

Work Programme of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2009

Europe without Barriers

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PRIORITIES OF THE CZECH PRESIDENCY

In 2009 the European Union will face a number of serious challenges and decisions related primarily to addressing the serious financial crisis and slowed economic growth. Due to the financial crisis, it is necessary to face the threat of a significant deceleration in economic growth or even an economic downturn, with all its social, political and international consequences. Although urgent measures have been taken at global, EU and national levels in recent months, the European Union will have to give priority attention to a solution to this problem also in 2009.

In addition, the development as regards security in the world, especially developments in crisis regions, involve many unknown factors. During the Czech Presidency, the European Union's strategic ally – the USA – will establish a new leadership and priorities. Special attention will also be paid to the attitudes of another major partner – the Russian Federation. These new facts arise against a background of long-term global challenges which shape the contemporary, interconnected world, whether it is the threat of climate change, the new trends in the distribution of economic and political power in the world or the development of the international security situation.

The issue of institutional reform, connected to the fate of the Lisbon Treaty ratification, is a task of no lesser importance for the efficient working of the European Union and its internal and external policies.

In the highly changeable world of the 21st century, it is becoming clear that the European Union's success depends upon it having the ability to flexibly respond to current problems, and to take full advantage of its economic, cultural and human potential. With this in mind, from the very outset of its preparations, the Czech Republic chose '**A Europe without Barriers**' as the symbolic motto of its Presidency. A Europe without internal economic, cultural and value barriers for individuals, entrepreneurs and economic entities. A Europe open to the world, but not defenceless against illegal activities and attacks. In the light of the present developments – the conclusions of the November G-20 Summit and the conclusions of the December European Council – this motto takes on a topical significance. In the present efforts to stabilise the EU's economies, excessive regulation and an increased level of protectionism must be avoided, above all. The European Union must not give up its strategic goals in favour of short-term stabilisation measures.

The motto 'A Europe without Barriers' has also a political and historical meaning. The year 2009 will be a year of significant anniversaries – above all, the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain, and the fifth anniversary of the most extensive enlargement of the European Union – that will commemorate the successful project of the reunification of Europe

Only an economically strong and cohesive EU without internal barriers, building on its values and roots, will be able to address complex global issues and establish its position in today's world. Hence, the Czech Presidency's key topics will be **the economy, the energy sector and external relations**.

The Economy

Urgent measures have already been taken in order to renew stability, the proper functioning of financial systems and the trust of economic entities. Implementing further steps to enhance transparency and stability of financial markets will be an important goal in the upcoming period. Taking into account that the financial crisis has already had impacts on the real economy, the Czech Presidency's primary task will be to prevent any further deepening of the crisis and to revive the

economic growth of EU economies. The European Economic Recovery Plan, adopted by the European Council in December 2008, is a joint framework for the coordinated effort of the European Union and its Member States. Solutions proposed in this plan must be effective, purposeful and time limited. They must reflect the specific conditions of the Member States and respect the principles of the Stability and Growth Pact as well as the competition rules.

The European Union will play a significant role in international negotiations about a financial system reform that would prevent the recent crisis from recurring in the future. In the joint dialogue with other countries, the Czech Presidency will strive, particularly at the April G-20 Summit in London, to ensure that the EU makes a coordinated contribution in the search for a solution at European and global level.

Even in this difficult economic situation, the Czech Presidency wants to put emphasis on the development of human capital through supporting education, research and development, and by freeing reserves in the internal market. The issue is, above all, to remove any barriers that still stand in the way of the full utilisation of all internal market freedoms, namely the free movement of workers and services, as well as the extraordinarily promising movement of knowledge. The European Union's competitiveness and economic development are also retarded by a number of regulatory and administrative obstacles whose purposefulness is beginning to appear questionable. Attention needs to be paid to the removal of barriers in the sphere of trans-European transport networks. The European Union will also greatly benefit from the implementation of the Galileo Programme.

The European Union must also strive to tear down external barriers. It cannot put up with the stalling of the process of world trade liberalisation, with persisting obstacles to access to other markets, or unfair competition, or insufficient protection of intellectual and industrial property. The new global economic situation may make protectionist approaches seem seductive. The Czech Presidency will therefore strive to ensure that the EU does not diverge from its path of openness, which has led it so far to economic and social prosperity.

The Energy Sector

A central theme for the European Union during the Czech Presidency will encompass the set of issues related to the energy sector and an active involvement in international negotiations about climate protection after 2012. This is a pressing topic, significantly concerning the economy and having international policy and security implications. Building upon the commitments of the European Council from March 2007 contained in the adopted Energy and Climate Change Package, the Presidency will strive to prepare a path for reaching broad international consensus on how to face climate change, which should be reached at the end of 2009 in Copenhagen. It must be stressed that any solution to the climate issue will imply not only certain economic and political costs, but also opportunities.

Energy security is a basic prerequisite for the functioning of the EU economies. In light of the EU's increasing dependence on importing energy sources from the surrounding world, it acquires a special urgency. The EU's goal in this regard is to achieve greater territorial diversification of suppliers, a broader range of utilised sources, an enhancement of renewable resources and the creation of a truly single energy market in the EU which would allow for solidarity in crisis situations. Overall, the path of reducing the economy's energy intensity must be pursued, as well as reducing the economy's impact on the environment at European and global level.

On the basis of the Commission's analyses and proposals, especially its Strategic Energy Review, the Presidency will proceed in preparing a solution along several lines outlined during the French Presidency. One of them involves realising energy savings, purposefully substituting imported and

fossil fuels and supporting the investment into new efficient technologies. Another consists in completing the single internal electricity and gas market and its technical and organisational requirements. This includes, above all, completing the missing segments of the existing transmission and transport infrastructure in the EU and coordinating transmission network operators. An important line involves stabilising relations with the main foreign suppliers of energy sources, primarily in terms of clarifying Russia's role and developing strong relations with new suppliers. Special importance must be attributed to suppliers from the Caspian region and to the construction of the relevant transport routes.

External Relations

The EU is a significant global player, due to its weight in the global economy, high level of integration into the multilateral system, stabilisation efforts in international conflicts and the volume of international development and humanitarian aid it provides. A major reason for the EU's role as a stabilising force is not only its prosperity and economic power, but also its value system. That is why it needs to retain its ability to keep enlarging and offering other European countries the prospect of future accession or mutually advantageous privileged cooperation.

In terms of the EU's international policy position, its stable transatlantic tie is of particular long-term significance. Talks with the representatives of the new US administration and the further development of the transatlantic dialogue in the key spheres of security, economy, energy and climate protection, will be of major importance for the EU's interests.

In the context of Russia's recent steps, which have evoked a number of serious questions, the EU must approach the upcoming negotiations about a new partnership agreement with Russia with a unanimous position. The increasing importance of the cooperation with the Eastern European region, especially with Ukraine, and the development of relations with countries in the Caucasian region, has sped up the preparation of an Eastern Partnership. The Czech Presidency will pay special attention to this Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy. In the first half of 2009, accession negotiations with a strategic partner – Turkey – will continue. Among the Western Balkan countries, Croatia is approaching EU membership, and the Presidency will do everything to ensure that EU enlargement with this country takes place as soon as possible. From the strategic perspective, it is necessary for the other Balkan states to comply with the conditions of the stabilisation and association process to be able to apply for future EU membership. The Czech Presidency will also continue to develop the Southern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy and to improve relations with the partner countries included in this political concept. A subject of the Presidency's great interest will also be the Middle East peace process. At the same time, a number of negotiations with third countries and international organisations will take place during the Presidency.

Similarly, the Presidency will continue the present emphasis of the EU on development cooperation, supporting human rights, building the rule of law and democracy and resolving conflicts in the world. The European Union will have to carry on in its struggle against new security threats, primarily the proliferation of nuclear weapons and nuclear weapon delivery systems, and international terrorism. A major prerequisite for the EU's ability to take action in international policy is the anchoring of its own security in a strategic partnership with NATO and the development of its own defence capabilities, complementary to NATO. The nature of the present security threats increasingly overlaps with the sphere of home security. Developing an area of freedom, security and justice is a common interest of the EU, which touches upon the lives of all its inhabitants. In it, the Presidency will strive for further progress in the Schengen cooperation, a common asylum and migration policy, police and customs cooperation and in the cooperation of the Member States in civil and criminal matters.

The Czech Republic is fully aware of its responsibilities as presiding country. In cooperation with other Member States and with the support of the EU institutions, it is prepared to address current and strategic challenges to the benefit of the EU and all of its citizens. The Czech Republic has based the Work Programme of its Presidency on the continuity of EU policies and on cooperation with the French and Swedish Presidencies, as expressed in the joint 18-Month Presidency Programme.

WORK PROGRAMME

GENERAL AFFAIRS

Institutional Structure of the EU

A key issue of 2009 will be the destiny of the Lisbon Treaty, conditioned by its ratification by all Member States. The development of the ratification process indicates that during the Czech Presidency the European Union will still function on the existing treaty basis. On the basis of the Treaty of Nice, citizens will also elect a new European Parliament in the June elections. Following up on the conclusions of the European Council of December 2008, the Czech Presidency will focus on searching for concrete solutions that would take into account the concerns of the Irish people expressed in the referendum in accord with the interests of all Member States. At the same time, it will be necessary to look for appropriate legal solutions required for the continued functioning of the EU institutions in this transitional period. The schedule of the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty will also be decisive for the possibility of re-opening preparatory negotiations concerning its implementation.

EU Enlargement

The historic unification and stabilisation of the European continent would be left incomplete without the gradual integration of the Western Balkans into the EU. Hence, it is desirable to strengthen the EU prospects of the countries in that region under the Thessaloniki Agenda, and to enable as much progress as possible by the Western Balkan countries under the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) during the Czech Presidency. The objective will be maximum progress in the accession talks with Croatia, which should constitute a major motivation impulse for the other countries. The Presidency is interested in improving the EU's relations with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and it will support preparations for a possible granting of candidacy status to other countries in the region. It will focus on Kosovo and its greatest possible involvement in the SAP. The Presidency will fulfil its responsibility for stability and safety in Kosovo, to which the EU subscribed, primarily with the assistance of the civil mission of the European Security and Defence Policy and other instruments of the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU. The Czech Presidency will strive for the gradual normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo, including mutual participation in regional cooperation activities. One of the basic conditions for stabilisation and peaceful developments in the Western Balkan region is that Serbia starts heading for the EU. The Presidency will also pay special attention to Bosnia and Herzegovina and to the enhancement of the EU's role in the country. Furthermore, the Presidency will focus on strengthening civil society and interpersonal contacts in Western Balkan countries. The road maps on visa liberalisation constitute another impulse for the continuation of internal transformation processes, provided that the set conditions are met. The Presidency will support progress in this regard.

During the Czech Presidency, negotiations with Turkey, which is a strategic ally of the EU, will certainly continue. As is the case of the Western Balkans, such negotiations represent a significant impulse for further transformation processes in that country.

Review of the EU Budget

The activities of the Czech Presidency in the sphere of the EU budget will depend on the publication date of the White Paper on Budget Review by the European Commission. The present financial crisis and uncertainty about the outcome of the Lisbon Treaty ratification could, however, have a significant impact on the timing of the discussions on budget review.

The outcomes of the budget review discussions, which will take place during the Czech Presidency, if the White Paper is published, will be summarised in a Progress Report. The Presidency will submit this report at a meeting of the Council for General Affairs and External Relations.

Economic and Social Cohesion Policy

A topical theme of the first half of 2009 will be the form of the economic and social cohesion policy after 2013. The Czech Presidency intends to continue the debate as to whether the current goals, strategies and priorities reflect the development and needs of the EU and whether and how current challenges should be reflected in that policy. Building upon the adopted European Economic Recovery Plan, the Presidency will try to finalise negotiations about the legislative proposals submitted in the plan. The concept of regional cohesion and the possibility to simplify the administration of the Structural Funds will become another theme of the discussion.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

Economic and Financial Affairs

The crisis in the financial markets is reflected in the pace of European as well as global economic growth. Building upon the steps taken by the French Presidency, the Czech Presidency will face three major topics in managing the current financial and economic risks: the recovery of financial markets and discussions about better regulation; coping with the decline in economic growth; and the preparation of the EU for common international debates on a global financial architecture. The economic crisis will also be reflected in the condition of public finances which may be further adversely affected by measures for the stabilisation of the banking sector and for supporting the economy. In the worsened macro-economic situation, a regular assessment of stabilisation and convergence programmes and national reform programmes will take place in early 2009.

Financial Market Recovery and Development

In the financial markets sector, the Czech Presidency will build upon the present EU activities. Priority issues of the Presidency will include the review of the Directive on the capital adequacy of investment firms and credit institutions; negotiations on the directive regulating the insurance sector and the regulation on credit rating agencies. The Presidency will further strive to finalise the Directive on the taking up, pursuit of and prudential supervision of the business of electronic money institutions, a review of the Regulation on cross-border payments in euro and last but not least a timely and proper implementation of the road maps of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council, adopted in reaction to the financial crisis.

The Czech Presidency is prepared to continue the debates about enhancing the stability and development of a single European financial market by way of harmonising the regulation of the financial market and its supervision. The existence of a strong and independent national institution to supervise the financial market, across all its segments, is a necessary prerequisite for more efficient communication and coordination of the measures adopted in the EU. The work of the high-level group led by Jacques de Larosière will constitute an important contribution to the debate.

While dealing with current problems on the financial market, the Presidency will take care not to disrupt the fundamental principles of a free market and the values upon which the EU is built. The Presidency will also emphasise respect for *acquis* principles in the field of competition and state aid and, in line with the principles of better regulation, will consider the possible side effects of additional regulatory measures.

Macroeconomic and Structural Policies

The economic slow-down in the EU represents a significant historical test for the single currency, the revised Stability and Growth Pact and the Lisbon Strategy. In December 2008, the European Commission published the European Economic Recovery Plan aiming to reduce the economic deceleration and speed up the implementation of selected structural reforms. The Presidency will strive for the Recovery Plan to be adequately reflected in regular supervision processes and will support the set-up of an optimum mix of short-term and long-term macroeconomic and structural policies that would enable the fastest possible and least costly adaptation to the present shocks, as well as reinforcement of the growth potential in the future. The Presidency will call for responsible adherence to the principles of the revised Stability and Growth Pact, including a responsible use of its flexibility. It will also strive to ensure that the current economic difficulties do not make the EU forget its medium-term budget strategies and goals, which arise from the future needs dictated by demographic change and increasing globalisation. In the long-term, an overall enhancement of the EU's competitiveness is the best tool for mitigating the impact of the financial crisis on European economies.

International Cooperation

The extent of the financial crisis and the threat of a global economic recession increased the need for international cooperation in managing them. As the November G-20 Summit in Washington showed, the EU and its Member States can be, in this regard, not only a significant partner, but also an initiator of discussions. International cooperation in the stabilisation, regulation, supervision and currency areas should prevent the spreading of economic instability through the world and – through constructive cooperation – avert the threat of a return to protectionism and undue state intervention.

Public Finance Sustainability and Quality

Demographic change is a major long-term challenge with a clear overlap with other EU policy areas. In a situation where the population is ageing, pressure increases on the quality of the public finances and the overall sustainability of the social, education and healthcare systems. The long-term sustainability and quality of the public finances assumes even greater importance at a time when the economic policy focuses on short-term measures aiming to revive the economy. The Presidency will strive to take a comprehensive view of this issue that will follow from a new analysis of budget spending on population ageing, enable its projection on the medium-term budgetary objectives of the Member States and assess the trends in the composition of public spending. An expert conference in May 2009 will be devoted to the topic of long-term sustainability.

Fighting Tax Evasion and Modernising Tax Rules

Tax evasion reduces the budgetary income of the Member States and reduces their ability to react flexibly to current challenges in case of an unfavourable economic situation. The Presidency has therefore identified the fight against tax evasion and tax avoidance as its key priority in the tax field. It will focus particularly on improving tax administration and administration cooperation among the Member States. In line with the conclusions of the

December European Council, the Presidency will try to reach agreement on reduced VAT rates. At the same time, it will try to finalise negotiations on the amendment to the Directive on taxes other than turnover taxes which affect the consumption of manufactured tobacco. The Presidency will put great effort into reaching progress in the discussion about the review of the Directive on taxation of savings income in the form of interest payments and the Directive on the modernisation of rules for applying VAT to financial and insurance services.

COMPETITIVENESS

The Lisbon Process

A significant economic slowdown underlines the importance of the Lisbon Strategy as a set of instruments to strengthen economic growth and resistance of economies to internal and external shocks. The Czech EU Presidency will be responsible for the preparation of the spring European Council, which, building up on the European Economic Recovery Plan, will carry out an evaluation of the progress in implementing structural reforms, both at EU level (Community Lisbon Programme) and national level (National Reform Programmes). The Presidency will further promote the debate on new priorities in the light of the existing economic situation and strive to find a consensus on long-term measures that will create conditions to revive economic growth in the EU. The Czech Presidency will follow up on the discussion on the European Economic Recovery Plan, which will serve as a point of departure for the Lisbon Strategy after 2010. As the presiding country, the Czech Republic will moderate the Lisbon Strategy debate. The future of the Lisbon Strategy will also be the main theme of the April meeting of national Lisbon coordinators in Prague.

The Internal Market

Making use of the potential of the internal market is a key tool for the revival of economic growth. The Presidency will support all initiatives contributing to the full application of all internal market freedoms and to the removal of administrative burdens and excessive regulation, as well as to the efficient setting of priorities with the help of market monitoring. The Czech Presidency will evaluate the progress in this area as part of the Internal Market Review.

The Presidency will put primary emphasis on removing restrictions on the free movement of workers (for more details see the chapter on Employment and Social Policy). Cross-border trading and service provision is another underutilised source of economic growth in the EU. The Presidency will therefore emphasise the need for the timely, correct and coherent transposition of the Directive on services in the internal market as well as the need to identify persisting barriers to the free movement of services. The Europe-wide Conference on the Future of Services in the Internal Market, which will take place in Prague in February, should contribute to this effort. The Czech Presidency will also promote further development of administrative cooperation among national institutions, which is crucial for the practical functioning of the internal market. A review of consumer legislation could serve as an instrument for the removal of certain factual barriers on the internal market. In connection with the enactment of the new legislative framework for the free movement of goods, the Presidency will actively support the review of directives governing certain technical requirements as to goods. This will take place as part of the technical harmonisation process, with the aim of simplifying the legal environment and enhancing producers' responsibility and elements of market control. The Presidency will conclude legislative work on the proposal for a directive on simplifying terms and conditions of transfers of defence-related products with the European Community and the directive on defence procurement, which are

part of the defence package. The enhancement of competitiveness and economic growth would be unthinkable without a fully functional internal market in electricity and gas. Achieving such a market is one of the Presidency's main priorities in the energy sector. At the same time, legislative proposals that the European Commission will issue as part of the Pharma Package will be discussed.

The Presidency will also build upon the efforts to improve the patent system in Europe. Work will continue on the preparation of a European patent judiciary and on developing a Community patent. The Czech Presidency will pay attention to the Commission's initiatives in line with the Industrial Property Rights Strategy for Europe.

Competition

The Presidency will promote the process of negotiating and concluding international agreements of the first and the second generation concerning cooperation in investigating anti-competitive practices between the European Union and its significant economic partners. Parties to these agreements should be provided with an adequate instrument to fight the ever growing number of anti-competitive practices of a global dimension.

Better Regulation

The improvement of regulation, including the reduction of the regulatory burden, is an important factor for improving competitiveness, making it easier to engage in business, in particular for small and medium-sized enterprises. The Presidency is interested in the fastest possible implementation of the initiatives submitted on the basis of the outcomes of the evaluation of the administrative burden on businesses, and in approving further steps, in the Action Programme for Reducing Administrative Burdens at the spring 2009 European Council. Furthermore, the Presidency will support the exchange of experience and best practice examples in the public administration systems of EU countries, primarily in the area of introduction of electronic devices into administrative processes, and electronic public administration as a tool for reducing the administrative burden. Furthermore, the Presidency will insist on carrying out impact assessments of newly submitted policies, including an assessment of alternative solutions, and on a comprehensible presentation of the main findings and data obtained through consultation and impact assessment to the public. The Presidency will also focus on a timely and more intensive use of impact studies in the EU decision-making process. The Presidency will lead the preparation of the Council's positions on the third strategic review of the Better Regulation initiative and aims to recommend the continuation of this agenda after the new Commission takes office. Furthermore, the Presidency will strive for the consolidation of and support for the use of instruments improving the implementation of EU legislation.

Research and Development, and Innovation

Given the current financial crisis, the Presidency will be concerned with methods promoting further growth in knowledge and European competitiveness in the long term. This topic will become a part of the Key Issues Paper. The Presidency will promote further development of the European Research Area (ERA), focusing on large research infrastructures and on removing barriers to research staff mobility. Discussions will also be conducted on the course of the implementation of the ESFRI Roadmap and discussions about the roadmap update. The Presidency will also focus on regional aspects concerning the development of large research

infrastructures. The possibilities of cooperation among smaller Member States in the development of research infrastructures, and questions regarding their development and sustainability, will constitute the topic of the conference 'Enhancing the ERA Through Research Infrastructures'. In line with the conclusions of the March 2008 European Council, the Czech Presidency will build upon the activities of the French Presidency and actively support the application of the 'fifth freedom', while paying its main attention to the careers and mobility of research staff. It will support all initiatives helping to create a European labour market in the field of human resources in research and development, and will be concerned with the assessment of investment into research and its methodology. The Presidency will continue the Ljubljana Process and it will also address issues of the implementation of Vision 2020 at the informal ministerial meeting for Competitiveness. The share of Member States in managing the ERA as well as the assessment of the management and coordination of ERA policies will be addressed during informal Councils in cooperation with Sweden.

The protection of intellectual property rights and cooperation of companies with universities and research institutions will be at the centre of attention of the Czech Presidency. In the support of innovation and competitiveness, the Presidency will promote and monitor fast progress in the implementation of the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme 2007-2013 (CIP). The Czech Presidency will officially launch the European Year of Creativity and Innovation and will emphasise the importance of innovation for the EU's competitiveness.

Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise Policy

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) form the basis of the EU's economic potential and create a great number of jobs. The Presidency will therefore focus on the implementation of specific measures arising from the Small Business Act and its reflection in the fulfilment of the Lisbon Strategy objectives. The Czech Presidency will put emphasis on the thorough application of the 'Think Small First' principle, especially in order to simplify regulation, reduce the administrative burden on business and improve the access of small and medium-sized enterprises to EU programmes. The Presidency will actively promote the application of the 'Only Once' principle, with the aim of reducing the obligations of small and medium-sized enterprises in the field of statistical findings. The Presidency will also be concerned with the review of the Directive on Combating Late Payment in Commercial Transactions, which is now being prepared and which is to ensure that small and medium-sized enterprises are paid in time for all business transactions. In May 2009, the Presidency will get actively involved in the first 'European SME Week' aimed at reducing the administrative burden on business. On the occasion of its conclusion, the Presidency will organise two conferences in cooperation with the Commission. The overarching topic will be the impact of the Small Business Act on the removal of barriers to business, particularly emphasising the reduction of administrative burdens for entrepreneurs. The conference will include the announcement of the 2008 European Business Awards.

Company Law

The Presidency will continue to discuss the proposal for a Council Regulation on the Statute for a European Private Company, with the aim of offering small and medium-sized enterprises a form of business that would enable them to take advantage of their potential and develop cross-border activities.

Sustainable Industrial Policy

In the area of industrial policy, the Presidency will focus on evaluating sectoral and horizontal initiatives, the implementation of which is currently being completed. Attention will need to be paid, above all, to a medium-term evaluation of the CARS21 initiative, a reflection on the results of the work of the high-level groups for the chemical and electrotechnical industries, and to the Council's response to the Commission's Communication on access to raw materials. These areas will be reflected in the conclusions of the Council on industrial policy, now in preparation. In connection with the Commission's activities, the Presidency wants to actively participate in a discussion on the further orientation of the EU's industrial policy after 2010.

Statistics

Globalisation brings about the need to objectively capture qualitatively new phenomena and processes. Primary attention will be paid to discussions on legislation focused on the development of new, and modification of existing, statistical characteristics, in line with the needs of individual areas of activity. An area of no lesser importance to the Czech Presidency will be the overall development of statistics and its ability to flexibly and adequately respond to current phenomena and processes, while respecting the need to simplify and reduce administrative burdens.

The Economic Benefits of Enlargement ('5 Years After')

The fifth anniversary of the most extensive EU enlargement poses an opportunity for an evaluation of its costs and benefits for all Member States and the Union as a whole. The Czech Presidency will present and discuss the impact of enlargement on the four internal market freedoms at the international conference '5 Years After', to be held in March 2009. The conclusions of the conference will serve as a foundation for discussing certain configurations of the EU Council (the Economic and Financial Affairs Council; the Competitiveness Council; and the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council).

ENERGY

Energy Policy

The Czech Presidency will continue to develop the EU energy policy. It will support measures leading to the improvement of the operation of the internal energy market, increasing energy efficiency, using energy sources effectively, saving energy and diversifying supplies from external sources (including transit routes). The chosen measures must fully reflect the EU's integrated approach towards policy on energy and climate protection. The Presidency will put emphasis on the long-term cost-efficiency and sustainability of the policies chosen, taking account of the particular situation of each Member State. The priorities of the Presidency in relation to the energy sector will be based on the implementation of the Action Plan for the period 2007-2009 'An Energy Policy for Europe'. The Presidency will build on the debates on the updated second Strategic Energy Review at the Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council (TTE), and will incorporate the outcomes of the debates on the Review into the conclusions of the Spring 2009 European Council. The Spring Council should define specific suggestions for further development and begin the preparation of the second Action Plan on Energy Policy for Europe (2010-2012). The Presidency will focus on the need to develop infrastructure, complete the creation of the common energy market, following the approval of the 3rd Energy Package, strengthen coordination in the area of foreign relations, in

particular in respect to producers of crude oil and natural gas and in respect to transit countries; and last, but not least, further develop state-of-the art energy technologies.

Energy Security and Reliability

Guaranteeing energy security is a necessary prerequisite for the EU's economic development and political stability. The Presidency intends to contribute to its strengthening, primarily in three respects: by identifying priority infrastructure projects, based on a medium- and long-term analysis of supply and demand; by supporting the development of energy infrastructure and initiating a debate on the possibilities of improving the existing processes in terms of legislation and implementation; and by creating and developing contractual relationships with third countries and regions, with the aim of ensuring permanent supplies and actively contributing to the diversification of energy sources and transit routes.

With respect to external energy relations, the Czech Presidency will focus on Russia, Ukraine and the Caspian Region. The Presidency will also, among other things through the preparation of the Action Plan for 2010–2012, actively promote an overall strengthening of the dialogue with the countries of the Caspian Sea Region, while implementing the EU's common external energy policy. During the Czech Presidency, a 'Southern Corridor Summit' on energy will be organised, emphasising the strategic significance of the producer and transit countries of this region. In respect to Russia, it will be necessary to address all aspects of Russia's role as the supplier of energy to EU markets. The Czech Presidency intends to organise an extraordinary meeting of the EU-Russia Permanent Partnership Council and an EU-Russia summit in May. In the case of Ukraine, the debate will focus on issues associated with secure and reliable energy transit. The Presidency will support any activities conducive to a greater diversification of energy sources and energy supply modes for EU Member States.

The Presidency will support activities leading to the completion of the construction of the missing segments in the existing energy transmission and transport infrastructure within the EU, and improved coordination of the transmission system operators. As part of the final approval procedures of the 3rd Liberalisation Package, the Presidency intends to promote the completion of coordination mechanisms for the European Network of Transmission/Transport System Operators for electricity and gas (ENTSO-E, ENTSO-G) which will enable their daily communication and prevent energy supply outages. The Czech Presidency maintains that the future security and reliability of electricity supply via the European transmission network will also depend on the balanced operation of different types of power plants. The Czech Presidency will try to reach an agreement on the review of rules applicable to the creation of emergency crude oil reserves. The legislation should make sure that in case of an outage of crude oil supplies, each Member State should have emergency supplies at its disposal.

Internal Market of Electricity and Natural Gas

The Czech Presidency considers the creation of a transparent, stable, efficient and interconnected internal electricity and gas market to be a necessary prerequisite for a secure, sustainable and competitive energy supply. The completion of discussions on the 3rd Liberalisation Package, and reaching an agreement on it within the term of the present European Parliament, is one of the main tasks of the Presidency. In connection with the regular Annual Report of the European Commission, the Strategic Energy Review, and the Green Paper on Trans-European Energy Networks, the Presidency will pay due attention to the issue of investments and other issues related to the completion of the construction of the required transmission and transport capacity within the Member States. The Czech Presidency considers this issue to be one of the key areas for the completion of the creation of the

common market. Only a completed and fully operational internal market in electricity and gas will create a predictable and stable environment for the EU, which is necessary for investments and cross-border cooperation. The Presidency will open a debate on the issue of the possible introduction of a single transparent tariff for the international transmission of electricity for the purposes of both the internal market and international trade in electricity in Europe. Such a tariff would be a payment to benefit the integrity and reinforcement of Trans-European Networks (the European power grid). Regarding the internal electricity market and the enhancement of energy security, the Presidency will organise a conference in Ostrava at the end of January 2009, on the theme 'Ensuring Energy Security of EU Member States on the Common Electricity Market'.

Energy Efficiency and Low-Carbon Energy Sources

The enhancement of energy efficiency and its economical use is one of the key means towards strengthening energy security, an important pillar of the ambitious policy on tackling climate change and a tool for promoting the competitiveness of enterprises. The Presidency will therefore continue to discuss specific consumption-related measures (the labelling of household appliances with energy labels, modification of the requirements for the 'Eco-design' of appliances, increasing the energy efficiency of buildings and the labelling of tyres with energy labels) and try to conclude the revised proposal for a framework directive determining requirements for the 'Eco-design' of appliances at first reading.

The Presidency will support a critical and open debate on all available energy sources and their economical use in line with the EU's climate protection commitments. In doing so, it will focus on the support for new technologies, energy savings, the debate about the opportunities and risks associated with the use of nuclear energy, the issue of the opportunities and risks associated with the use of biofuels, and last but not least, the impacts of wind energy production on transmission network stability. Along these lines, it will promote the activities of the Nuclear Forum and maximum application of the results of the work of the High Level Group on Nuclear Safety.

The Czech Presidency will participate in the debate on supporting the use of clean coal technology and demonstration projects for the system of capturing and storing carbon emissions (CCS technology). In the first half of 2009, a debate will be held on the implementation of the European Strategic Energy Technology Plan (SET-Plan). The Presidency will support the translation of the SET-Plan into practical steps and initiatives, including the strengthening of research and development and the development of new forms of cooperation. From the perspective of the Czech Presidency, the EU should play a leading role in the development of these technologies.

TRANSPORT

Optimisation of the Functioning of the Internal Transport Market

Exploiting the real economic potential of the EU would be unthinkable without a fully operational internal transport market. The Presidency will primarily support measures leading to equal conditions in the EU transport market and to the optimisation of the use of individual modes of transport. When implementing the measures contained in the 'Green Transport Package', the Presidency will focus on the charging of the infrastructure, with the aim of incorporating external costs within the charges for the use of transport infrastructure. The Presidency will focus intensively on discussing the proposed amendment to the Directive on

the Charging of Heavy Goods Vehicles (the 'Eurovignette' Directive), with a view to reaching an agreement among the Member States in the Council. A significant initiative of the Commission, the submission of which was announced in the Green Transport Package, will be the Action Plan for the Deployment of Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) in Europe. The inadequate pace of the implementation of these technologies restricts the possibilities of an efficient management of road traffic. Consequently, the Presidency intends to initiate the adoption of Council conclusions and to advance the debates on the expected legislative proposal for the establishment of a European ITS Committee. If the Commission submits the Action Plan on Urban Mobility, the Presidency will submit and discuss the conclusions of the Council about this initiative. Aiming to reduce the negative impact of freight road traffic on the environment, the Presidency will discuss the amendment to the Marco Polo II Programme Regulation to provide financial help from the EU, expecting to reach an agreement with the Parliament at first reading.

In air transport, the fragmented implementation of the Single European Sky (SES) programme must be overcome. The Presidency will therefore strive to conclude the discussions on the proposal for a review of the legal framework of this programme. Concerning the SESAR project, which represents the technological part of the Single European Sky programme, the Presidency will strive for the approval of the ATM Master Plan. The Presidency will also discuss the amendment to the Regulation concerning the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), with the object of including selected airports and air traffic management systems / air navigation services (ATM/ANS) in the scope of this regulation.

Completing the Trans-European Transport Network is a prerequisite for a fully operational internal market. The Presidency deems it desirable that the Commission should be informed well in advance about the opinions of the Member States as to the direction to be taken in this area. By opening a discussion on this topic, the Presidency intends to use the Green Paper on the future of the TEN-T policy that is now being prepared.

The Presidency is also ready to launch debates on proposals for regulations concerning the rights of bus and sea transport passengers.

Elimination of Administrative Barriers to Business in the Transport Sector

Doing business in international road transport is still not completely free of certain barriers. With the aim of eliminating these barriers, the Presidency will seek to reach an agreement between the Council and the European Parliament on the Road Package at second reading. In addition, the adoption of a proposal amending the Directive on the organisation of the working time of persons performing mobile road transport activities should have a positive impact on the reduction of administrative barriers to business in the transport sector. In respect of this proposal, the Presidency will seek to reach consensus between the Member States, most likely in the form of a general approach of the Council.

Competitiveness of the EU's Transport System

The Presidency is aware of the strategic importance and immense economic potential of the Galileo programme. Consequently, it will promote the continuation of its implementation. In particular, the Presidency will focus on discussions about an amendment to the Regulation on the establishment of structures for the management of the European satellite radio-navigation programmes, if it is submitted by the Commission. In line with the White Paper on the European Transport Policy, the Presidency will focus on promoting the competitiveness of railway transport, and it plans to engage in a discussion on the upcoming proposal for a

regulation concerning a European rail network for competitive freight. The Presidency considers the deepening of relations with third countries to be an important tool in enhancing the competitiveness of European air carriers. The Presidency will therefore assist the Commission in negotiating with the USA about the second phase of the mutual Air Transport Agreement. Depending on the outcome of the negotiations conducted by the French Presidency, the Czech Presidency will take the steps necessary to conclude an Air Transport Agreement between the EU and Canada. The goal is to support and further develop ties between the EU and the North American countries in the field of transport.

Road Safety

The high number of people killed on European roads requires an enhancement of Europe-wide effort to improve road safety. Under the Czech Presidency, there should be a discussion on the future orientation of EU policies concerning road safety. Its outcome should be the adoption of the new European Road Safety Action Programme for 2011-2020 in the second half of 2009 or in the first half of 2010.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Information Society

In accordance with the idea of a Europe without barriers, the Presidency will focus on overcoming barriers by means of information and communication technologies. The Presidency will continue the work on the inclusion into the information society (e-Inclusion), including the issue of accessibility of information and communication technologies to persons with disabilities and seniors (e-Accessibility). The Presidency will support all activities aimed at one of the objectives of the i2010 Action Plan – to secure the possibility for all citizens to use the services of easily accessible electronic public administration (e-Government) by 2010. The Presidency also views the issue of social inclusion in the global context, in particular with respect to developing countries. The Presidency will also support the Safer Internet Plus programme and will promote raising public awareness of illegal and harmful content on the Internet.

Review of the Regulatory Framework for Electronic Communications Networks and Services

Concerning the regulatory framework for electronic communications networks and services, the Czech Presidency will build on its active cooperation with the French Presidency. The Presidency will seek a compromise between the Council and the European Parliament over the Telecommunications Package concluding the related legislative process during the Presidency.

Review of the GSM Directive and of the Roaming Regulation

The Presidency will strive for the approval of the proposed amendment to the GSM Directive from November 2008. The amended and simplified directive should enable a more effective use of the spectrum and the introduction of new services with a positive economic effect. In 2009, discussions will continue on the Commission's proposal of October 2008 for a review of the Roaming Regulation. The Czech Presidency will build on these discussions with the aim of reaching a compromise and adopting the proposal during the first half of 2009.

Climate Protection

In spite of the complicated economic situation caused by shocks in the financial markets, the Presidency is aware of the need to meet the commitments made in the area of climate protection and to further seek to maintain the EU's position as the global leader in this field. When addressing the joint commitments, the Presidency will consistently strive to ensure the economic sustainability of the individual steps, their cost-efficiency and long-term economic and social impacts.

In the field of climate protection, the Presidency will conduct preparatory negotiations in order to achieve a global agreement on setting targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions after 2012, in line with the EU's commitment to keep the maximum increase of the average global temperature at no more than 2°C by 2050. The adoption of the Energy and Climate Change Package gives the EU a good starting position for these negotiations. The Presidency will conduct negotiations on the setting of the targets following the completion of the first control period of the Kyoto Protocol after 2012. This agenda will include, in particular, negotiations with the USA and other major producers of greenhouse gases (such as Russia, Brazil, China and India) and their involvement in the international climate protection system. In this respect, the Presidency will build on negotiations following the conferences of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Bali (2007) and in Poznań (2008). The Presidency will represent the EU during the UNFCCC negotiations and prepare a joint EU position for negotiations in other international forums, in particular for the conference to be held in Copenhagen in December 2009. Following the commitments of the European Council of June 2008, the Spring 2009 European Council will discuss the mechanisms of financing the fight against climate change. During the Presidency, discussions will also be initiated on the Communication on adaptation to climate change. The Presidency supports the introduction of adaptation measures that will also take into account other aspects, such as biodiversity and soil protection. The above issue should be a theme of the Informal Meeting of Ministers for the Environment in June 2009.

Protection of Human Health and the Environment

Concerning the protection of human health and the environment, the Presidency will focus on the following agenda: progress in the discussions of the proposal for a directive on industrial emissions; finalising the discussions on the review of the proposal for the regulation on ozone-depleting substances; initiating discussions on a proposed review of the directive on national emission ceilings for certain atmospheric pollutants, if submitted by the Commission; and discussions on proposals for directives reviewing the management of waste electrical and electronic equipment. The Presidency will also discuss the issues concerning the management of organic waste, in connection with the European Commission's published Green Paper. The Czech Presidency will also coordinate a number of significant international meetings and activities related to the protection of the environment and health and represent the EU during these events.

Sustainable Consumption and Production

The issue of sustainable consumption and production is related to environmental protection and climate change. The Presidency will support initiatives that seek to raise awareness among the citizens of the EU Member States. This concerns, in particular, the labelling of organisations applying environmental approaches (review of the existing Regulation allowing voluntary participation by organisations in a Community eco-management and audit scheme –

EMAS), and support for the promotion of the system of eco-labelling of products. In this respect, the Presidency will seek to reach an agreement with the European Parliament at first reading. Furthermore, the Presidency will devote attention to information reporting within the EU and the system of conveying information. The Presidency will organise an international conference on these issues, entitled 'Towards e-Environment'.

The Czech Presidency will make every effort to ensure that at the 17th session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, in May 2009 in New York, effective political decisions are taken on the integrated promotion of sustainable development, in such important fields as agriculture, rural development, soil protection and tackling desertification and drought, taking into account the context of the current crisis in the financial markets.

Biodiversity Protection

In view of the link between biodiversity protection on the one hand, and climate change and soil protection on the other, the Presidency will focus on the Commission's Biodiversity Package, in particular the Communication on invasive species. The Czech Presidency will also seek to make significant progress in the discussion on the proposal for a regulation concerning trade in seal products. The Presidency intends to contribute to biodiversity protection by the Conference on Wilderness and Large Natural Habitat Areas, which it will organise in Prague in cooperation with the Commission. By means of this conference, the Wilderness project will be launched, focused on the promotion of a debate on the protection of primary, natural and semi-natural areas. Furthermore, the Presidency intends to engage in discussing a proposal for a directive on soil protection, by which it intends to follow up on the steps taken by the French Presidency.

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY

Worker Mobility in the EU Labour Market

Restrictions on the free movement of workers constitute a major barrier to the development of the single internal market, hampering full use of the real potential of the EU Member States and the EU as a whole. Consequently, the primary objective of the Czech EU Presidency will be to emphasise the benefits, for the EU's competitiveness, of full liberalisation of the movement of workers within the EU and the simplification and increase of professional and geographic mobility of workers in the labour market. In line with this objective, the Presidency will propose the Council conclusions on the Commission report on the impact of free movement of workers in the context of EU enlargement. The Presidency will seek to finalise the modernisation of legislation on the coordination of migrant workers' social security. The Presidency will also focus on measures that will lead to the suppression of undeclared work and that will raise awareness of the possibilities and advantages of mobility within the EU, and it will put emphasis on sharing examples of good practice in removing other barriers, such as language barriers. In the context of the preparations for the spring 2009 European Council, the Presidency will draw attention to the adverse impacts of existing transitional measures on the free movement of workers.

Increasing Employment and Labour Market Flexibility through General Flexicurity Principles

Making full use of workforce potential and making the EU's labour market more flexible are among the key tools to increase the EU's competitiveness. Therefore, the Presidency will focus on the practical implementation of the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs and of the general principles of flexicurity, putting special emphasis on increasing labour market

flexibility; on flexible employment relationships and social services, based on the principle of ‘making work pay’; on strengthening motivation for an active approach to reintegration into the labour market; and on enhancing the quality of human resources through the training of adults. At the same time, it will highlight the prevention of social protection abuse. In the light of these priorities, the Presidency will prepare the conclusions of the Council on the Commission Communication on ‘New Skills for New Jobs’, and the conclusions of the Council on flexicurity, with special emphasis on the relation between social protection and vocational training during labour market transitions. The Presidency will seek a compromise with the European Parliament in a conciliation procedure on the Working Time Directive. During the debate on the Lisbon Strategy after 2010, the Presidency will also address the issues of modernising labour law (Green Paper ‘Modernising Labour Law to Meet the Challenges of the 21st Century’).

Horizontal Support for Families within EU Policies

As part of the European debate on the promotion of employment and reconciliation of working, personal and family lives, the Presidency will focus on the issue of parental childcare and its relation to employment policy and stress the importance of home childcare as a fully fledged alternative to a professional career, an alternative that deserves both respect and support from the state and society. It will put emphasis on respect for the autonomy and freedom of choice for families, on the qualitative aspect of care services, the socio-cultural environment and the historical experience of Member States. These issues will constitute the theme of a Presidency conference and the Informal Meeting of Ministers for Family Policy. At the Informal Meeting, the Presidency will, in light of the above, propose opening a debate on a possible review of the Barcelona objectives in the field of pre-school childcare services. The Presidency will also continue discussing legislative proposals of the European Commission aimed at the reconciliation of work, personal and family life.

Social Services as a Tool for Active Social Inclusion of the Most Disadvantaged Persons and as an Employment Opportunity

The Presidency will focus on services as a tool for preventing social exclusion and for active inclusion of the most vulnerable persons and, at the same time, as an area of growing employment opportunities (given the demographic trends in the EU) and will pay attention to the process of strengthening the networks of such services provided in a natural social environment. The Presidency will address the issue of the availability of social services in terms of location, financing and type. In the context of an active inclusion policy, the Presidency will support the combination of policies in the areas of labour market integration, workforce mobility, motivation to find a job, support for an adequate income and high-quality, accessible and efficient social services. The Presidency will organise a conference to discuss social inclusion issues and will propose the adoption of the Council conclusions. Attention will also be paid to the improvement of quality, availability and financing of long-term care, protection of the dignity and rights of persons dependent on care, and support for an active, healthy ageing and ageing well.

EDUCATION, YOUTH AND SPORTS

Updating the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education after 2010

The Presidency will focus on negotiations on the future strategic framework for European cooperation in education and vocational training after 2010, which should make a significant contribution to the active development of Europe’s human potential. In view of the

Commission's Communication, and in connection with the Education and Training 2010 work programme, the new strategic framework is expected to set the long-term objectives of European cooperation in the next decade. The task of the Presidency will be to prepare key communications in the field of education for the spring meeting of the European Council, which will provide the mandate for the approval of the new strategic framework in May 2009. Emphasis will also be put on the debate on topical themes (such as the education of migrants and support for mobility) and implementation of common tools – in particular the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQARF).

Partnership between the Educational Sector and Employers:

Openness of Schools to New Challenges

The Presidency will stress the openness of educational institutions and the significance of their cooperation with employers and regions. The Presidency deems it necessary to focus on the implementation of the knowledge triangle. The interaction of both sectors is decisive for defining and ensuring the key competences and skills of all individuals, which determine their maximum professional and personal development and employability. The Presidency will closely cooperate with the European Commission on its initiative on cooperation between universities and the business sector. These issues are closely related to forecasting and the development of skills in Europe in the forthcoming period. For this reason, the Presidency pays attention to the initiative of the Commission on the issue of skills from the viewpoint of developing professions.

Development of University Education – Quality and Openness (the Bologna Process)

With regard to the development of university education, the Czech Presidency will engage in evaluating the implementation of the priorities of the Bologna process set for 2007–2009, and in preparing the interim report on the overall development for 1999–2009 and the supporting documentation for defining the vision of university education after 2010. The Czech Presidency will also coordinate the Follow-up Group of the Bologna Process at the time of the Conference of Ministers in Leuven (Louvain).

Cooperation in the Youth Field

Based on the Commission's proposal that will summarise the results of cooperation in the youth field and propose its future framework after 2009, the Presidency will evaluate the implementation of existing priorities, their significance for the future, the methods used, and the impacts of the current cooperation framework. The Presidency will focus in particular on the review of the application of the open coordination method and the implementation of the European Youth Pact. Furthermore, the Czech Presidency will contribute to the implementation of the Council Recommendation on Mobility of Young Volunteers across Europe.

Autonomy of Sports

The Presidency will support forms of international cooperation that respect the principles of the autonomous and particular nature of sports, as defined in the Nice Declaration of the European Council on the specific characteristics of sports and their social function in Europe. The Presidency will continue the dialogue with the sports movement and favour a dialogue with representatives of non-governmental sports organisations. In connection with the White Paper on Sport, and in view of the Pierre de Coubertin Action Plan, the Presidency will focus on the identification of the current status, best practices and other possibilities for supporting volunteer work in the field of sports.

HEALTH

Exercise of Patients' Rights in Cross-Border Healthcare

The Presidency will participate in the effort to set out an overall framework for the provision of cross-border healthcare. The European Union considers such measures to be a benefit for patients and healthcare systems alike, especially with regard to increasing patient mobility. The future system of cross-border care provision must also take into account the quality and safety of healthcare, regardless of which Member State it is provided in.

In connection with this issue and with the high-level process of reflection on healthcare workers in Europe, the Presidency will also seek to address the growing mobility of healthcare workers.

Quality and Safety of Organ Donorship and Transplants

The Presidency will address the issue of the availability and safety of organs that are intended for donation and transplants. A new legislative initiative will include the principles providing a general framework for quality and safety in relation to the medical use of human organs; for the creation of a common set of quality and safety standards for organ transport and storage; and for reporting serious adverse events. The Presidency will also participate in debates on the Action Plan for close cooperation between Member States.

Rare Diseases

The Czech Presidency will support the Commission initiative on rare diseases which seeks to improve the current situation of patients suffering from such diseases, and increase their chances of obtaining adequate care and available information.

Patient Safety and the Control of Nosocomial Infections, with a Focus on Antimicrobial Resistance

The main objective of the initiative addressing patient safety and healthcare quality is to provide support to Member States in their effort to ensure safety and quality standards within the entire scope of EU healthcare systems, namely as regards the continuous quality improvement (CQI) of healthcare and patient safety within national and regional systems. The Presidency will participate in the adoption of appropriate measures for infection control and the definition of relevant standards and preventive measures. Here, the prevention and control of antimicrobial resistance and healthcare-associated infections in healthcare settings with an emphasis on European hospitals will be a priority. The April 2009 ministerial conference is expected to provide recommendations for specific measures concerning antibiotic programmes in European hospitals and suitable models for the support and financing of these programmes by national governments and healthcare payers, especially health insurance companies.

Financial Sustainability of Healthcare Systems

The key factors influencing healthcare expenditure are an ageing population, medical progress and innovation, and the growing expectations and demands of patients. The Presidency will focus primarily on the definition of financial sustainability and its objectives, and on the analysis of the resources available for healthcare funding. In terms of long-term care funding, it will be necessary to draw attention to the pressure it faces as a result of the growing demand for long-term care services, in relation to the negative demographic trends and the lack of

providers of this type of care. The May 2009 high-level conference is to provide a forum for Member States to share experience and exchange information and best practices concerning healthcare systems and their financial sustainability.

e-Health and Telemedicine

The Presidency will also be looking into the issue of improving cooperation between EU Member States, increasing the quality of healthcare provision with the help of telemedicine, and strengthening the interoperability of information systems in the healthcare sector. Attention will be paid to the individual (the citizen as a patient and the healthcare staff, including their mutual interactions), society (education, science and research and their importance for e-Health) and economic aspects (in close relation to the issue of financial sustainability). In February 2009, the topic of e-Health will be discussed at a ministerial conference organised in cooperation with the Commission.

The Pharmaceuticals Package

Adequate regulation of the pharmaceuticals market may significantly contribute to the quality, safety and effectiveness of pharmaceuticals, which in turn significantly influences the health of patients. The Presidency is ready for a serious debate on legislative proposals contained in the 'Pharma Package'. The proposals focus on three key issues: the aim is to improve the functioning of the pharmacovigilance system at European level, to strengthen the legal distribution chain for pharmaceuticals against illegal or counterfeit products and to provide the general public with information on prescription pharmaceuticals. It also supports the EU objectives regarding the pharmaceuticals market, i.e. the aim to improve and guarantee the high quality and safety of pharmaceuticals, while maintaining cost-effectiveness.

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES

The Future of the Common Agricultural Policy and Rural Development

The Presidency will actively build on the discussions on the future of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) after 2013. It will stimulate debate on the search for instruments of the future CAP that will lead to a more effective use of financial resources under the CAP, increase the competitiveness of farmers and lay the foundations for the long-term strengthening of the position of the European agriculture and food-processing industries on the open global market. These topics are closely related to the debate on the future of direct payments and the entire first pillar after 2013. The debates should pave the way for equal conditions for all EU Member States, not only as regards the amount of direct payments, but also in connection to the system of allocation, which will respect the agricultural diversity of the Member States.

Agricultural Products and Foodstuffs Quality Policy

To enhance the competitiveness of European production, the Presidency will actively promote the debate on the revision of the EU agricultural products and foodstuffs quality policy. This debate will seek to ensure a long-term perspective for quality agricultural products and foodstuffs, above all as regards products registered under Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) or Protected Designation of Origin (PDO). The key issues to be highlighted include effective and extensive promotion, reduction of the administrative burden and shortening of the registration procedures. For these purposes, the Presidency will hold a high-level conference and stimulate discussion within the EU Council.

Simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy

The future of the CAP and the reduction of the EU's administrative burden being a significant horizontal objective, the Presidency gives priority to the revision of existing legislation and the improvement of the regulatory environment in agriculture. It will seek to initiate a broad discussion based on the expected Report of the Commission on the meeting of the targets for the simplification and better regulation of agricultural legislation. In this respect it will also strive to adopt legislation aimed at checking the functioning of the CAP and including wine in the common market organisation.

Development of Rural Areas and Delimitation of Less Favoured Areas (LFA)

Under the rural development policy, the Czech Presidency plans to initiate a discussion on the redefinition of the 'intermediate' or 'other' Less Favoured Areas, in connection with a Commission Communication on this issue. The aim of the Presidency is to stimulate a constructive debate that will lead to the definition of uniform procedures and methodologies for the delimitation of these areas.

Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)

In order to promote sustainable and responsible fishing, the Presidency will proceed with the revision of legislative proposals concerning technical measures, fisheries controls and long-term management plans for selected fish species. It will also continue to promote sustainable development of aquaculture and will work towards obtaining a Commission Communication addressing these issues. Furthermore, it will host a debate on the future reform of the Common Fisheries Policy, and especially on its most important points mentioned in the Green Paper prepared by the Commission. On external relations, the Presidency promotes an active role for the EU in international organisations such as the UN, FAO and OECD, as well as in regional fisheries organisations, and wishes the EU to strive for progress towards the conclusion of certain bilateral fisheries agreements (e.g. with Guinea).

Other Legislative Acts Concerning Agriculture

The Presidency will make an effort to achieve progress in negotiations on the proposal for a regulation on the provision of food information to consumers. Through a dialogue between the Member States and the European Parliament, it will seek to achieve a common goal, which is to empower consumers to make informed choices and safe use of food.

The Presidency expects progress to be achieved in negotiations on the draft proposal for a Regulation Concerning Statistics on Plant Protection Products. The purpose of this regulation is to set out harmonised rules for the placing of these substances on the market, aiming to ensure a high level of consumer safety and protection, as well as to improve and simplify the functioning of the internal market.

The Presidency attaches great importance to the proposal for a Regulation on the Protection of Animals at the Time of Killing. It aims to amend it by introducing the necessary improvements and simplifications, and to clarify the relevant rules in this area. The Presidency will also launch a debate on the revision of legislation on the protection of animals used for research purposes.

Last but not least, the Presidency will focus on the proposal for a Regulation laying down the obligations of operators who place timber and timber products on the market. Special attention will be paid to the management of timber trade within the EU. The Presidency will

also support the EU's role in the context of international forestry, especially within the framework of the UN Forum on Forests and the International Tropical Timber Agreement.

CULTURE AND AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA

Culture

Culture is one of the fundamental elements of EU Member States' identity. The Presidency will focus on implementing the EU's Culture Programme, adopted in November 2007 by a resolution of the Council, and the Work Plan for Culture 2008-2010, approved by the Council in May 2008. It will try to make culture more accessible for people, especially by promoting cultural heritage, cultural tourism, cooperation with arts education and greater mobility in the area of culture. Taking up the agenda of its French predecessor, the Czech Presidency will focus on the priorities related to the digitisation of cultural material for future generations. In May 2009, Prague will host a conference devoted to the European Digital Library, the national strategies of Member States and other successful digitisation projects in the EU. To mark the European Year of Creativity and Innovation 2009, the development and relationship between creativity and culture will be discussed at the ministerial conference entitled 'Forum for Creative Europe', which will be held in Prague in March 2009. The conference will primarily address the issues of creative industry and economy, the relation of civil society to creativity and the implementation of cultural strategies. The Presidency will also support the 'European Heritage Label' project, with the aim of promoting and supporting access of the general public to cultural heritage as a source of the EU's fundamental values. Attention will also be paid to an informal discussion on a wide range of topics related to the protection of cultural assets, and especially to the issue of works of art seized from victims of the Holocaust.

Audiovisual Issues

One of the tasks presently at hand is the implementation of the new Audiovisual Media Services Directive. The Presidency is prepared to carry on with activities seeking to ensure a stable regulatory environment for new ways of audiovisual content distribution. In March 2009, Prague will be the venue of a conference focused on raising awareness of issues related to the legal supply of services, piracy and advertising. The Presidency considers awareness campaigns to be one of the most important tools to achieve these ends.

HOME AFFAIRS

Use of Modern Technologies for Security and Safe Use of Modern Technologies

The interconnectedness of the modern world and its technological achievements bring forth security issues that must be resolved using adequate instruments. This is why the use of modern technologies and information networks for security purposes, and their safe use, will be a central theme of the Presidency in this field. Within this cross-cutting theme, which to a certain degree touches upon most justice and home affairs issues, the Presidency will continue to seek a balance between security and freedom, between the protection of human rights and the right to privacy. Modern technologies will feature at a number of events, such as the Informal Meeting of Ministers for Justice and Home Affairs, or the conference on the eradication of cyber threats.

International Protection of Children

The need to address the risks related to modern technologies and information networks is all the more urgent since a significant portion of their users are children and young people. The

Presidency intends to start a discussion on the various aspects of child protection in today's world. Within this topic it will focus on active police cooperation in searches for missing children, improved use of the Schengen Information System (SIS) for these purposes, and joint action to combat illegal content on the Internet. The Czech Presidency will follow up on the activities of the French Presidency as well as the conclusions of the Council concerning the 'Child Alert' project. Child protection will be the topic of an informal meeting of ministers in Prague and at the ministerial conferences 'Safer Internet for Children' and 'Children Friendly Europe'.

Combating Drugs

The fight against drug abuse has always been one of the subjects of interest of the EU Member States. Here, the attention of the Presidency will focus on the implementation of An EU Drugs Action Plan for 2009-2012; issues concerning the production and use of amphetamines; and the coordination of the joint position of the EU for the regular session of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs. This session will also evaluate the decade-long implementation of the conclusions adopted by the 20th special session of the UN General Assembly (UNGASS).

Complementary and Flexible Migration Policy

The Presidency will promote an EU migration policy in which the issues of migration and asylum will be mutually complementary with the objective of effectively managing migration flows. In this field, the key issues will be: legal migration and the removal of transition periods applied to the free movement of the workforce; combating illegal migration (with the objective of finalising negotiations on a legal document to sanction employers of illegal migrants); building a Common European Asylum System; a policy fostering the integration of foreigners and supporting their socio-economic potential; a multicultural dialogue; effective cooperation with third countries. The Presidency will put emphasis on the eastern and south-eastern dimensions of this dialogue, and on cooperation with third countries within the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy. In April 2009, the Presidency will hold a ministerial conference on 'Building Migration Partnerships', which will bring together the EU Member States as well as the Schengen Area countries along with the regions neighbouring with the EU in the east and south-east.

Border Protection, Schengen Cooperation and Visa Policy

The Presidency will promote the development of the Schengen cooperation and of all measures bearing on the security of the Schengen area. It will give priority to the implementation of all measures that are related to Switzerland having joined Schengen, provided that Schengen standards are met at international airports. The Presidency will also seek to achieve significant progress in the preparation of the Second-Generation Schengen Information System (SIS II); to obtain the adoption of the Community Code on Visas and to achieve progress in the debate on the draft legal framework for the creation of the agency for high-capacity IT systems. As regards the visa policy, the Presidency will focus on the implementation of the Visa Information System (VIS), including the adoption of a legal instrument for its use at consular posts and an approach to third countries. The Presidency will strive for maximum progress in the development of VIS technical support, so that it may be put into full operation under a pilot project in June 2009. As for SIS II, the Presidency will actively promote a permanent mechanism for coordination, and an open approach, so that all identifiable problems can be removed in time and overall material progress can be achieved in the preparation for the launch of the new system. The Czech Presidency will also aim at maximum objectiveness during the first stages of the Schengen evaluation of Bulgaria and

Romania and in the verification of compliance with Schengen standards by the Benelux countries, France and Germany. A topical theme will be integrated management of the protection of the Union's external borders and its further development, e.g. by means of modern technologies. The Presidency will also seek to obtain a consensus and common approach towards a further development of balanced management of border protection.

Countering Terrorism and Organised Crime

Radicalisation and recruitment of new members of terrorist cells remains a fundamental problem. The Presidency will focus on strengthening cooperation with its partners in the Western Balkans. There will also be a practically-oriented meeting with representatives of justice and police from the Western Balkans and the second round of evaluations of the EU Member States' preparedness to respond to terrorist attacks. The Presidency will coordinate the implementation of the Action Plan on Enhancing the Security of Explosives and promote research with the aim of finding relevant technical solutions. An important challenge in combating organised crime is the fight against human trafficking. The Presidency will follow up on action taken by the Member States and the Commission in the preparation of mechanisms for data collection and the analysis of the current situation in combating trafficking in human beings, as well as of trends in the prevention of human trafficking and programmes caring for its victims. The Presidency is also aware of the need to improve Europe's ability to fight against cyber threats. Therefore, stronger cooperation in research and development, and coordination of EU positions toward harmful content on servers located in third countries will also be considered. Furthermore, negotiations will continue on the framework decision on the use of Passenger Name Record (PNR) for law enforcement purposes.

Police and Customs Cooperation

The Presidency will focus on international protection of children, in particular on Safe Internet for Children. This priority shares certain aspects with other areas of cooperation and thus can be viewed as a part of the efforts to combat information crime. Following up on the steps taken by the French Presidency, the Czech Presidency will take up the task to develop the new electronic police handbook. It will also make an effort to deepen international cooperation in the education and training of police personnel. As regards the EU CEPOL agency, the Presidency will above all support the completion and implementation of the common curriculum.

External Relations

As for the external relations agenda of the Informal Meeting of Ministers of Justice and Home Affairs, the Presidency will focus on the implementation of ongoing initiatives. It will also actively support cooperation with third countries and international organisations, which is vital to success within the area of Justice and Home Affairs. Besides cooperating with candidate countries and countries with a prospect of joining the EU (Western Balkans, primarily Croatia), the Presidency will also pursue negotiations on enhancing cooperation with countries on the southern and eastern wings of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Special attention will be paid to the countries of the Western Balkans and their progress in the fulfilment and evaluation of criteria based on road maps, with the aim of achieving a visa-free regime, and to relations with the EU's strategic partners in the field of JHA, i.e., with USA and the Russian Federation.

New Multi-Annual Programme for Justice and Home Affairs

In 2009, the five-year term of The Hague Programme will come to an end. Therefore a new multi-annual programme is to be adopted which will reflect the existing and future problems in the field of Justice and Home Affairs, the new situation in the European Union after its enlargement to 27 Member States and possibly also the coming into force of the Lisbon Treaty. The European Commission plans to submit its proposal for this new multi-annual programme in May 2009. The Presidency will seek to actively participate in the preparation of this strategic document while basing its work, content-wise, on the results of the work of the Future Group.

JUSTICE

Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters

In the area of criminal law, the Czech Presidency would like to strive for the adoption of legislation that has added value and which is required from a practical point of view. In this regard, it is in the process of preparing a submission on its own initiative, addressing conflicts of competence within criminal proceedings. The aim of this proposed framework decision will be to create a mechanism for preventing and resolving conflicts of competence between the Member States which will be based on the exchange of information on ongoing criminal proceedings.

A no less significant topic for the Czech Presidency will be the overall evaluation of the fourth round of mutual assessment of the practical application of the European Arrest Warrant. During its Presidency, the Czech Republic is prepared to discuss the final evaluation report, which is to complete the multi-year process of mutual assessment. Also during the Presidency of the Czech Republic, the negotiations on the mandate of the EU to conclude the agreement on legal cooperation in criminal matters between the EU and Japan will continue.

In terms of substantive criminal law, the Presidency will continue negotiations on the Directive on Criminal Sanctions for Ship-Source Pollution, which seeks to protect seas against pollution caused by shipping. During the Czech Presidency, the initiative of the Commission revising the Framework Decision on Combating the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography, and the Framework Decision on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, will also be presented. The Presidency is prepared to actively launch negotiations concerning both of the mentioned proposals, which aim to ensure higher standards of protection against this serious criminal activity. With respect to the criminal law agenda, the Czech Presidency is also preparing a conference focusing on the protection of vulnerable victims and their position within criminal proceedings, which is to take place in mid-March 2009.

Judicial Cooperation in Civil Matters

The Presidency will continue the improvement of judicial cooperation in civil matters in order to achieve greater legal certainty for the citizens of EU Member States who travel and work in other states. Attention will be paid to the commencement of work on a proposal for a regulation concerning wills and inheritance matters, to which an international conference will be devoted, to be held in April 2009 in cooperation with the Academy of European Law (ERA). The Presidency will also initiate discussion in the EU Council on the Report on the application of the Brussels I Regulation, and also begin discussions on the mechanism regulating the negotiating and concluding of bilateral agreements with third countries in the area of civil justice. The Presidency will also continue to discuss the Common Frame of

Reference for contract law, which should serve in the future as a non-binding guide containing definitions of legal terms, fundamental principles and model rules of contract law. The Presidency will also address, within the agenda of general issues, the preparedness of the Member States and the Community to accede to certain international conventions negotiated within the framework of the Hague Conference on Private International Law and the Council of Europe.

E-Justice

The Czech Presidency welcomes the progress achieved in the introduction of e-Justice during prior Presidency terms. It considers the Action Plan for European e-Justice, which sets out the structure and division of the roles between the Member States and the Commission in the implementation of projects, to be especially beneficial. The Czech Presidency will actively support further development of the European e-Justice portal, as the uniform access point to law for EU citizens. To this end, the Presidency will formulate several particular agendas, which will respect the continuity of the work already done. To contribute to the improvement of the European e-Justice portal, it will focus on the extension of existing pilot projects, such as the project on integrated insolvency registers or on the introduction of more applications for integration into the structure of the future European portal (such as the database of translators and interpreters in the EU Member States). Another profile area will be the support of cross-border videoconferencing, through the introduction of an application for the reservation of time slots for these conferences. In February, the Czech Presidency will hold a ministerial level conference on the topic of e-Justice.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The Eastern Partnership

In accordance with historical ties and current challenges, the Presidency will give priority to the strengthening of cooperation between the EU and the Eastern European and Southern Caucasus countries. The key topics will include the deepening of energy, economic, trade and environmental partnerships; respect for fundamental rights and freedoms; support for democratisation and transformation processes; facilitating mobility and management of migration; supporting mutual contacts on various levels; and political and security cooperation. The basic characteristic of the Presidency will be a differentiated and individualised approach to these countries, while utilising available EU instruments.

The Presidency fully supports the deepening of the European Neighbourhood Policy, and for this reason it will strive to strongly push forward for the introduction of the Eastern Partnership, with the aim of achieving balance between the individual geographical partnerships of the EU. The Eastern Partnership will represent a new comprehensive and reinforced policy of the EU eastward, and its clear and ambitious articulation is in compliance with the long-term interests of the Czech Republic. The necessity of advocating regional cooperation and strengthening the EU's relations with its Eastern neighbours was sufficiently demonstrated by recent events in Georgia. The Presidency will organise the opening summit on the Eastern Partnership at the level of the heads of state of the EU Member States and the six Eastern European partnership countries (the involvement of Belarus in the Eastern Partnership and the participation of its representatives at the opening summit depends on the steps taken by the Belarusian government).

At the level of bilateral relations, the Presidency will strive to continue negotiations with Ukraine on a new, deeper agreement on mutual relations and to launch negotiations on a new agreement with Moldova. No less intensively, the Presidency intends to pursue relations with Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, as well as working on the conclusion of new, enhanced agreements, deepening relations and cooperation within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership. The Presidency will follow the developments in the South Caucasus and the progress in implementing the agreements concluded for the purposes of ensuring the security and stability of the region. Heightened attention will also be paid to the process of the reconciliation of the Georgia conflict, while maintaining the principles of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia. The Presidency will also support the gradual development of relations between the EU and Belarus, the commencement of a constructive dialogue with Belarus, and seek to support the civil society in Belarus.

EU-Russia Relations

During the Czech Presidency, the dialogue with Russia will continue. The regular EU-Russia summit will be held, sessions of the Permanent Partnership Council (PPC) are to be held in various formations and in accordance with the conclusions of the EU-Russia summit in Nice in November 2008, the Presidency will continue negotiations on the new agreement on partnership and cooperation with Russia. The negotiations should reflect the results of the review of EU-Russia relations. With regard to the disproportionate reaction of Russia during the Georgia conflict, which confirmed the necessity of understanding its internal development, interests and direction, the Czech Presidency will strive for the cooperation of experts on Russian politics, across the EU. This should lead to the identification of common ground for policy toward Russia and a subsequently more coherent EU approach. The Czech Presidency believes that the key to EU-Russia relations is the maintenance of the unity of the entire EU and its ability to speak with one voice. The important topic in relation to Russia and the countries included within the Eastern Partnership is to ensure a stable and predictable supply of energy and energy security for the EU. Energy security is one of the main priorities of the Czech Presidency.

Transatlantic Relations

The Czech Presidency will strive to further develop transatlantic cooperation. Its significance is enhanced by current global challenges, in the security, development, humanitarian, human rights, economic, energy or environmental spheres. The Presidency will seek to reinforce mutual cooperation and work towards the removal of the remaining barriers. It will focus on strengthening cooperation between the EU and the USA in third countries. Within the transatlantic dialogue, the Czech Presidency has set itself the following priorities: multilateralism, the Middle East peace process, Afghanistan/Pakistan and relations with Russia. The opportunity to debate a number of topics and reflect upon the shape of mutual relations will be provided at the EU-USA summit, which will be attended by the new American administration. In relation to Canada, the Presidency will emphasise the strengthening of economic relations, which is a topic of focus for the EU-Canada summit. Within the context of the CFSP, the Presidency will support effective cooperation between the EU and NATO, especially in the area of building and developing military capabilities, their mutual complementarity and potential deployment in international operations. The Presidency will strive to ensure that this cooperation between the two organisations is established in systematic, mutually complementary cooperation in the development of military and non-military capabilities.

Development of Relations with Mediterranean Countries

In the area of cooperation with Mediterranean countries, the Czech Presidency will build on the steps taken by the French Presidency to prioritise mutual relations within the European Neighbourhood Policy according to the differentiation principle, i.e. primarily with countries that comply with the commitments negotiated with the EU within the framework of this political instrument of EU external relations. Since the EU-Israel Action Plan expires in April 2009, the Presidency will focus on the preparation of a new document, which will emphasise Israel's position as a partner of the EU. A sustained object of interest of the EU will also remain the Middle East peace process, where the emphasis will be placed on supporting the negotiation process in coordination with the Quartet members, and on compliance with international law and human rights standards.

Other Regions

Important relations between the EU and the states of Asia and the Pacific Rim, Latin America and Africa must not be neglected. During the Presidency there will be a number of negotiations with countries from these regions, some of them at the highest level. Of special importance to the interests of the Union will be negotiations with the highest representatives of Japan and Korea, the EU-Rio Group Ministerial Meeting in Prague and the EU-ASEAN and ASEM ministerial meetings.

European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP)

The global importance of the EU and its shared responsibility for the solution of key security issues require corresponding capabilities and instruments. The Presidency will promote the development of the civil and military capabilities of the EU, so as to ensure that each of its engagements in the world will be marked by the corresponding added value. In the context of the development of ESDP civilian capabilities, the Presidency will focus on the fulfilment of the Civilian Headline Goal 2010. In the context of military capabilities, it will continue the process of the fulfilment of the Headline Goal 2010 and it will strive for the implementation and evaluation of the Capability Development Plan (CDP). Special attention will be paid to the implementation of specific projects (such as helicopters and the European air transport fleet). Within the ESDP operation, the Presidency will put emphasis on the involvement in the Western Balkans, in the post-Soviet area and in the Middle East. As regards the strategic level and the development of capabilities, the Presidency will support the cooperation between the EU and NATO and their effective joint operations in crisis management within the same territory. In addition, the Presidency will focus its efforts on harmonising the processes of defence planning. Within the context of EU – UN relations, the Presidency will focus on the implementation of the joint declaration on the cooperation of both organisations in the field of crisis prevention and conflict management. [The Presidency will continue updating the European Security Strategy, with the aim that it fully reflects the nature of current risks and threats.] It will also promote the activities of the European Defence Agency, especially its efforts to develop small and medium-sized enterprises, such as to prevent the suppression of the military production base on the national and European levels. Simultaneously, it will promote processes currently underway in the EU and the UN that aim to set up generally applicable rules for the arms trade. The Presidency considers it necessary to develop EU activities in the sphere of professional education, where it will focus on developing an initiative aiming to bring about an exchange study programme for young officers, inspired by the Erasmus programme, and on armament.

Combating the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction

The Presidency will follow up on the EU Strategy against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and will focus on the growing risks of the development, proliferation and use of such weapons. These objectives will be specified in the EU Action Plan on Combating the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction. The Presidency will strive to contribute to a successful meeting of the 3rd Preparatory Committee for the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. On the floor of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Presidency will also elaborate on the financial involvement of the EU in the International Nuclear Fuel Bank project, with the aim of combating the distribution of nuclear material and technologies to unauthorised users. An emphasis will be placed on achieving progress in the ratification process of the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. The Presidency will also pay attention to the fulfilment of the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation.

Human Rights and Transformation Policies

With regard to the Czech Republic's own experience with the transformation to democracy, and with the awareness of the importance of assistance provided during such transformation, the Presidency will strive to ensure that the EU policies in this area better reflect the actual needs of the countries that require such assistance. The Presidency will focus on increasing the consistency and transparency of EU action, namely by reinforcing the interconnection between existing mechanisms and tools. Primary attention will be paid to supporting human rights defenders. The aim of the Presidency will be to improve the cooperation and partnership of the EU institutions with non-governmental organisations and to contribute to the increased effectiveness of the relevant financial tools of the EU. The evaluation of the renewed European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) will already take place in 2009.

Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid

Within the sphere of development cooperation, the Presidency will continue the implementation of EU commitments and strategies, especially the European Consensus on Development and the EU Code of Conduct on Complementarity and Division of Labour in Development Policy.

In addition to issues concerning development financing, including the impact of the current economic crisis on developing countries, the Presidency will put emphasis on the effectiveness of development cooperation and on the strengthening of good administration in developing countries. Sectoral priorities will include the securing of local sustainable sources of energy in developing countries. The Presidency will oversee the practical implementation of the Common EU-Africa Strategy; however, at the same time, it plans to emphasise geographical balance within the relations between the EU and other regions. Emphasis will be also placed on the region of South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, in line with the overall priorities of the Presidency in the area of external relations. The Presidency will continue the efforts to achieve more interlinking between humanitarian and development aid, as well as the interlinking of development policies with other policies of the EU (trade, security, migration etc.).

COMMON TRADE POLICY

Trade Policy

The EU exists in a world of relations and contingencies and as such it has never been a solitary player in the field of trade policies. The internal objectives of the EU are, in the various spheres, from employment and the standard of living to development and security, linked to a large degree to the opportunities for the European economic players to assert themselves beyond the borders of the EU itself. The Czech Presidency is aware of this fact and will actively contribute to the opening of more markets to products, services and investments from the EU by strengthening the external dimension of the Lisbon Strategy. Free trade is one of the tools for solving the contemporary crisis. The Czech Presidency will therefore promote liberalisation and seek to limit protectionist tendencies.

Multilateral Trade System

The forum, and simultaneously the tool, for the promotion of these objectives on the multilateral level is the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The Czech Presidency attributes great significance to the successful implementation of the Doha Development Agenda (DDA). The DDA represents the efforts to achieve transparent liberalisation of trade on the multilateral level, which will bring about long-term advantages. Should the DDA negotiations be interrupted, the Presidency will strive to initiate reflection on multilateral trade instruments and will support more intense negotiations within the framework of other WTO agendas. In this connection, the Czech Presidency would emphasise new topics that must be discussed in the long-term perspective. The Presidency supports the most extensive application of the multilateral trade system possible. For these reasons it will continue the process of the extension of the WTO membership base.

Bilateral Trade Relations

As a convenient supplement to multilateral negotiations on the liberalisation of trade, the Czech Presidency will support and develop all of the current and planned negotiations on free trade agreements and on strengthening the EU's trade relations with third countries. The Presidency will also seek to find new trade opportunities for EU businesses and to remove barriers on the markets of third countries. Special attention will be paid to the discussion on the future direction of the common trade policies vis-à-vis developed countries, especially to the transatlantic economic dialogue with the USA and to the strengthening of trade relations with Canada. The Presidency will focus on arriving at an agreement on free trade with Korea. Within the context of the Eastern Partnership, the Czech Presidency will focus on the possibilities of deepening mutual trade and economic relations between the EU and individual countries.

Removal of Trade Barriers

Openness, non-discrimination and liberalisation of trade relations are the main aspects emphasised by the Czech Presidency within the Global Europe trade strategy. The Presidency will to the maximum extent possible seek to uphold respect and compliance with international trade rules and gradually involve developing countries in international trade.

With respect to third countries, the Czech Presidency will seek to implement the revised Market Access Strategy as broadly as possible. Of significance will also be the support of the partnership between Commission services, the economic diplomacy of the Member States and the business sector in the process of effectively monitoring and effectively removing trade barriers, as the access to markets cannot be ensured by passive tools alone. Such objectives must be pursued actively.

Within the context of internal matters, the Czech Presidency will focus on the debate on the functioning of the Trade Defence Instruments system, with the aim to modernise the instruments to such a degree that they fully respect the economic interests of the EU Member States.

An important part of establishing equal competitive conditions is played by intellectual property rights. The Czech Presidency will seek to achieve progress in all negotiations that are held for the purpose of ensuring that they are better protected and enforced. In this regard the Czech Presidency considers the negotiations on the multilateral Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) to be especially important.