

Programme of the Austrian Presidency

Presidency of the Council of the European Union
1 July – 31 December 2018



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of the
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Priorities of the Austrian EU Presidency

Austria will take over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union on 1 July 2018, in a time of great challenges and upheavals, both on the European continent and beyond. 2018, a year in which Austria commemorates not only the so-called “Anschluss” in 1938, but also the revolution of 1848 and the end of the First World War in 1918, is a reminder that Europe has already weathered numerous crises and witnessed profound political change. However, the painful lessons of the past have taught us that Europe not only managed to survive its darkest hours, but ultimately emerged from them stronger and united.

Long-lasting peace, along with freedom and growing prosperity in all EU Member States, are major achievements of the European integration and must be preserved. Today, however, Europe faces new challenges which no country will be able to address on its own. Globalisation leads to intensified economic competition and the consequences of armed conflicts in neighbouring regions and global migration flows are becoming increasingly difficult to cope with. Climate protection is an increasingly pressing issue, and the threats of terrorism and radicalisation are on the rise. These issues need to be addressed rapidly, if Europe wants to safeguard its achievements, values and the European way of life – and thereby maintain the support of its citizens and remain a global power. The Austrian Presidency considers it both its duty and its ambition to contribute to finding solutions to these major challenges.

Also within the European Union itself, the Austrian Presidency will encounter a very demanding environment. The EU will be concerned with two important topics during the Austrian Presidency which will be decisive for the future: on the one hand, the conclusion of the negotiations on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Brexit), and, on the other hand, the negotiations on the Multi-annual Financial Framework post 2020 following the presentation of the respective proposals of the European Commission in May and June 2018.

Concerning the complex Brexit negotiations, the Withdrawal Agreement and the terms on the transition period as well as the Political Declaration on the framework for future EU-UK relations associated with the Withdrawal Agreement have to be finalised by autumn 2018. This is necessary to ensure the United Kingdom's orderly withdrawal from the European Union on 30 March 2019. In this context, Austria will focus on maintaining the unity of the EU-27, and on laying the foundations for a positive and successful relationship with the UK after its withdrawal.

The Multiannual Financial Framework post 2020 will have to respond to several new challenges and priorities, as well as to the fact that the UK will no longer be paying contributions. Negotiations will be conducted intensively under the Austrian Presidency. In this respect, it will be crucial that the budgeted resources lead to gains in efficiency and provide a clear European added value for the EU to benefit as a whole.

In addition, the Austrian Presidency takes place shortly before to the European Parliament elections in May 2019. There is therefore the expectation that EU legislative proposals will be taken forward as much as possible or brought to a conclusion during this period. Austria views its role during the forthcoming Council Presidency as that of an honest broker and will use its best efforts to find common solutions. There is no doubt that a Presidency can only make progress if it can count on the unity of the EU and its Member States. In order to overcome the challenges it faces, the EU must ensure that all EU Member States pursue a joint approach. Given its geographic location in the heart of the EU, its obligation of neutrality and in line with its traditional role as bridge builder, Austria will endeavour to contribute to the unity within the EU during its Council Presidency.

A Europe that protects

In recent years, the EU has had to deal with several crises that have shaken citizens' confidence in the European Union as a Union that guarantees peace and security. Austria will therefore choose the following motto for its Presidency: A Europe that protects.

This is in accordance with EU citizens' expectations. Austria's efforts will be aimed at strengthening the European Union, helping it to get closer to its citizens and re-establishing trust – citizens' trust in the EU's capacity to act, mutual trust among the Member States, and trust in the EU as a reliable and stabilising force in the world.

In order to achieve this objective, Austria's approach will be based on enhancing the principle of subsidiarity. The European Union should focus on big issues which require a joint solution and take a step back when it comes to smaller issues where Member States or regions are in a better position to take decisions. This approach aims at taking seriously the motto of the European Union, "United in Diversity" as well as the ongoing debate on the future of Europe, in particular the scenario "Doing less more efficiently". As often shown in the past, the EU's strength derives also from the diversity of its Member States and regions. Only if there is sufficient room for finding local solutions to smaller issues, will it be possible to credibly promote unity in the face of big issues. In this context, Austria will place a strong emphasis on the involvement of EU citizens in issues concerning the future development of the European Union.

In light of the big challenges mentioned above, the EU is in a position to provide an indispensable added value for its citizens and its Member States. To that effect, the Austrian Presidency will prioritise the role of the European Union as a Europe that protects, in particular concerning three priority areas: security and migration, maintaining competitiveness through digitalisation, and stability in the neighbourhood.

1. Security and the fight against illegal migration

The consequences of Europe's largest migration crisis since the Second World War and the concerns of citizens about further uncontrolled migratory flows have highlighted the importance of a joint approach in the fight against illegal migration and of securing the EU's ability to act. At the centre of these efforts are the reform of the Common European Asylum System as well as the re-focussing and strengthening of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency FRONTEX, in order to guarantee the efficient protection of the EU's external borders. Moreover, the aim is to work more closely with third countries in order to ensure effective return policies and to provide assistance to those in need of protection before they enter the EU while, on the other hand, preventing those not in need of protection from setting off on the dangerous crossing to Europe. The Heads of State or Government will deal with these issues at their informal summit held in Salzburg on 20 September 2018.

As organised crime in a globalised and converging world is operating in an increasingly connected way, the Austrian Presidency will advocate efficient cooperation of and information exchange between the security authorities of individual Member States as well as the interoperability of the relevant large databases. Furthermore, joint efforts are needed also at European level to combat terror threats and radicalisation of all kinds.

2. Securing prosperity and competitiveness through digitalisation

The EU maintains its position as the world's leading trade power and largest internal market. However, Europe's share of global GDP and its economic power are in decline. To sustainably secure its prosperity and competitiveness, it is essential that the EU consistently avoids overregulation and makes progress in the fields of innovation and digitalisation. In addition, many EU citizens are concerned about the effects digitalisation may have on the economy and their personal lives. A considerable share of growth in the EU can already be attributed to the digital economy. With an intelligent policy of digital transformation, it will be possible to safeguard the competitiveness and sustainability of the European economy also in the future. Completing the Digital Single Market, modernising public administration on a broad scale and renewing industrial policy will improve framework conditions for digital business models and services.

For the digital economy to develop its full potential and to benefit everybody, a modern and balanced regulatory framework is required. National public budgets need to be protected from harmful tax competition and tax avoidance, and fair conditions of competition must be guaranteed for all companies. The Austrian Presidency aims at continuing the EU's work on the taxation of the digital economy in order to ensure that profits are taxed in the country in which they are generated.

3. Stability in the European neighbourhood – EU perspective of the Western Balkans/ South Eastern Europe

A European Union that offers its citizens stability, peace and security is only possible in a stable and secure neighbourhood. To this end, during its Presidency, Austria will focus on promoting strong relationships between the EU and its neighbours.

In this context, the Western Balkan/South Eastern European countries take centre stage. In terms of economic and security policy, this region belongs to Europe and proved to be a reliable partner during the migration crisis. Furthermore, we are also linked by a common historical and cultural heritage. It is in the interest of Austria's and Europe's economy and security that the future of the Western Balkans/ South Eastern Europe lies within the European Union. Building on the work of the Bulgarian Presidency and the European Commission's Enlargement Strategy presented on 6 February 2018, the Austrian Presidency will, along with its European partners, advocate for developing a concrete EU perspective for all Western Balkan/South Eastern European states based on clear criteria relating to their individual performance and work on achieving measurable progress.



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General Affairs Council

We want a strong Europe, trusted by our citizens



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Austria's Presidency of the Council of the European Union comes at a turbulent time in the European integration process, a time of both opportunities and challenges. In this context, it is essential to ensure cross-cutting political coherence in the work performed at EU level. The General Affairs Council has a key role to play in this effort.

During Austria's Presidency, the negotiations about the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union are to be completed and those on the future Multiannual Financial Framework to be intensified, so new programmes can start on schedule on 1 January 2021. Recent years have shown that we need a Europe people can identify with, which offers them security and in which they can put their trust. The European Union's strength derives from the diversity of its Member States and regions. At the same time, the European Union is based on common rules and values which need to be adhered to and strengthened while taking into account the principle of subsidiarity.

The Task force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and "Doing less more efficiently", which was established by the President of the European Commission and also includes representatives of the national parliaments of the trio partners and the Committee of the Regions, will present its recommendations on how to better apply the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality in July 2018. The Austrian Presidency will focus its efforts on an approach towards more subsidiarity – the pivotal question in this respect is where specifically more or less Europe is needed. We need stronger cooperation on major issues, such as security and defence policy, migration, the protection of the EU's external borders, as well as digitalisation. At the same time, however, the European Union should take a step back on smaller issues where the regions or Member States are in a better position to take decisions themselves. In the course of its Presidency, Austria will hold a high-level conference on subsidiarity which will address these questions. Moreover, Citizens' Consultations will be organised throughout the Member States to discuss the future development of the European Union, and finalising the revision of the European Citizens' Initiative will improve citizens' opportunities to participate at EU level.

In the second half of 2018, the European Council will, under the Leaders' Agenda, address the following topics: Internal security, migration (follow-up to the informal meeting of the Heads of State or Government on 20 September 2018), future trade policy, Multiannual Financial Framework and the Single Market.

Bringing the six accession candidates from South Eastern Europe closer to the EU in the framework of the enlargement process is a strategic investment in peace, democracy, prosperity, security and stability in Europe. It is thus in the interest of both the EU and the region and serves as a transformative power and driving force for reforms. Based on the strategy presented by the European Commission in February 2018 ("A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans"), the annual country reports, the corresponding Council conclusions as well as the results of the EU-Western Balkans Summit on 17 May 2018 in Sofia, the Austrian Presidency will focus on achieving concrete progress in the accession process of the Western Balkan countries. This includes, in particular, implementing the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, stepping up the pace of the ongoing accession negotiations with Serbia and Montenegro, as well as promoting further integration measures to be taken by the other Western Balkan countries.

The Austrian Presidency will see intensive negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework post 2020, with the objective to advance the negotiations as much as possible.

Furthermore, the Austrian Presidency will devote its attention to the European Semester and, together with Romania, which will take over the Presidency from Austria, present the roadmap for the 2019 European Semester.

The annual rule of law dialogue held among Member States since 2015 will also take place during Austria's Presidency in 2018.

The interinstitutional agreement on better law-making, which entered into force in April 2016, aims at making the EU legislative process more transparent, more effective and more focused on currently relevant central policy areas. It entails adjustments to the entire policymaking cycle, from consultations and impact assessments to the adoption, implementation and evaluation of EU legislation. The ongoing implementation measures undertaken jointly by the European Parliament and the European Commission will continue during the Austrian Presidency, and Austria will present the Council with a report on the current status.

Also, the enshrinement of the Agenda 2030 goals in the relevant strategy and institutions, as well as their implementation by EU institutions and Member States will be discussed during the Austrian Presidency.

The relationship between Switzerland and the EU is characterised by close cooperation and strong economic ties. Negotiations with Switzerland on an institutional framework agreement could possibly be completed during Austria's Presidency. This would consolidate the existing, complex relations and prepare the ground for Switzerland's potential participation in other sectors of the Single Market.

In the context of the next Multiannual Financial Framework, cohesion policy is up for renegotiation for the period after 2020. Important aspects in the reorientation of the cohesion policy (its funding sources being the ERDF, the Cohesion Fund and the ESF+) are differentiation, proportionality, simplification, and increased results orientation. The Austrian Presidency will strive for quick and efficient progress on this negotiation package.

Brexit presents an unprecedented political, economic and legal challenge for the European Union. The final stage of the withdrawal negotiations will take place during the Austrian Presidency. The negotiations must be completed by October 2018 so they can be approved by the European Parliament and the United Kingdom before the two-year negotiation period under Article 50 TEU expires. Therefore, the General Affairs Council (Article 50) will devote its attention to the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the EU and prepare the meetings of the European Council (Article 50). Austria's objective in this context will be to maintain the unity of the EU 27. The Withdrawal Agreement must provide for strong guarantees and controls as well as protections for the citizens' rights. Our goal is a constructive and forward-looking relationship with the United Kingdom, which requires a level playing field and a reasonable balance between rights and obligations.





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Foreign Affairs Council

The Union as a strong global actor



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During its Presidency, Austria will work for a coherent external presence and support the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in fulfilling her tasks.

Austria's main priorities in foreign affairs and security policy will be increasing security and stability in the immediate neighbourhood, for example by promoting the European perspective in South Eastern European states, further developing the Eastern Partnership, strengthening the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), and dealing with the challenges posed by irregular migration. Furthermore, emphasis will be placed on reinforcing the relations between the EU and Asia, and promoting effective and rules-based multilateralism.

Common Foreign and Security Policy

Fostering international cooperation

One of the priorities will be the promotion of effective multilateralism and a rules-based global order, to which the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) accords high implementation priority. In the current geopolitical situation, it is important to present a resolute and coherent European approach on the international stage, based on international law. With a view to maintaining peace and security and addressing global challenges, it is necessary to implement commitments to multilateralism in terms of both actions and solutions. During its Presidency, Austria will use its best efforts to consolidate the EU's leading role in promoting effective multilateralism, as well as to foster multilateral topics and processes. For example, Austria will endeavour to contribute its expertise on disarmament, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and arms control.

Furthermore, it is necessary to improve the situation in Ukraine and to contribute to solving current conflicts in Syria, Libya and other countries in the Mediterranean region. These challenges can only be met in close cooperation with the EU's partners, among them the United Nations (UN), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe (CoE). In order to be effective, the foreign and security policy needs to be better communicated, so as to convey the EU's actions and resolutions in a comprehensible manner to EU citizens and partner countries alike. Hence, during its Presidency Austria will devote special attention to improving the EU's strategic communication in this area.

The Union as a reliable partner

With the EU's and other partners' support, the Eastern Partnership region is to become an area of security and prosperity. During the Austrian Presidency, a meeting of the foreign ministers of the Eastern Partnership will be held to evaluate progress and discuss further steps. The crisis in Ukraine will require particular attention. As Russia plays a key role for security and stability in Europe and the world, Austria's goal will be to continue to pursue EU-Russia relations based on the five guiding principles already defined as well as to strengthen the EU-Russia dialogue.

Sustainable stabilisation in the South Eastern European region is crucial for security in Europe as a whole and represents a further goal to be achieved in cooperation with other international actors. Furthermore, the Austrian Presidency will endeavour to increase the EU's cooperation with South Eastern European states in certain policy areas. The further inclusion of South Eastern European states in CSDP missions and operations will be actively supported.

The EU will have to continue dealing with crises in surrounding regions. In addition to areas of conflict in Syria, Libya and Yemen, attention must also be paid to other countries affected by these crises, such as Lebanon for example. Another topical foreign policy issue is Iran, which deserves close attention not least with a view to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the Middle East Peace Process (Israel/Palestine). The EU must face all of these challenges with a proactive and unified approach.

As for relations with African countries, dealing with crises and supporting economic development will remain key priorities. Furthermore, Austria will promote the implementation of the resolutions passed at the 5th African Union - European Union Summit in November 2017.

A particular focus during the Austrian Presidency will lie on the Asian region. The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) will be organised in Brussels, where Heads of State or Government will discuss the future political and economic cooperation of their countries. The foreign ministers of the ASEAN Member States will meet with their colleagues from the EU to talk about opportunities for cooperation between the EU and the emerging global region of South-East Asia. The Austrian Presidency will also endeavor to achieve a contribution by the EU to solve the crisis on the North Korean peninsula.

Topics of the continued transatlantic dialogue with the strategic partner USA include the Middle East and South Eastern Europe, as well as global issues such as the CSDP, the fight against terrorism, cybersecurity, or energy. Also, a foreign ministers conference with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) is envisaged to be held during the Austrian Presidency. The Foreign Affairs Council is likely to also have to deal with the political crisis in Venezuela in the second half of 2018.

External aspects of migration

With a view to an effective migration control, Austria will also place a focus on external aspects of migration during its Presidency. This means close and cooperative partnerships of the EU with relevant countries of origin and transit. Comprehensive cooperation with those countries concerning the political stabilisation and the promotion of economic and social development, human rights and good governance is essential in order to achieve effective cooperation regarding curbing illegal migration, including fight against human trafficking, creation of sustainable protection capacities in the relevant regions as well as securing return, readmission and reintegration.

Specific measures include the consistent implementation of the Malta Declaration and of the efforts undertaken by the Joint EU-AU-UN Task Force, the targeted expansion of cooperation models and migration dialogues with priority countries of origin (inter alia, the Partnership Framework with Ethiopia, Nigeria, Mali, Niger and Senegal), the second assessment of the Joint Valetta Action Plan in autumn 2018, and the coordination of EU positions prior to the Budapest Process conference of ministers with countries located along the Silk Road.

Security and defence

Given the current geopolitical situation, the EU finds itself constantly faced with new and ever more complex challenges and threats. These require a broad-based approach and strong commitment to security and defence that encompasses the whole spectrum of military and non-military capacities, with a particular emphasis on prevention. Furthermore, internal and external as well as military and non-military aspects need to be better interconnected.

In response to the deteriorating security environment, the EU has, since 2013, been stepping up its security and defence efforts. There are three main strands of work, each broken down into numerous tasks: implementation of the EUGS with respect to security and defence, implementation of the European Defence Action Plan (EDAP), and implementation of the EU-NATO Joint Declaration.

Overall, Austria will devote special attention to the following topics: maintaining the political dynamics in security and defence, addressing the financing of CSDP missions and operations and capacity building in partner countries, keeping up a strategic dialogue on the further development of CSDP missions and operations in accordance with European interests, protection of the EU's external borders, dealing with migration issues, including the causes of migration, prevention and combating of radicalisation and violent extremism as well as organised crime, and promotion of effective multilateralism, in particular by intensifying partnerships with relevant international organisations such as the United Nations System and the OSCE, as well as protection of civilians. Austria will also place a particular emphasis on improving security in South Eastern Europe and a stronger inclusion of this region.

With a view to strengthening the EU's strategic autonomy and realising the EU's ambitions, Austria will fulfil its role in strengthening the integrated and competitive European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB). In this respect, it is also important to ensure fair cross-border market access in particular for small and medium-sized enterprises. After the establishment of an inclusive and ambitious Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the goal now is to quickly develop governance structures and to implement the first set of projects. In a first phase, Austria itself participates in four projects and will contribute to the development of new PESCO projects. With respect to cybersecurity, Austria will strive for European approaches to ease international tensions in this area and to find global partners willing to join in efforts to keep the internet open and secure while also respecting fundamental human rights. This also entails advancing necessary skills and instruments in cybersecurity under the CSDP and PESCO. To be able to deal with hybrid threats, Austria will work on developing a nationwide approach with a strong emphasis on resilience.

A close-knit cooperation between the EU and its Member States is crucial for coping with the challenges posed by terrorism, violent extremism and political Islam. Given that potential threats have moved from outside the EU's external borders into the heart of the European Union, stepped-up efforts to fight the root causes of radicalism and violent extremism within the EU have taken on special importance. Cooperation with third countries, especially with the southern and eastern neighbourhood of the EU, should be enhanced.

Based on the experience gained during Austria's OSCE Chairmanship in 2017, where combating terrorism was a priority issue, the Austrian Presidency will contribute towards consistently implementing the conclusions adopted by the European Council in June 2017.

The ties between organised crime and terrorism must be addressed not only within the EU, under a criminal law perspective, but also require increased attention within international cooperation activities. In the spirit of strengthening multilateralism, Austria will aspire to an intensified cooperation with the newly established United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism in New York and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Vienna. The most important topics will be the implementation of the new EU Policy Cycle, the more efficient use of Europol's financial resources, and a debate on the coordination of priorities.

Development cooperation

In response to the issue of migration, the Austrian Presidency intends to place a strong emphasis on linking humanitarian aid with long-term development policy measures in a bid to provide economic perspectives in the countries of origin, in particular for young people. In this context, a closer link with the willingness of third countries to cooperate in the readmission of asylum seekers whose applications were rejected will be sought.

In the area of development cooperation, Austria will devote special attention to the topic of gender equality and development. Guided by the report on the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan 2016–2020, Austria will place a strong emphasis on issues such as women and education, women and health, women's political and economic participation, women's role in conflict and crisis situations, as well as combating violence against women and girls.

With respect to sustainable energy, Austria will strive for the use of renewable energy sources and the increase of energy efficiency.

As a cross-cutting topic, the principles of efficiency and effectiveness are to be introduced in all aspects of development cooperation.

The revision of the EU external financing instruments in the context of the Multi-annual Financial Framework post 2020 will also be dealt with during the Austrian Presidency. Austria will advocate enhanced responsiveness, transparency and results orientation.

As the Cotonou Agreement expires in 2020, negotiations on a renewal of the partnership with the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States will begin in 2018. Austria will work for a coordinated EU position in this context.

The development policy aspect of the EU External Investment Plan (EIP), which was established to encourage private investment, above all in Africa, will continue to be a subject of consultations.

Trade

Being an open and export-oriented economy, Austria supports an active EU trade policy based on the EU “Trade for All” strategy, which it considers to be a key factor in sustainable economic development and the creation of high-quality jobs. An effective and transparent trade policy requires partnerships among equals, concerning both new and traditional alliances. In light of current developments, the Austrian Presidency will therefore support a strong and unified EU approach with regards to the strategic advancement of our trade relations.

One of the goals of the Austrian Presidency is to strengthen the EU’s position as a global economic player. Negotiating up-to-date and well-balanced free trade and investment agreements and working in the context of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) should contribute to developing fair rules for international trade from which all members of society stand to benefit. In this context, the pertinent activities of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shall be given particular consideration. Inclusiveness and transparency are crucial characteristics of such negotiations. All future negotiation processes, whether at European or national level, will have to safeguard the interests of EU citizens in the best possible way.

Special attention in this respect should also be paid to including well-balanced investment provisions in EU agreements that take public regulatory concerns into account. Therefore, the Austrian Presidency will actively support the EU’s efforts to develop an innovative, multilateral approach to investments, taking into account the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises.

Important legislative dossiers concern the framework for screening of foreign direct investments into the EU as well as the control of trade in dual-use items. In particular with respect to screening foreign direct investments into the EU, the Austrian Presidency will strive to achieve greatest possible progress. Similarly, progress is envisaged to be made on the legislative processes concerning the access of third-country goods and services to the EU’s internal market for public procurement, as well as on the Horizontal Safeguard Regulation.

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Economic and Financial Affairs Council

A stable and strong euro area and fair and efficient taxation



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The Austrian Presidency takes place in continuously favourable economic conditions which reflect the outcome of the manifold and determined reform efforts undertaken in the past years. In 2018 and 2019, the EU economy is expected to grow by more than 2% each year, with both internal demand as well as exports continuing to grow at a robust pace. At the same time, labour markets will further improve and unemployment rates are set to decline.

In spite of considerable progress achieved in addressing macro-economic and structural weaknesses as well as strengthening the architecture of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), some major challenges persist. There are still too many people without a job, and public and private debt levels in some Member States remain a matter of concern. Despite the overall decline of non-performing loans (NPLs), many banks still have double-digit NPL ratios.

The economic expansion provides an additional window of opportunity for strengthening the region's resilience. Further measures are required, both at EU and at Member State level, to boost growth, employment and investment and to make Europe's economy more sustainable, more productive and more competitive. The Austrian Presidency will advance the negotiations on the implementation of the EU reform agenda, and aims at reaching concrete results or at least significant progress in all relevant policy areas.

Completing the Banking Union and developing a Capital Markets Union

With respect to the Banking Union, the Austrian Presidency will focus on further risk reduction measures, as progress in this area is a prerequisite for resuming discussions on further risk sharing measures. This concerns in particular the establishment of a European Deposit Insurance System (EDIS) as well as the introduction of a common backstop to the Single Resolution Fund provided by the European Stability Mechanism (ESM). First and foremost, Austria will strive for an agreement on the Banking Package (risk reduction measures) presented by the European Commission in November 2016, which already addresses a number of important objectives outlined in the ECOFIN roadmap of June 2016 on risk reduction measures. In particular, liabilities for tax payers shall be precluded. In addition, particular attention will be paid to the European Commission's proposals for further reducing non-performing loans stocks as well as other legacy assets and preventing the accumulation of new NPLs.

Also with respect to the numerous other topics related to financial services, Austria will do its best to achieve significant progress and finalise dossiers. We will also ensure an appropriate follow-up to the Commission's FinTech Action Plan (and the respective conclusions of the ECOFIN Council), with a particular focus on opportunities and risks of virtual assets and on regulatory and supervisory measures that may become necessary in this context. Finally, the Austrian Presidency will also advance the building of a Capital Markets Union, thus contributing to innovation and competitiveness, employment and growth.

Deepening and strengthening economic policy coordination

The economic and financial crisis has been used to fundamentally reform economic, fiscal and financial governance rules. Today, the European Union is better prepared than ever regarding crisis prevention and resolution. However, to further strengthen credibility and trust, better compliance with governance rules, notably with the Stability and Growth Pact, is needed. With a view to further strengthening the EMU, we should concentrate on policy measures with real and visible added value to the EU in terms of stability, resilience and convergence. Against this backdrop, the Austrian Presidency is determined to continue the debate based on the Commission's proposals of December 2017 and spring 2018 and the results achieved by the Bulgarian Presidency.

Improving efficiency and fairness in taxation

Efficient, fair and transparent tax systems are essential for the sustainability of public finances. Together with the quality of public spending, they are a key determinant for growth and jobs. We have to protect our public budgets against harmful tax competition, tax fraud and tax evasion and to modernise tax rules in view of globalisation and new technologies. We need to take strong and unequivocal positions vis-à-vis our international partners, especially when it comes to taxation of the digital economy. The Austrian Presidency will attach particular importance to this issue in a bid to advance the negotiations and to outline potential solutions in light of the developments at G-20, OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and EU level. We will also continue to work on the European Commission's proposal for the introduction of a common corporate tax base. In the field of indirect taxation, we plan to achieve progress on the numerous European Commission proposals for modernising VAT in order to continue strengthening the Single Market, and to be able to efficiently fight fraud and ensure a close cooperation between tax administrations.

Provision of financial resources – 2019 EU budget

The Austrian Presidency will ensure that the implementation of the budget for 2018 and the budget for 2019 will adhere to the principles of sound and efficient financial management. The budget for 2019 will be prepared with due consideration of the guidelines adopted by the ECOFIN Council in February 2018, which call, among other things, for prudent budgeting and sufficient margins to deal with unforeseen circumstances. We will also take all the necessary steps to reach an agreement with the European Parliament.

The debate on the financing of the EU budget will also involve negotiations on the future own resources decision.

Justice and Home Affairs Council

A Union that protects freedom and justice



Justice

The Austrian Presidency strives to implement the three levels of the area of freedom, security and justice on a comprehensive basis. All measures in this respect must be in conformity with fundamental rights, also with a view to fully satisfying the criterion of rule of law, one of the values laid down in Article 2 TEU. Against this backdrop, Austria strongly supports the European Commission's initiatives for the sustainable protection of the rule of law in the European Union and its neighbouring countries.

Criminal justice

While the increasing threat of terrorism has brought the European dimension of criminal activities to the fore, it has always been there. Judicial cooperation is indispensable to ensure that firm and efficient measures can be taken against cross-border crime. This requires a coordinated approach by national law enforcement authorities and mutual recognition of court judgments and decisions. Judicial systems which fully comply with rule-of-law standards form the basis for mutual recognition and trust. What is more, it will soon be possible for the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) to investigate criminal offences against the EU's financial interests. Following completion of the work on the Regulation establishing the European Public Prosecutor's Office, Austria will strive to finalise the accompanying measures for preparing the EPPO to take up operations and provide for an evaluation of its activities in a foreseeable future.

The organisation of Eurojust, the agency that has been highly successful in prosecuting cross-border crime, is to become even more efficient once the revision of its legal framework has been completed, if possible under the Austrian Presidency.

An amendment of the existing framework decision on the European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS) is to extend the exchange of information on national criminal records to include third-country nationals sentenced by the courts of a Member State. Should this work not be completed during the Bulgarian Presidency, achieving this goal will be high on the agenda of the Austrian Presidency. In this context, a focus will be placed on the topic "Detention in country of origin".

Improving the legal framework for judicial cooperation on criminal matters encompasses, in particular, a more efficient fight against terrorist crime, measures to combat money laundering, fraud and counterfeiting of non-cash means of payment as well as more efficient ways to freeze and seize criminally obtained assets.

A more comprehensive set of instruments is to be created for law enforcement authorities in a bid to better accommodate the changes caused by the continuing advances in communications technology. A key aspect in this respect is speeding up and streamlining cross-border access to evidence obtained from telecommunication service providers. The Austrian Presidency will therefore actively support all efforts

to fight internet crime and strive to advance proposals for a Regulation on a European Production Order and a European Preservation Order on electronic evidence in criminal matters, as well as for a Directive laying down harmonised rules on the appointment of legal representatives for the purpose of gathering evidence in criminal proceedings. In this context, the use of e-Justice solutions in cross-border judicial cooperation in criminal matters also appears to be particularly important.

e-Justice

As a pioneer in the forward-looking use of electronic solutions in the justice system (e-Justice), Austria is particularly invested in taking the ongoing e-CODEX project (e-Justice Communication via Online Data Exchange) into regular operation at the European eu-LISA agency, and in quickly advancing an expected proposal for a Regulation providing fundamental provisions on the use of e-Justice.

Civil law

The Austrian Presidency will devote great efforts to those dossiers of civil law which contribute to the completion of the Digital Single Market. We will at the same time try to advance the work on the proposed legislation on judicial cooperation in civil matters, with a view to contributing to improving the efficiency of judicial systems and cross-border judicial cooperation.

The draft Directive on certain aspects concerning contracts for the supply of digital content will, for the first time, create a pertinent body of rules at European level and thus boost electronic commerce on the European market. Austria will strive to achieve significant progress in the negotiations on this dossier. Austria will also endeavour to further develop the proposal for a Directive on certain aspects concerning contracts for the online and other distance sales of goods.

Access to justice, mutual recognition of court decisions and a convergence of national procedural law will be fostered by legislative acts under the judicial cooperation in civil matters, offering a wide range of assistance to people and businesses finding themselves before a court in another EU Member State. This will also help families with an international background to find arrangements that are as clear and forward-looking as possible on complex matters such as those arising in divorce proceedings or in disputes over custody rights. For these reasons, Austria is very much interested in completing the work on the revision of the Brussels IIa Regulation, which is to provide for even more efficient handling of cases of child abduction in future.

In an effort to offer businesses struggling with economic difficulties access to preventive restructuring measures as soon as possible, Austria will also strive to advance and – if possible – complete work on the current proposal for a Directive on insolvency law.

In addition, work on the revision of the European Service Regulation and the European Evidence Regulation will be advanced. Finally, the Austrian Presidency will strive to achieve substantial progress as regards the law applicable to the third-party effects of assignments of claims.

Data protection

Following the entry into force of the data protection package for EU Member States, which consists of the General Data Protection Regulation and the Directive for data protection in law enforcement, further legislative acts are envisaged to complete the updated EU data protection regime: Unless this goal is achieved already by the Bulgarian Presidency, Austria will endeavour to complete the negotiations on the Regulation on Data Protection by EU institutions, as well as the work on modernising the Council of Europe Convention No. 108 on Data Protection, including the technical provisions on its entry into force, in particular with a view to a potential future accession of the EU to the Convention. Once a draft has been submitted, it is also envisaged to advance the negotiations on a Council decision on data protection provisions for CSDP missions and operations.

External dimension

Aware of the importance of the export of rule-of-law standards, Austria will also focus on the external dimension of justice and home affairs matters and, in particular, on a dialogue with those countries that are immediate or close neighbours of the EU, with continued special attention to the Western Balkans.

Home affairs

The largest migration crisis in Europe since the Second World War and people's fears of further uncontrolled migration have caused a loss in trust in the European Union's capacity to act and show resilience in a crisis. Add to this increasing extremist and terrorist activities and new threats in crime, not least due to the use of modern technology. As a result, ensuring security in the digital world has become a special challenge. The Austrian Presidency will aspire to contribute to a Union that is resilient and future-proof in matters of internal security and aligned with the concerns of citizens. We will place a focus on asylum and migration issues, on protecting the external borders, on fighting radicalisation, terrorism and organised crime, on cooperation between security authorities, on digital security, and on promoting and protecting European values.



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Protection of the EU's external borders

Strengthening both external and internal security and ensuring the freedom of movement within the Schengen Area requires resilient protection of the EU's external borders and efficient entry and exit controls. The core element here is to support Member States through the reinforcement of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency FRONTEX, including the adaptation of its mandate to the new requirements. Measures ensuring sustainable controls and closing of illegal migration routes, in particular those across the Eastern and Central Mediterranean, preventing illegal immigration and human trafficking as well as dismantling illegal immigration networks have to be continued and reinforced.

In addition, the Austrian Presidency will pursue a number of other projects in this context. These include the completion and implementation of the three Regulations for the strengthening and improvement of the Schengen Information System (SIS) and the revision of the Schengen Borders Code so as to be able to introduce and maintain internal border controls for a longer period of time in the event of serious threats to internal security. The implementation of the Regulation establishing an Entry/Exit System (EES) and a European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS) for monitoring travel by third-country nationals from and into the EU also needs to be advanced.

Asylum and migration

Based on a clear distinction between refugees and migrants, the core element of a functioning Europe-wide solution to current migration issues must be the creation of a resilient and strict asylum and migration system to prevent uncontrolled migration and reduce migratory pressure on EU Member States.

The Austrian Presidency intends to make a contribution towards this end by advancing the negotiations on the reform of the Common European Asylum System. In addition, measures aimed at establishing a resilient asylum policy must be developed. We need a system change in order to prevent that human traffickers continue to decide who will be received in the EU Member States.

Austria will also advocate a strengthening of the common return policy, with suitable incentives in the cooperation with third countries, but also increasingly by applying the principle "Less for Less" (i. e. links to visa or economic policy and concerted restrictive measures). In addition, the Union must put the cooperation with relevant countries of origin and transit onto a firm footing under the European migration partnership framework and, based on a comprehensive approach, increase targeted efforts in third countries.

What is more, respect among migrants and people who have been granted asylum or subsidiary protection in the EU Member States for democratic values as well as universal human and civil rights, which helped shape Europe as it is today, is an indispensable prerequisite for a successful migration and asylum policy.

Fight against radicalisation and terrorism

With a view to promoting a secure and positive environment for people living together, the Union must pursue a proactive, comprehensive and integrated approach towards preventing and fighting extremism and terrorism and supporting de-radicalisation. Repeated acts of violence in recent years underline the need for a common and holistic approach.

For this reason, the Austrian Presidency will work towards a number of measures to curb tendencies towards radicalisation at an early stage. This includes promoting and protecting fundamental rights and European values, increased efforts to communicate the rules for peaceful and secure co-existence as well as reinforced measures against antisemitism. The EU Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) is to be further developed and strengthened. Likewise, it is planned to launch a serious debate on strategies against political Islam and for fostering European-style Islam, not least at the conference of ministers on the topic of “Values – Rule of Law – Security” to be held in Vienna in November 2018.

Effective cooperation between justice and home affairs agencies, as well as with the Member States’ authorities and other partners is essential for preventing terrorist and extremist attacks. For this reason, Austria advocates the improvement of information sharing and cooperation between all stakeholders. Existing special units are to be reinforced, for instance through the ATLAS network, which comprises special police force intervention units. Security and stability in our neighbouring countries contribute to the internal security of the EU, which is why partnerships in this field are to be developed and implemented with the Western Balkan countries as well as with countries in North Africa.

Fight against organised crime

To achieve noticeable progress in fighting organised crime, it is necessary to strengthen the cooperation between police forces and increase the efficiency of existing instruments. In this context, the Austrian Presidency will focus on implementing the EU Policy Cycle for organised and serious international crime 2018–2021. Special importance will be attached to the priorities it defines on illegal migration, trafficking in human beings and facilitation of illegal immigration, in particular as regards the identification of victims of human trafficking and fighting facilitation of illegal immigration along the Silk Road. In addition, measures on cross-cutting priorities such as financial crime, asset recovery and money laundering, document fraud and issues such as cybercrime, drugs, organised

property crime, tax fraud and MTIC fraud, firearms and environmental crime are to be implemented.

Given the current security situation, combating links between organised crime and terrorism, specifically financing of terrorism, firearms trafficking and document fraud also takes top priority. Another positive contribution to security can be expected from promoting networks for cooperation between the police and the public (community policing); in this context, the Presidency will present the Austrian approach to this issue (“Gemeinsam.Sicher”).

We want to foster integrity in the public administration as well as in other areas of government and EU activity and contribute to stronger cooperation between the competent authorities when it comes to preventing and combating corruption.

The Austrian Presidency’s focus on stability in the EU’s neighbouring countries and in the Western Balkans also involves familiarising these countries with EU security standards. A comprehensive approach based on partnerships for security, migration and development will be discussed at the ministerial conference on “Security and Migration – Promoting Partnership and Resilience” taking place in September 2018 in Vienna. A significant goal in this context is stepping-up Prüm cooperation in the Western Balkans.

Exchange of information

Experience from recent years has shown again and again that a smooth exchange of information between security authorities is essential to the security of European Union citizens. Improving the functions of existing large-scale IT systems and the interoperability of relevant databases is to ensure better networking between, and capability to act of, security authorities in their fight against illegal migration, organised crime, extremism and terrorism.

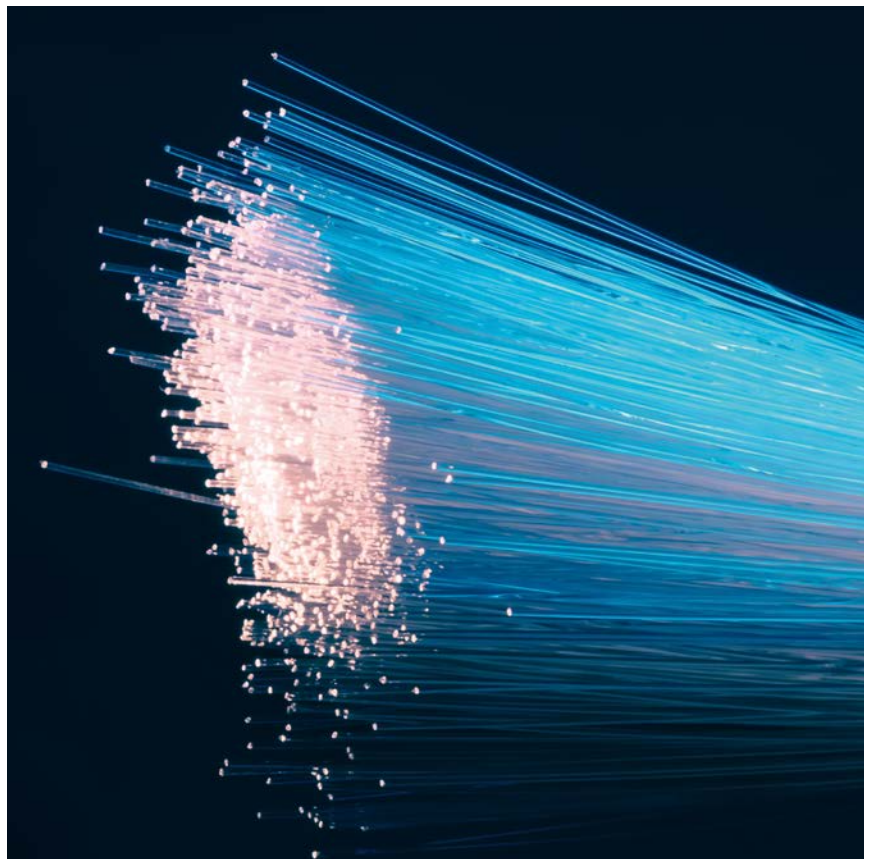
For this reason, the Austrian Presidency will work hard to achieve a prompt finalisation of the proposal on the interoperability of EU information systems for borders and security.

Digital security

To make digitalisation work, it is necessary to ensure digital security in all areas, transparency in data handling, and technological sovereignty. The risks inherent in digitalisation must be minimised, and critical infrastructures need to be protected. Being dependent on non-European security technologies makes us vulnerable, a problem we need to find sustainable solutions for. Austria will strive for a global approach to freedom and security in the digital world which takes account of all relevant products and services and builds on work already undertaken in respect of network and information security.

Dialogue and cooperation between the ministers represented on the Justice and Home Affairs Council and the internet industry will be needed to improve cyber security. The EU Internet Forum is to provide a platform for intensifying such efforts. The Commission Recommendation on measures to effectively tackle illegal content online is to be fully implemented.

Overall, Austria will contribute towards implementing a resilient and future-proof security union that is aligned with citizen concerns, and towards revising the internal security strategy in line with these requirements by fostering the above-mentioned projects as well as by including subsequent Presidencies, the Commission, the European Parliament, the EU agencies, the European External Action Service and outside experts into a medium-term discussion process (“Vienna Process”).





Employment, Social Policy,
Health and Consumer Affairs Council

A Union to benefit everyone



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Digitalisation means change on all levels – in business and at work, in health systems, for social models and also with respect to the social fabric. Securing the sustainability of social protection systems, in particular with respect to healthcare, still poses major challenges for many Member States.

The initiatives proposed by the Commission in the health and social sectors provide the framework for further endeavours which will also be promoted under the Austrian Presidency.

Employment and social policy

Fair working conditions for everyone

Digitalisation in the workplace will be one major theme of the Austrian Presidency. New modes of work that arise due to digitalisation require a shared understanding and common rules within the Single Market to avoid distortion of competition. Building on the work of the trio partners, the Austrian Presidency will direct its focus on platform-based working, in particular on work and employment conditions as well as social and labour law. In this context, challenges, experiences and best-practice models relating to labour market effects, working conditions and social protection will be discussed together with European social partners and (socio-political) NGOs in an informal setting. The key results of this debate will be considered in the Council's deliberations.

Moreover, the Austrian Presidency will continue the negotiations on the Directive on transparent and predictable working conditions in the European Union and on the new Employment Guidelines.

Under the Austrian Presidency, the Council will also continue work on the existing initiatives on equal treatment and non-discrimination, and the initiative for work-life balance.

Mobility, health and safety at the workplace and accessibility

Based on the progress made under the Bulgarian Presidency, the Austrian Presidency will continue the negotiations on the revision of the Regulation on the coordination of social security systems. The proposals submitted by the Commission, such as on better access to social protection for the self-employed and people in atypical employment forms, will also be negotiated.

Changes in modes of work, employment structures and the organisation of work lead to new health risks for workers. Cancer is the most common work-related reason of death in the EU. The Austrian Presidency aims to complete the negotiations on the amendment of the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive (second and third batches).

A well-functioning Single Market has to be beneficial for everyone, also for people with disabilities. The Austrian Presidency will thus endeavour to conclude the negotiations on the European Accessibility Act.

Health and consumer protection

The objective assessment of innovations with respect to drugs and medical engineering becomes increasingly important when it comes to decisions on the application of new therapies. Therefore, Austria will continue the work started by the Bulgarian Presidency on the Regulation on Health Technology Assessment, with the aim of preparing a progress report.

In December 2017, the Commission presented a roadmap for a strengthened cooperation against vaccine preventable diseases, providing for a proposal for a Council Recommendation. The Austrian Presidency strives for the adoption of this Recommendation.

In October 2018, the Eighth Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control will take place in Geneva. It is the aim of the Austrian Presidency to prepare a common EU position on the issues under negotiation at the conference.

Women and gender equality

Two main goals are at the centre of the Austrian Presidency's objectives with regard to women and gender equality. The first goal is to promote an open and future-oriented dialogue on gender equality. Second, we wish to advance the strengthening and institutionalisation of the discourse on gender equality on the EU political agenda. The focus will be on the topics of youth and gender equality, on which draft Council conclusions will be prepared. Based on this topic, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action will be reviewed with respect to "The Girl Child", and new aspects of gender equality will be worked on in the context of digitalisation. The European Institute for Gender Equality will prepare a study on this issue. In addition, a stronger focus will be placed on combating violence against women and girls.

Competitiveness Council

A Union for jobs, growth and competitiveness



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Sustainably maintaining Europe's position as a business location requires a coordinated economic policy aimed at making our enterprises more competitive. On the one hand, this means preserving and expanding traditional industrial sectors and, on the other hand, creating an economic environment that is open for new sectors, encourages innovative business models and fosters research and development.

For this to work properly, a regulatory framework is needed which anticipates new circumstances, such as digitalisation, and which highlights the true added value of EU regulations – in line with the subsidiarity principle. Conditions should be designed in such a way that the opportunities arising from digitalisation can be seized as best possible.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), start-ups and scale-ups are to take centre stage during the Austrian Presidency, with an environment offering legal certainty while at the same time promoting growth and innovation to help them become more competitive. Initiatives to develop innovation and professional skills will be further promoted. Austria will also encourage the improvement of conditions for digital services and digitalisation in enterprises, also with a view to the realisation of a Digital Single Market. Under the trio presidency, Austria will continue the efforts undertaken to implement the Digital Single Market strategy, focusing, in particular, on finalising the dossiers on platform-to-business trading (P2B) and on strengthening the competition authorities of the Member States (ECN+).

The Austrian Presidency intends to promote artificial intelligence as a field with the potential for a reindustrialisation of Europe, and plans to stimulate developments in this respect in close cooperation with the relevant stakeholders.

Better regulation

Not least in view of the current debate on subsidiarity, the Austrian Presidency will continue the Better Regulation Agenda using the existing tools and initiatives as a basis.

Single Market

Another priority is to further develop and deepen the Single Market and to remove bureaucratic hurdles. Austria will continue constructive negotiations on the Single Market Programme, the goods, services and compliance packages as well as on the 'New Deal for Consumers' package.

As for the Digital Single Market, the Austrian Presidency will work on finalising the proposed legislation on the establishment of a Single Digital Gateway, depending on the progress already achieved by the Bulgarian Presidency. This dossier is deemed key in enabling users to significantly reduce administrative burdens within the EU Single Market and provides first steps towards the implementation of the "Once Only" principle.

Moreover, Austria will continue the reforms of copyright and company law, not least to also meet the increasing challenges of digitalisation in these areas of legislation. The aim is to complete the work on the Directive on copyright in the Digital Single Market and the Regulation laying down rules on the exercise of copyright and related rights applicable to certain online transmissions of broadcasting organisations and retransmissions of television and radio programmes. The efforts for further digitalisation in company law matters and for a simplification of cross-border restructuring measures will be continued.

Industry

The Austrian Presidency will place industry as a key engine of growth, employment and innovation in Europe into the centre of activities. Against the backdrop of the current digital transformation, Austria will strive for a holistic approach towards EU industrial policy, which will, in close coordination with other policy areas such as climate and energy, promote new energy technologies but also take into account the needs of energy-intensive industries.

It has to be our common goal to boost industrial competitiveness for the EU as a whole, leveraging the opportunities that come with digitalisation and strengthening Europe's position as a business location. Based on the accomplishments of the trio partners Estonia and Bulgaria as well as on the Industrial Policy Strategy presented by the Commission, the Austrian Presidency will work towards improving mainstreaming and monitoring of industrial competitiveness.

Targeted promotion of innovation, such as with respect to Industry 4.0, through RTI funding and demand-side measures will be another priority contributing to strengthening Europe's international competitiveness.

Small and medium-sized enterprises

Small and medium-sized enterprises contribute significantly to the creation of jobs, innovation and growth. Therefore Austria commits itself to the systematic application of the “Think Small First” principle and will ensure that this principle will be applied in all policy areas, in particular when establishing new regulations to help European start-ups and SMEs to develop their full potential and to grow. The continuation of COSME as part of the Single Market Programme is to help SMEs in gaining access to the Single Market. For the programme to be successful, it will be crucial to focus on the specific needs of SMEs.

Unitary Patent and Unified Patent Court

Work on the Unitary Patent is more or less completed, but there are still a few adjustments to be made to the legal texts. Austria has always supported the reform of the patent system in Europe with the aim to establish unitary patent protection and a corresponding Unified Patent Court and will, during its Presidency, endeavour to complete respective work and take all measures required for the system to be implemented as smoothly as possible.

Space

Space technology, data and services are main drivers of growth and innovation and ensure Europe’s security and independency. This is why the Austrian Presidency will strive to ensure infrastructure continuity as well as sustainable future-oriented services, in particular with respect to the space programmes Copernicus (Earth observation) and Galileo/EGNOS (satellite navigation). In view of challenges such as climate change and sustainable development, as well as migration and security, it is necessary to provide additional services and to ensure an adequate level of security for both infrastructure and services. The Austrian Presidency will strive to achieve quick and efficient progress on the negotiations on the future EU space programmes. Furthermore, Austria’s Presidency will focus its efforts on promoting cooperation with other programmes and EU policy areas, as well as on ensuring efficient and effective governance of the space sector as a whole.

Research

Setting the course for the future

It is research and innovation that fuel the dynamic development of our societies. The second semester of 2018 will provide a chance to set the course for the future.

This includes first and foremost the negotiations on Horizon Europe, the world's largest and most successful research programme. The ninth edition of the programme will continue well-established funding instruments but will also provide new impetus, be it with respect to the European Innovation Council or developments towards stronger mission orientation of research and innovation. The Austrian Presidency will strive for quick and efficient progress on this negotiation package.

Moreover, the Austrian Presidency aims for Council conclusions on the European Research Area, which is to give prominence above all to activities that hold out the promise of major progress towards a Single Market for Knowledge, such as the European Open Science Cloud.

Demand will have to play an even stronger role in research and innovation. The challenges of digitalisation or climate change, for instance, are major factors in driving demand for research. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals provide an important reference framework for the demand for research and innovation. The Austrian Presidency sees research and innovation as a generic policy area that has to be put to work for all sectoral policies.



**Move towards
sustainable, fair,
competitive and
safe transport systems**

**Facilitate secure
connectivity and
digital public services**

**Towards an
Energy Union**

Transport

Move towards sustainable, fair, competitive and safe transport systems

The Austrian Presidency aims to further develop transport systems that contribute to balanced competition, ensure a fair standard of working and social conditions, increase the safety of transport and contribute to a sustainable and climate-friendly approach to mobility. Considering that an effective modern infrastructure constitutes the basis for an innovative and efficient mobility system, Austria will also attach great importance to the revision of the Trans-European Transport Network and the infrastructure financing rules.

In the area of land transport, Austria will therefore continue the work on the dossiers of the mobility packages. Depending on the progress achieved during the Bulgarian Presidency, Austria will work on the European Commission's proposals on market access and access to professions, driving times and rest periods, tachographs, controls of social legislation, the posting of workers in the transport sector, and hired vehicles, and, together with the European Parliament, it will strive to find solutions which take into account the needs of both European citizens and businesses. Furthermore, the Commission's proposals for the revision of transport infrastructure cost, the European Electronic Toll Service (EETS), the promotion of clean and eco-friendly road transport vehicles and combined transport can greatly contribute to energy-efficient and low-emission mobility. Therefore, debates on these proposals will constitute a key priority for the Austrian Presidency. Although there are no concrete dossiers pending, Austria will work on increasing efficiency in the area of rail freight transport on an informal basis.

Concerning the Commission's proposals aimed at improving road safety in Europe, such as the revision of the Directive on road infrastructure safety management and the General Safety Regulation, Austria intends to achieve significant progress in the negotiations with a view to rapidly improving road safety.

With respect to air transport, the Austrian Presidency will pursue the goal of strengthening Europe's competitive position and will, in particular, advance the work on the Regulation on safeguarding competition in air transport. Further work on agreements with third countries will also constitute an important measure in this respect. As for rail transport, Austria will attach great importance to the negotiations on passenger rights. In the area of inland waterway transport, Austria will emphasise in Council conclusions the potential of this mode of transport as well as the necessity to continue the respective EU programmes, especially NAIADES. With respect to maritime transport, Austria will use its best efforts to reach an agreement on the Directive on port reception facilities. Furthermore, Austria will try to make

good progress regarding the proposals on the establishment of a European Maritime Single Window environment and the seafarer training/the recognition of certificates as well as support the important work in the framework of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO).

Telecommunications

Facilitate secure connectivity and digital public services

Following in the footsteps of our trio partners Estonia and Bulgaria, the Austrian Presidency will give priority to the dossiers on the development of a Digital Single Market. The goal will be to come up with well-balanced and forward-looking compromises which will help to promote growth and competition for the benefit of both European citizens and the economy.

Depending on the progress made during the Bulgarian Presidency, the Austrian Presidency intends to finalise the negotiations on the revision of the legal framework for telecommunications, in particular, the Directive establishing the European Electronic Communications Code and the Regulation establishing the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC).

The Austrian Presidency will also advocate future-proof data protection provisions in the digital sector, including, in particular, work on the Regulation on Privacy and Electronic Communications. In this respect, it is important to ensure strong privacy protection in electronic communications while also taking into account development opportunities for innovative services. With a view to implementing the 5G Action Plan and establishing a European Gigabit Society, the Austrian Presidency will advocate the extension of broadband and mobile network coverage. Depending on the progress achieved during the Bulgarian Presidency, Austria will also use its best efforts to see the finalisation of the proposal for a Regulation on a framework for the free flow of non-personal data. Negotiations on the revised Directive on the re-use of public sector information, and on the sectoral legislative proposals within the scope of the Multiannual Financial Framework (i.e., Connecting Europe Facility, Digital Europe) will be pushed forward under the Austrian Presidency. In the context of reviewing the eGovernment Action Plan, Austria will strive to accelerate the pace of modernisation in Member States' public administrations, for instance by introducing eGovernment services.

The Austrian Presidency also expects finalisation of the Cybersecurity Act, which provides for a new mandate for an EU Cybersecurity Agency (formerly ENISA) and the creation of a cybersecurity certification framework.

Energy

Towards an Energy Union

In the context of the Paris Agreement on climate change, the European Commission presented, in 2016, the “Clean Energy for All Europeans” legislative proposals, which constitute probably the most extensive package of measures in the history of EU energy policy and aim at providing an effective legal framework for an affordable, competitive, sustainable and secure energy supply for the future. Ambitious energy policy targets have been set for the period until 2030. New rules on the electricity market are designed to strengthen the position of EU citizens and help address energy transition challenges.

The Austrian Presidency is dedicated to continuing the work of our trio partners, Estonia and Bulgaria, and will therefore use its best efforts to bring about the successful completion of all legislative proposals on which work is still pending. As the individual proposals are all interconnected, it will be necessary to find overarching solutions. Given the ambitious targets set at national, international and European level, Austria will endeavour to make an active contribution towards bringing about the Energy Union and achieving an integrated energy and climate policy.

The key is for all of Europe to make a concerted effort towards a more sustainable and efficient supply and use of energy. In this respect, Austria will strive to finalise the negotiations on the Energy Efficiency Directive, unless this will already have been achieved during the Bulgarian Presidency.

The increased use of renewable energy sources on competitive electricity markets, as well as efficient heating and cooling markets play a key role in ensuring a sustainable energy future. This requires solutions which take the regional character of the EU's energy system into account. Austria will endeavour to bring the negotiations on the Renewable Energy Directive to a close, unless this will already have been achieved during the Bulgarian Presidency.

The Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union is to be finalised in order to efficiently implement the climate and energy targets while at the same time ensuring streamlined processes and simplified reporting and adhering to the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and balance, unless this will already have been achieved during the Bulgarian Presidency.

Topics such as the integration of renewable energy sources, active consumers, digitalisation, and regional approaches play a crucial role with a view to deepening the internal electricity market. The Austrian Presidency will focus its efforts on developing viable compromises with respect to both the Directive and the Regulation in the course of the trilogue negotiations. Furthermore, the proposal for a Regulation on the Agency for Cooperation between EU Energy Regulators (ACER) will also need

to be finalised during Austria's Presidency. The negotiations on the proposal for a Regulation on risk preparedness in the electricity sector are to produce suitable and reasonable rules.

Continuing the work done so far by its trio partners, Austria will keep up the debate triggered by the Commission's efforts towards amending the Directive concerning common rules for the internal market in natural gas.

Energy industry and energy technology

With a view to ensuring a sustainable future for business and industry, it is crucial to work towards fair competition also where energy and climate are concerned. Security of supply, affordability and competitiveness need to be kept in mind as well. It is also intended to devote attention to issues relevant for the industry. The focus here will be on aspects such as development and market transition of new technologies, stepping-up security of supply based on flexibility and energy storage solutions, and leveraging the potential of digitalisation and smart grid technologies for the energy transition.



Agriculture and Fisheries Council

Ensuring food security and vitality of rural areas



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With respect to agriculture, the priority of the Austrian Presidency is to negotiate the proposals made by the European Commission on the modernisation and simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) after 2020.

Not only is the CAP the EU's most long-standing and best-integrated policy area, but it is also considered to be of global strategic importance. This sector is all the more important as it supplies us with safe, high-quality and affordable food. To maintain this status, it is crucial to safeguard a multifunctional EU-wide agriculture, as well as to strengthen and promote the development of vital rural areas, in particular in disadvantaged and mountainous regions. The starting point of the discussions on the future of the CAP will be the legislative proposals presented by the Commission based on the Communication on "The Future of Food and Farming".

Based on the Commission's proposal on unfair trade practices, a strong emphasis will be placed on improving the position of agricultural producers, who are currently considered the weakest party in the entire food supply chain.

In addition, the Austrian Presidency will devote its attention to improving Europe's supply with vegetable protein, implementing the Bio-economy Strategy in the agriculture and forestry sectors, and working on the dossiers on veterinary and phytosanitary matters, forestry and fisheries.

Agriculture

Discussions and negotiations on the Common Agricultural Policy after 2020 as well as on the Commission's proposal on the food supply chain will dominate the work of the Austrian Presidency in this sector. The Presidency's goal is to find the right balance between tried and tested measures and new, innovative approaches, and to safeguard the CAP as a common strategic policy which grants the Member States more flexibility thanks to a stronger emphasis on subsidiarity.

In the context of the proposal on the food supply chain, Austria will take up the baton from the Bulgarian Presidency and focus on strengthening the position of agricultural producers in the food supply chain. Key issues will be unfair trade practices along the supply chain and the sustainable strengthening of weaker business partners.

Building on the progress achieved by the Estonian and Bulgarian Presidencies, Austria will continue the negotiations with the European Parliament on the Regulation on Spirit Drinks with the aim of finalisation.

At the start of the Austrian Presidency, the members of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) will set out their priorities for forestry for the next two years. In addition, it is planned to sound out possibilities for resuming the negotiations on a legally binding agreement on forests in Europe. Other relevant dossiers include a review of the EU Forest Strategy and of EU activities on deforestation, the EU FLEGT Action Plan (Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade), and the United Nations Forest Forum (UNFF).

In the area of plant health, 2018 will see more work on the new Plant Health and Controls Regulation, as more than 20 delegated or implementing acts will have to be finalised in 2019. Preparations for the 2020 United Nations International Year of Plant Health will pick up the pace during the Austrian Presidency.

On consumer protection, veterinary matters, and animal welfare, work on the legislative proposals already presented, such as the veterinary medicinal products and medicated feeds package, will be continued.

To ensure a high level of both consumer protection and animal health, it is important to continue work on the implementing acts and delegated acts for the implementation of the Regulations on animal health and official controls adopted in 2016 and 2017. In this context, better networking among Member States on food safety will be key.

Furthermore, in an effort to strengthen citizens' trust in EU food policy, Austria will vigorously proceed with the consultations on the Commission's proposal on transparency and sustainability of the EU risk assessment in the food chain, and focus its efforts on increasing the transparency of authorisation procedures followed by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

Fisheries

The Common Fisheries Policy provides that catches for a number of commercial fishing stocks, which are defined in terms of total allowable catches (TACs) allocated to Member States (quotas), be determined on a regular basis. For this reason, the negotiations on 2019 catch limits for the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea and the North Sea/the Atlantic will be predominant in the Presidency's work in this area. In addition, we will conclude two-year TACs and quotas for deep-sea species and three-year autonomous tariff quotas for certain fishery products.

Multi-annual plans are another key element of the Common Fisheries Policy. The Austrian Presidency will therefore continue to work, among other things, on the proposal on the Western Mediterranean Sea and the proposal on Western Waters.

The Austrian Presidency will attempt to advance discussions on the proposed amendment of the Official Controls Regulation and the proposal for the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund after 2020.

With respect to the external dimension of the Common Fisheries Policy, the Austrian Presidency will see further work on developing the common position of the Council on annual meetings of multilateral organisations and regional fisheries management organisations. Austria will also prepare the negotiations on sustainable fisheries partnership agreements, such as with Cape Verde and Madagascar. Finally, it will be necessary to develop EU positions for the negotiations with the coastal states and on the northern agreements with Norway and the Faroe Islands.

Environment Council

A Union of sustainability and forward-looking climate policy



During the Austrian Presidency, active climate protection will constitute a priority in environmental policy. This is why Austria will endeavour to promote healthy mobility and transport systems with low greenhouse gas emissions.

At the 24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP24) in Katowice, Poland in December 2018, Austria, in its capacity as EU negotiator, will represent Europe's climate policy interests.

In line with the trio presidency's programme, the Austrian Presidency will continue the work on the circular economy, with a special focus on eco-innovative initiatives. Key goals include a healthy environment, the efficient use of resources, eco-friendly and sustainable growth, and measures for a non-toxic environment.

Climate agreement

The 2015 Paris Agreement marks a breakthrough in global climate policy. In implementing the agreement, the Austrian Presidency will present Council conclusions at the Environment Council in October for the 24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. These conclusions will spell out the EU's key political statements on the individual themes under negotiation at the COP24. The focus in this respect will be placed on the technical implementation of the Paris Agreement.

CO2 standards for vehicles

The Joint Declaration on the EU's legislative priorities for 2018–2019 mentions the further reduction of CO2 emissions of passenger cars and vans as one of the priority areas. With a view to attaining the climate goals, Austria will continue the work started by the Bulgarian Presidency and work towards completing the negotiations. This will contribute to the attainment of the EU targets for 2030, among them an at least 40 % cut in greenhouse gas emissions compared with 1990. In addition, the proposal on the introduction of standards for HGV CO2 emissions constitutes an implementation measure of the 2016 EU Strategy for Low-Emission Mobility, which

provides for a 60 % emissions reduction goal in the transport sector to be reached by 2050.

Single-use plastics

For years Austria has been working at reducing plastics and microplastics and advocating an ambitious strategy for plastics. The Austrian Presidency will attach great importance to stepping up activities against plastic pollution in inland waters and oceans and to stopping the use of microplastics in various product groups. Therefore, the proposal on single-use plastics will receive special attention during the Austrian Presidency.

Biodiversity

In October, the Austrian Presidency will present the Council with conclusions on the orientation of the future global biodiversity policy after 2020, which encompass the mandate of the European Union for the negotiations at the 14th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the meetings of the Parties to the two Protocols to the Convention (CBD COP14).

Revision of the POP Regulation

Based on the international Stockholm Convention, the Regulation on persistent organic pollutants (POPs) sets out measures against particularly toxic and long-lasting chemicals. The Austrian Presidency aspires to complete the revision of the Regulation, which provides for adjustments with respect to the Treaty of Lisbon and the definitions in EU chemicals and waste legislation, as well as for an adaptation of the monitoring system.

LIFE Regulation

With respect to the negotiations on the LIFE programme, which aims at promoting environment, climate and sustainable energy projects for the period between 2021 and 2027, the Austrian Presidency will strive to achieve quick and efficient progress.

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Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council

A Europe that moves (us)



Education

The central theme of the Austrian Presidency in education and higher education will be the future of the EU cooperation on education. Apart from discussions on what will come after the Strategic Framework – Education & Training 2020 (ET 2020), a key role will be accorded to the conclusions of the European Council of 14 December 2017, and the Commission’s Communication “Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture”, which defines the target of creating a European Education Area.

A key dossier under the Austrian Presidency will be the successor programme to Erasmus+. The EU education programme is pivotal for the strategic cooperation on education, as well as for student and teacher mobility and cooperation projects. The Austrian Presidency will start negotiations within Council and work towards reaching an agreement on key parts of the programme.

The Presidency will strive to achieve a consensus on the proposal for a Council Recommendation on the mutual recognition of higher education and school leaving diplomas/study periods abroad, and to start negotiations on the proposal for a Council Recommendation on boosting language learning.

Youth

One of the key issues in this area will be the negotiations on the proposal for a new EU Youth Strategy after 2019. A concrete work plan is to be agreed for the first implementation phase from 2019 to 2020.

Quick and efficient progress is envisaged on the European Solidarity Corps follow-up initiative after 2021. With respect to the successor programme of Erasmus+, a contribution concerning the area of youth will be prepared.

The Austrian Presidency will present a proposal for conclusions on the role of youth work for young migrants and refugees, which builds on the work of the European Commission expert group currently working on this topic.

The EU Youth Report, which will be published by the European Commission in the next months, will likewise be discussed and result in the preparation of a Joint Statement of the Council and the Commission, as in 2015.

Culture and audio-visual media

In the area of culture, key topics will be the revision of the European Agenda for Culture of 2007 and the adoption of the new Work Plan for Culture as of 2019 in an effort to lay the foundations for further cultural cooperation at EU level and to define the strategic framework and the priorities and methods for the years ahead. Far-reaching progress should be achieved on the Commission proposal for the new Creative Europe programme as of 2021. The Austrian Presidency will devote itself to an extensive debate on, and adoption of, Council conclusions on opportunities and challenges in the cultural, media and creative sectors in the digital age. In implementing the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, special attention will be paid to sustainability. In addition, the work of the Friends of the Presidency group (FoP) on international cultural relations is to be continued.

With respect to the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, the Austrian Presidency will promote exchanges between the Member States and the Commission on implementation issues and thus contribute to rapidly establishing conditions of fair competition. The question of how to deal with large platforms will be a priority for Austria in all areas affected.

Sport

In the area of sport, the Austrian Presidency will highlight the diverse economic dimensions of sport and present the Council with a proposal for conclusions on this topic. In addition to sport's already known contributions to economic added value and employment, such dimensions include the regional economic importance of sport, its role as a driving force for innovation, the quantifiable effects of physical activity on health, and raising awareness for the significance of volunteer work from a macroeconomic perspective. Another key aspect is sport and physical activity at the workplace and what they contribute to preventive occupational healthcare.

With respect to the successor programme of Erasmus+, a contribution concerning the area of sport will be prepared.

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