Factsheet: Results of the EU Presidency

The Netherlands’ Presidency of the EU has been marked by our emphasis on innovation, pragmatism and transparency. As Presidency holder the Netherlands has worked hard to bring member states together on such important issues as migration, safety and the internal market, an aim which resulted in concrete decisions. There was, of course, disappointment about the outcome of the referendum in the United Kingdom.

The refugee crisis was the most urgent issue to arise during the Dutch Presidency. Thanks to an integrated European approach, the number of people attempting the perilous crossing from Turkey to Greece has been reduced and the influx of migrants into Europe has become more manageable. We have also worked to strengthen the internal market, with the aim of fostering growth and creating jobs. Finally, specific steps have been taken to make Europe safer and more secure. We also sought to make the decision-making process more transparent and to actively get organisations, companies and people involved in EU cooperation.

Migration

• A deal was made with Turkey on fleshing out the migration plan. The number of people attempting the dangerous crossing to Europe is dramatically lower. This has saved many lives. The essence of the plan is that Turkey will take back all irregular migrants arriving in Greece. The next step is to stop people risking their lives by attempting the crossing from North Africa to Europe.

• An agreement was reached on a European Border Guard, which would be responsible for protecting the Union’s external borders. The aim was to provide effective border security to manage migrant flows.

• The Netherlands has worked to implement the agreements the EU has made with West African countries on tackling root causes of economic migration.

Security

• Agreement has been reached about a new Foreign and Security Strategy for the EU that can better respond to today’s threats and promote more efficient cooperation in the field of security and defence.

• Agreements were also reached on amending the Firearms Directive: stricter European standards on arms sales, the possession of firearms and the convertibility of alarm weapons into functional firearms.
Innovation, growth and jobs

- A timetable has been put in place for strengthening the internal market, with a view to fostering growth and creating jobs. A decision must be taken by the end of 2018 on all plans that are now on the table. It will then be up to the European Council to conduct an annual review of their implementation.
- The open science action plan: all scientific research funded with public money will be publicly available as of 2020. A meaningful step forward with respect to both knowledge and transparency.
- The signing of the Pact of Amsterdam on urban development. This will give cities a greater role in EU legislation and increased access to funds. It will also promote better knowledge-sharing to address the most urgent and complex problems.
- European countries are opening their borders to self-driving cars by harmonising national legislation.
- Agreement on new European rules on medical devices to ensure that such devices and in vitro diagnostics are safe and that patients have easy access to them.

Stable finances and a robust eurozone

- Agreement on preventing tax avoidance by facilitating the exchange of tax details between the various national tax authorities. Big companies are now obliged to draw up annual, country-by-country reports documenting the amount of tax they pay.
- Tackling tax fraud with the Action Plan on VAT: member states will team up, using innovative methods to detect tax fraud more rapidly.
- Agreement to combat tax avoidance by multinationals and a European deposit insurance scheme.
- Agreement on a roadmap for completing the banking union.
- Plan of action to combat terrorist financing, which includes the gradual withdrawal of the €500 note from circulation.
- We initiated a discussion on the modernisation of the EU’s multiannual budget.
- A new deal has been reached with Greece on further economic and financial recovery.

Forward-looking climate and energy policy

- Wind energy agreement: nine North Sea countries have joined forces to build more offshore wind farms.
• We backed the Commission’s plans to move towards a circular economy with a view to reducing the consumption of natural resources and improving recycling practices.
• Agreement that all the member states will jointly ratify the Paris climate agreement in the near future.

• Transparency:
  o Better Regulation agreement: there will be a single common portal providing quick, easy access to information and documents from the Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament.
  o The Netherlands organised the first TransparencyCamp Europe, with over 350 participants who came together to discuss the EU and open data.
  o The Netherlands has made the costs of its Presidency public.

• Enhancing the accessibility of government websites and apps for the deaf and blind.
• An agreement to make the Code of Conduct Group more efficient and transparent.

• Connecting with the public:
  o The Europe Building Open Day on 14 May attracted 2,000 visitors.
  o There was a visitors’ centre at the venue.
  o Civil servants gave guest lectures to more than 5,000 pupils at 75 schools.
  o Ministers and state secretaries gave 12 lectures to students and school pupils.
  o The website and social media gave insight into meetings and agreements.
  o School pupils were given the opportunity to take over the Instagram account.
  o The cultural programme featured more than 200 events and performances about Europe, plus FabCity (joint project by European students, artists and designers and businesses).

Organisation: frugal and innovative
• Budget was €62.8 million: €46 million for the central infrastructure and €16.8 million for the meetings. The recent projections come to €59 million. In 2004 the Netherlands Presidency had a budget of €97 million, which is equivalent to €120 million in today’s money.
• Innovative approach to meetings, such as small-group sessions or discussions based on pre-planned scenarios.
• The organisation in Amsterdam was innovative. There was an app for participants with information on the location and meetings. A sustainable building with solar panels, water bottle refill points and a 3D-printed façade. With boats taking participants to and from the venue to lessen road traffic.

Other results
• The Fourth Rail Package: a raft of legislative measures designed to create a more competitive rail sector. The package will make it easier for rail companies, like Dutch Railways, to operate services in other countries.
• On behalf of the member states the European Commission will open negotiations with the Gulf States on new aviation treaties that would provide for fair competition in exchange for limited market access.
• Agreement on tackling antibiotic resistance in the healthcare sector and in livestock farming
• The redundancy scheme and other fringe benefits for European Commissioners are being pared down and the retirement age raised.
• Digital cultural heritage: agreements on making the millions of works of art, books, musical scores and historical records easier to find and use through the European platform (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science).
• Twenty-two EU member states, Norway and Switzerland and various international businesses and patient organisations have agreed to gradually make food products healthier by reducing salt, saturated fat and sugar content (calories) (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and the Ministry of Economic Affairs).
• Agreement on gender equality and LGBTI equality: addressing the issue of equal rights for men and women, gender equality and the protection of LGBTI people.
• Agreement on the Multiannual Plan for the Baltic Fisheries, cod recovery plan and deep-sea fishing.
• Agreement on ensuring that innovative medicines can be made available to patients quickly and affordably.
• The Netherlands has put poverty reduction on the EU agenda. By promoting the exchange of best practices in this area, we hope to increase the general level of knowledge.
• Agreement on codifying professional qualifications for inland navigation. This will create more career opportunities and labour mobility for workers in that sector.