



Croatian Presidency of the
Council of the European Union

PROGRAMME PRIORITIES

1 January – 30 June 2020

A strong Europe in a world of challenges

Programme priorities

OF THE CROATIAN PRESIDENCY
OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION 2020



30 October 2019

A strong Europe in a world of challenges

From 1 January to 30 June 2020, Croatia will take over the presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first time. During this six-month period, Croatia will lead the activities of the Council, building cooperation and agreement among Member States in a spirit of consensus and mutual respect.

The Croatian Presidency comes at a time of great changes for the European Union, at the beginning of a new institutional and legislative cycle following the new composition of the European institutions, as well as at a time of challenges resulting from the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union.

Uneven economic development, climate change, increased migration, dissemination of disinformation and growing populism are some of the challenges of today's world to which citizens are expecting answers, and with good reason. Those answers can be given only by a strong Europe. Here, our unity is our greatest strength.

In order to bring the Union and the benefits it provides even closer to its citizens we aim to enhance dialogue, including through the Conference on the Future of Europe.

In line with the guidelines set by the Council's New Strategic Agenda 2019–2024 and Croatian priorities and points of reference, in accordance with the Trio programme of Romania, Finland and Croatia and under the motto "**A strong Europe in a world of challenges**", Croatia is preparing a detailed six-month presidency agenda based on four priorities:

- **A Europe that is developing**
- **A Europe that connects**
- **A Europe that protects**
- **An influential Europe.**

In its work, the Croatian Presidency will also take into account the priorities and the work programme of the new European Commission, following its confirmation and inauguration.

An ambitious, balanced and sustainable EU Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021–2027 is a prerequisite for achieving our goals. The Croatian Presidency will work towards achieving a comprehensive agreement as swiftly as possible, in order to enable the timely implementation of all the Union's policies and programmes, in the service of further building a Europe that is as strong as possible in an ever-changing and challenging world.

A EUROPE THAT IS DEVELOPING

Balanced and sustainable development of the Union and its Member States

In the era of the fourth industrial revolution, the European Union, its economy and labour market face new global challenges and demographic changes. In such circumstances, a further deepening of the single market, encouraging the digitalisation of business, investment in innovations and research, greater accessibility of high-quality and lifelong learning and developing new skills adjusted to jobs of the future are a guarantee for the Union's competitiveness. Improving the quality of life of the Union's citizens requires the further development of policies that will create better working and living conditions, and contribute to the protection of the environment and the fight against climate change. Therefore, the Croatian Presidency will support a balanced, sustainable and inclusive development of the Union that takes into consideration the specificities and needs of all Member States, their regions and citizens.

Balanced regional development

- Reducing differences between Member States, and fostering economic and social cohesion and convergence
- Strengthening the European monetary union
- Using the potential of macro-regional cooperation
- Ensuring the equal quality of products on the markets of all Member States

Environmental protection and fighting climate change

- Discussions about a green Europe, including in the context of sustainable economic growth and development
- Efficient and ambitious implementation of the Paris Agreement, with a financially just transition to a low-carbon and circular economy
- Conservation of biodiversity, protection of the marine environment and coastal areas from pollution, and efficient water and waste management
- Promoting the sustainable forms of tourism and sustainability of coastal and insular communities (small-scale fisheries, infrastructure)

Strengthening of competitiveness and skills

- Further deepening of the single market and strengthening the digitalisation of business
- Strengthening the competitiveness of European industry and small and medium enterprises
- Modernisation of agriculture and rural areas
- Balanced mobility of scientists and researchers, promoting high-quality and lifelong learning and developing skills for jobs of the future

A more satisfied and vital society

- Implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights, including work-life balance
- Establishing measures to stop negative demographic trends
- Promoting equality between women and men, along with empowering women in society and on the labour market
- Creating better opportunities for young people, especially in rural areas
- Promoting lifelong care for one's health

A EUROPE THAT CONNECTS

Networked economy and used potentials

In a world that is becoming increasingly connected, the progress of the European Union depends on it having a networked economy and making full use of its infrastructural and human potential. The existing differences within the European Union in terms of the quality of the infrastructure and the availability of transport, energy, and telecommunication and digital networks hamper its global competitiveness. In order to achieve full social, economic and territorial cohesion, transport, energy and digital infrastructure and interconnection need to be further developed. The Croatian Presidency will encourage policies which strengthen infrastructural connectivity of the Union and bring together its citizens, primarily through education, culture and sports.

A Single European Transport Area

- Ensuring appropriate funding for the further construction of infrastructural networks
- Improving trans-European transport networks and encouraging their further extension to neighbouring regions
- Digitalisation and innovation in all branches of the transport sector

High-quality and secure data infrastructure

- Establishing a functional single digital market and reducing the digital gap
- Creating conditions for the full functioning and security of 5G networks
- Organising a discussion on the legal and ethical implications of artificial intelligence and defining standards for new technologies

Integrated energy market

- Further establishment and implementation of the Energy Union
- Strengthening energy security (infrastructure and diversification, including renewable and low-carbon energy sources)
- Promoting the role and potential of European islands in the clean energy transition

Stronger connections between Union citizens

- Further strengthening the mobility of pupils, students, researchers, teachers and other staff
- Increasing mobility in the cultural and creative sector
- Promoting European cultural heritage
- Intensifying dialogue with young people
- Using sports in connecting people of all generations, strengthening of informal skills, especially of young people, and promoting a healthy lifestyle

A EUROPE THAT PROTECTS

A safer Union and its citizens

The European Union considers the security of its citizens to be an issue of the utmost importance. Hence we will strengthen internal security, provide for a more effective control of external borders, ensure the full interoperability of IT systems and strengthen resilience to external threats and malicious cyber activities. Our common goal remains to find a comprehensive solution for a sustainable and effective migration and asylum policy. The Croatian Presidency will focus on further establishing the Union as an area of freedom, security and justice, founded on common values, democracy and the rule of law.

Strengthening internal security

- Work on the Union's strategic guidelines in the areas of freedom, security and justice
- Cooperation among Member States in combating organised crime, money laundering and the financing of terrorism
- Protection of the financial interests of the Union and its Member States and the fight against fraud
- Prevention of the dissemination of online content promoting discrimination, violent extremism and terrorism
- Strengthening of the interoperability of IT systems in the area of justice and internal affairs
- Strengthening of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism for prevention and disaster response

Protection of freedoms and democracy

- Return to an integral and efficient functioning of the Schengen Area
- Personal data protection and protection of privacy
- A comprehensive approach to the rule of law and strengthening of the principles of democracy and fundamental values of the Union

Comprehensive and sustainable migration policy

- Strengthening the control of the Union's external borders and ensuring the interoperability of relevant IT systems
- A coherent and comprehensive approach to the external and internal aspects of migration, including legal migration
- Reform of the Common European Asylum System
- Deepening of cooperation with third countries, including South East Europe

Strengthening resilience against hybrid threats

- Fight against all forms of hybrid threats and malicious cyber activities
- Protection of public space and critical infrastructure
- Prevention of the dissemination of fake news, intolerance and disinformation on digital platforms
- Building professional and technological capacity in the area of cyber security

AN INFLUENTIAL EUROPE

Neighbourhood and world leader

Member States can best overcome the challenges of the 21st century by facing them through the framework and strength of the European Union. The further development of capacities and instruments for common action is the only way to strengthen the Union's leading role on a global scale. Strengthening multilateralism, fulfilling the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals and promoting European values and interests remain the main points of reference for the Union's external action. Its credibility in international relations is also reflected in its responsible approach towards its own neighbourhood, from East to South, including South East Europe (Western Balkans) in its immediate surroundings. The Croatian Presidency will strive for a continued credible and effective enlargement policy, as a pledge towards stability, security and further economic development and mutual connection on the European continent.

Leading international player

- Promoting multilateralism and a rules-based international order founded on international law
- Promoting fundamental values in the Union's external actions
- Taking a leading role in fighting climate change
- Safeguarding and strengthening a multilateral trade system

Global partner

- Promoting international development policies in the service of sustainable development and the eradication of poverty
- Strategic support, fostering reform and strengthening resilience in the eastern and southern neighbourhood
- Strengthening transatlantic relations
- Intensifying relations with Asia, Africa and Latin America and the Union's strategic partners

A guarantee for progress and stability in South East Europe

- Encouraging continuous reform processes in South East Europe and regional cooperation
- Continuing a credible and effective enlargement policy, based on a confirmed European perspective of candidates and potential candidates from South East Europe, based on complete fulfilment of set criteria
- EU-Western Balkans Summit in Zagreb

Crisis-response capacity

- Preserving peace and security through early action aimed at preventing conflicts
- Developing operational capacities and instruments for swift crisis response
- Strengthening the European Union Security and Defence Policy
- Continuing the close and fruitful cooperation between the Union and NATO