of the richest regions in the world in terms of culture - should invest in order to make its social, economic and environmental development more sustainable. The fact that cultural heritage is unique and non-renewable presents opportunities as well as challenges. Among the opportunities, the text highlights the contribution of cultural heritage to social cohesion and to the economy, where heritage can become a driver for regional development, local jobs, urban regeneration and cultural tourism. On the other hand, the economic crisis and the limited public financing for culture can have a particularly adverse effect on conservation and preservation of cultural heritage, which is often seen as an expensive "extra".

Climate change, which can lead to cultural assets being irreversibly damaged or lost, also constitutes a major challenge, as well as the impact of the digital shift. Given the cross-cutting nature of cultural heritage, member states and the Commission are invited to better coordinate their policies and actions which deal with or have an impact on cultural heritage, including at international level.

SPORT

Adoption of Council resolution on an EU Work Plan for Sport (2014-2017)

Building on the achievements of the first EU Work Plan, and complementing and reinforcing the impact of activities launched under the Erasmus+ programme in the field of sport, the second Work Plan once more acknowledges the important contribution of sport to the overall goals of the Europe 2020 strategy, given the sector's strong potential to contribute to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and new jobs and considering its positive effects on social inclusion, education and training, as well as on public health and active ageing . The plan sets out the following priority areas:

- integrity of sport, including anti-doping, the fight against match-fixing, protection of minors, good governance and gender equality;
- economic dimension of sport, addressing in particular sustainable financing of sport, the legacy of major sport events, economic benefits of sport and innovation;
- sport and society, covering health-enhancing physical activities (HEPA), volunteering and employment in sport, as well as education and training in sport.

Adoption of Council Conclusions on gender equality in sport

Equality between women and men is a fundamental principle of the European Union enshrined in the Treaties and integrating this principle into all EU activities and policies constitutes one of the EU's specific tasks. Gender equality is also enshrined in article 23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. However, gender balance in sport is implemented differently in the member states and more work is still required at European level and at the level of the international sports movement. The Council invited member states to consider developing policies and programmes for eliminating gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality in education curricula and practices from an early age. The conclusions also call on member states to promote, in cooperation with sports organisations, the prevention of gender-based violence in sport and the protection of victims and potential victims of sexual abuse and harassment in sport. Member states are also asked to consider developing with sport organisations adequate and proportional measures to check the suitability of persons working in the field of sport (especially with minors).