
PRIORITIES OF THE LITHUANIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: FOR A CREDIBLE, GROWING AND OPEN EUROPE

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Lithuania is the first of the Baltic States to take the helm of the Council of the European Union. The Baltic countries have demonstrated their ability to pursue responsible policies. They have shown that it is possible to overcome the recession successfully and to return to sustainable growth. Naturally, not all measures used here can be adopted for other Member States, as they are dealing with different problems. But all Member States need the political will and determination that the Baltic States have displayed.

The Presidency is an opportunity to take responsibility for the EU decision-making process and actively seek solutions for the well-being and prosperity of the whole European family.

Decades ago, in our fight for independence, Europe symbolised freedom, human rights, prosperity, openness, growth and credibility. As the Presiding country, Lithuania will not lose sight of these values, which are very dear to us. We know that to sustain the world model of openness and prosperity, Europe needs policies that correspond to the current realities and open up more opportunities in the future.

This is why the Lithuanian Presidency will focus on three goals of a credible, growing and open Europe.

Firstly, the Lithuanian Presidency will focus on legislation, which is essential for renewing trust in the European economies. From the Fiscal Compact to the Stability and Growth Pact, steps have already been agreed by our leaders that, if implemented properly and consistently, will further improve the credibility of the whole European project. We will proceed with discussions on the strengthening of the Economic and Monetary Union, aiming for concrete results that can further

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enhance the effective functioning of the euro zone while preserving the integrity of a single market. In order to establish a well-functioning Banking Union, our efforts will be dedicated to the progress of the legislative processes of the financial services sector.

The Lithuanian Presidency will also pursue steps to improve the protection of the financial interests of the EU and Member States, including the fight against tax fraud as well as starting discussions on the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's office.

Europe must remain credible in the eyes of its citizens. As 2013 is the European Year of Citizens, the Lithuanian Presidency will encourage and facilitate its wider involvement in the EU, focus on raising public awareness (especially among the young generation) of the common EU values as well as citizens' rights.

Secondly, we will seek to create the appropriate conditions for economic growth.

All EU institutions must agree on the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2014–2020 as soon as possible to ensure that EU budget funds reach the Member States in time and that the projects already begun are successfully carried forward and contribute to economic growth across the EU. For decades, the main driving force of economic growth in Europe was integration. But today our businesses and people still face various obstacles in the single market. Take, for example, services or energy issues. How much time, money and human resource is wasted due to the fragmentation of the single market? We must speed up our efforts to complete the EU internal energy market by 2014 – a stated EU goal – and unleash the potential of the services sector, if we want to be more competitive worldwide.

In the regulatory environment we need to make efforts to reduce the regulatory burden for companies, especially small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), and develop and further integrate existing smart regulation tools (such as competitiveness proofing, ex-post evaluations, SME tests, and fitness checks). Due consideration will be given to the prevention of additional burdens arising from the transposition of directives.

In addition to the package of EU legislation that will contribute to higher youth employment, the Lithuanian Presidency will focus on a wide range of other measures to create new jobs. We will pay particular attention to the development of research and innovation and moving forward with the Digital Agenda, which will open up new opportunities for EU citizens as well as businesses.

The Lithuanian Presidency will strive for agreement with the European Parliament on the possibility of supplementary pension rights, on a decision

about the undeclared work platform, as well as the enforcement of the rights of EU migrant workers and their families in line with the fundamental principle of free movement of workers and with the aim of eliminating discrimination on the grounds of nationality.

We also see the EU macro-regional strategies, such as the Baltic Sea Strategy, as yet another means to encourage growth, which is why we will pay close attention to their review.

Thirdly, Lithuania will pursue efforts to make sure Europe continues to be a symbol of openness and security. We, together with the European External Action Service (EEAS), will continue to work with EU partners to address regional and global challenges, promoting EU interests and values to help to deliver a more secure and prosperous world for EU citizens.

European integration and the openness of Europe was a big stimulus for Lithuania itself to implement ambitious reforms two decades ago. Today, the EU should continue to motivate its neighbours in the east by offering closer integration.

We are working hard with the President of the European Council, the High Representative and the European Commission, and we hope that sufficient progress by the partner countries will allow concrete results to be achieved by the time of the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius in late November. We hope that the summit will create the necessary conditions for deeper, more effective and mutually beneficial cooperation between the EU and its eastern partners. It is in our interest to enlarge the space of democracy, stability and security. Taking the European Southern Neighbourhood into consideration, Lithuania will continue to focus the EU's attention on this important region, especially promoting democracy, stability and prosperity.

Lithuania will focus on the EU's determination to promote free, fair and open trade while at the same time asserting its interests in the spirit of reciprocity and mutual benefit. The Lithuanian Presidency will promote free trade relations with the EU's neighbouring countries by seeking substantial progress in the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) negotiations, including the signature and provisional application of DCFTA with Ukraine, the finalisation of agreements with Moldova, Georgia and Armenia, the advancement of negotiations with Morocco and, possibly, the opening of new DCFTA negotiations.

Our Presidency will also pursue the continuation of the enlargement process, promoting free, fair and open trade worldwide with strategic partners such as the USA and Japan. We will also strive for progress in negotiations on free trade agreements with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries.

Openness must go hand in hand with security. This is why the Lithuanian Presidency will seek more effective control of the EU external borders and a stronger Common Security and Defence policy.

The Lithuanian Presidency will pursue a strategic EU approach to the processes leading to the formulation of an overarching post-2015 framework. A particular focus will be placed on the United Nations General Assembly Special Event in New York in September 2013. Also among our priorities are preparing Council conclusions on the financing for development; common EU positions for the Ministerial meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation; as well as promoting better use of the EU Member States' transition experiences in EU development cooperation. Lithuania will closely monitor ongoing and emerging humanitarian crises and will seek to improve the effectiveness of the response of the EU and the international community. Work will continue on the legislative proposal related to the establishment of the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps.

In conclusion, we know that success in all areas depends on joint efforts by all Member States and institutions of the EU. Lithuania is ready to build that European consensus for the better future of all Europeans. Encouraged by Lithuania's own success story, we come to serve as reliable stewards for the entire EU family.