



The Dutch Presidency of the Council of the European Union: Priorities

General overview

Agenda and circumstances

2004 is a special year ...

The importance of 2004 for the European Union cannot be underestimated. On 1 May 2004, ten new member states simultaneously joined the European Union. The European Council reached agreement in June on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for the EU. In the second week of June, the citizens of all 25 member states elected a new European Parliament, and a 25-member European Commission will take office in November for a new five-year term. In addition, the first referendums on the constitutional treaty could take place in 2004 now that the negotiations have actually been concluded and signing of the treaty is due to take place in the autumn, following the completion of the necessary legal and linguistic preparations.

... with a demanding European agenda

In addition to these special circumstances, the character of the presidency will be determined mainly by issues that have long occupied a prominent place on the European agenda: enlargement, the Lisbon process, the development of the area of freedom, security and justice, and the further development of the Union's external policy. In addition, 2004 will see negotiations concerning the financial perspectives for 2007-2013.

Realism and ambition

Against this background, the Netherlands should formulate its presidency's priorities judiciously. Being a good organiser and chair, and helping the new member states to integrate quickly and effectively into the Council's decision-making processes, is quite a task in itself. Running the machinery of the Union involves more than just holding the fort. During the coming period, in particular, the presidency will be expected to provide leadership within the expanded circle of member states in the Council and in the relations between the Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament. This requires a clear vision of the European Union's future development. The Dutch presidency wishes to express this vision through the priorities described below, which emphasise that much remains to be done by all the member states and European institutions jointly, to bring about a more prosperous, secure and financially healthy Europe. A Europe that, with confidence and commitment, will help to make the world a better place.

In addition, the Netherlands plans to draw attention to the foundations of European integration, in which key elements are a community of law and a community of values. There is no guarantee that support for these foundations will continue: it is the responsibility of governments and citizens to work together to make sure that it does. This will require effort and communication; 'Europe' is not a miracle cure for all the problems confronting citizens and governments. Together with its EU partners, the Dutch presidency wants to ensure that objectives remain realistic and that they match the expectations of Europe's citizens. In the light of the recent enlargement, in particular, the Netherlands plans to organise a number of meetings, including two high-level meetings, on the community of values, the community of law and European citizenship.

The Netherlands also plans to use its presidency to improve communication on the subject of Europe, as Europeans in all member states face the challenge of helping together to preserve the foundations of their cooperation. Part of this contribution consists of an open and in-depth debate on shared values and the implications of further European integration and cooperation. The Dutch presidency plans to encourage and enhance this debate through a number of interesting activities. Interaction will also be encouraged by cultural expression. The Dutch presidency overnment therefore plans to boost the public debate on Europe through a number

of interesting, partly cultural activities. The enlarged Union can present a clearer, more powerful image, both to its citizens and to the outside world, if it makes creative use of its cultural wealth and diversity.

Priorities of the Dutch presidency

1. Making a success of enlargement

The enlargement of the Union will help to increase stability and security in Europe. A stable and united Europe is better equipped to play a global role and withstand challenges. A larger area of shared values is in the interests of everyone in the European Union. In addition, particularly in the long term, enlargement will lead to greater prosperity for the citizens of the Union. However, this is conditional on the success of enlargement. In order to demonstrate to the citizens of the 'old' member states as well as those of the 'new' member states that the efforts they and their governments have made in recent years have been a valuable investment, it is vital to integrate the new member states (the 'Laeken ten') into all areas of EU cooperation quickly and effectively.

In the context of the negotiations on future enlargement, talks with Romania and Bulgaria concerning their accession will continue. The Dutch presidency will act in line with the conclusions of the European Council of June 2004, which state that provided that real and effective progress in reforms and preparations on the ground for accession is maintained by Bulgaria and Romania, the Union confirms its determination to bring the accession negotiations to a successful conclusion for both countries in 2004, on the basis of own merits. In this context, the achievements of each country will be considered separately. The Commission's annual progress reports concerning these countries, which this year are expected to appear in October, will play an important role in determining the Union's opinion on this issue.

In December, the European Council will determine whether Turkey meets the Copenhagen political criteria. If so, accession negotiations will also be opened with it, as decided by the Copenhagen European Council in December 2002. The Netherlands will base its position in part on the Commission's report and recommendations concerning Turkey, which will be

published in the autumn. In addition, the Dutch presidency considers it important for the European Council's decision to be sustainable and to continue to enjoy the support of all member states in the future. In order to facilitate the adoption of such a decision as effectively as possible, the Netherlands is currently surveying the positions of the member states.

Since Croatia has been granted candidate status at the European Council in June, work should begin on an examination of the *acquis*, in order to prepare for negotiations.

2. Strengthening the European economy and reducing the administrative burden

The European economy is gradually showing signs of recovery, but further structural reforms are essential to accelerate this recovery and make it permanent. The Netherlands supports the objectives of the three pillars of the Lisbon strategy and will use the presidency to contribute to the process aimed at realising these objectives. The report of the High Level Working Group headed by Wim Kok, which can be expected in October 2004, should influence the Mid-Term Review of the Lisbon Process, which will be drawn up during the Spring European Council in 2005.

However, the preparation of the Mid-Term Review should not distract attention from the real objective, namely, implementation. The Netherlands plans to use its presidency to promote decisions in the various Council formations that will make a real contribution to sustainable growth and to continue emphasising the importance of structural reform. New agreements are needed less than effective implementation of existing ones. In this context, the Dutch presidency will devote special attention to the functioning of labour markets, in accordance with the recommendations of the earlier Kok report on employment. In addition, the Netherlands will emphasise the functioning of the internal market, among other things where legislation concerning capital and services is concerned. It goes without saying that sound public finances will also remain an important focal point during the Dutch presidency, for example with regard to compliance with the rules of the Stability and Growth Pact and the integration of the new member states into the process of sound public finances. The Netherlands plans to devote a lot of attention to simplifying legislation and reducing the administrative burden during its presidency.

In addition, the Netherlands will devote attention to such issues as the completion of the Financial Services Action Plan, the new Regulation on Chemicals (which proposes the REACH system for registration, evaluation and authorisation of chemicals), eco-efficient innovation and sustainable mobility. Other issues that will receive attention include knowledge, innovation and education, corporate social responsibility, future developments in the field of ICT and telecommunications and, finally, the security of the energy supply. Equally important priorities include modernising the social policy agenda, the social and financial sustainability of pension schemes, and working hours. The quality and sustainability of health care will also appear on the agenda, as will culture and sport. Finally, the Dutch presidency will devote attention to sustainable agriculture, food safety, rural policy and the reform of the European sugar regime. The Dutch presidency will develop specific activities and organise meetings in several of these areas. [More information can be found in the thematic section of this memorandum.]

3. *The area of freedom, security and justice*

During the Dutch presidency, cooperation in the field of Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) will be prioritised in two ways: by establishing political guidelines for the coming years and by dealing with priority issues as part of the regular agenda.

As far as the regular agenda is concerned, high priority will be granted to the fight against terrorism, building on the report of the European anti-terrorism coordinator Gijs de Vries.

With regard to other aspects of the regular agenda, results can be expected, in particular, in the fields of return, integration policy, the use of biometrics, the Visa Information System and protection in the region. Current issues in the field of civil law include the development of a European order for payment procedure and the law applying to non-contractual obligations. Police and judicial cooperation will focus primarily on the European evidence warrant, the exchange of information, the fight against organised crime and improvements in police cooperation. In addition, a new drugs strategy will be adopted for the 2005-2012 period.

Equally important is the attention that will be devoted to the development of guidelines for JHA policy in the coming years. In 2004, it will be five years since the Tampere European

Council agreed on a programme for the development of an area of freedom, security and justice. The Netherlands intends to use the European Council of 5 November 2004 to steer further developments in this area. On this occasion, it will also be possible to lay down the political guidelines for JHA policy in the coming years. This includes the adoption of a practical agenda, including the preparation of the implementation of the new European constitution.

4. The Union's future financial and budgetary structure: Agenda 2007

The period covered by the Union's current multiyear budgetary framework, known as the financial perspectives, draws to a close at the end of 2006. On the basis of the European Commission's recommendations, which are expected in mid-2004, the Union must therefore start to consider the adoption of a new multiyear financial and budgetary framework. In this regard, the level and structure of the budget, the approach to cohesion policy and the relationship with the expected proposals concerning the Union's own resources are of particular importance. These negotiations are complex and should start in good time so that they can be completed before the beginning of the 2007 budgetary cycle (in spring 2006). The Dutch presidency is faced with the task of organising the debate in such a way that the intended result can be achieved in good time. At the same time, the negotiations should be conducted with great care, given their relevance to all the Union's policy areas. The Dutch presidency therefore considers it essential for guidelines and principles to be agreed in December 2004, so that the negotiations can be completed on time in 2005.

5. The EU's role in the world: an effective, coherent and committed external policy

The presidency is expected to provide leadership, especially in the Union's external relations. This is because it is primarily the Council presidency, assisted by the High Representative, that acts as the Union's external face in the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). The Union's ambition is to deploy its wide range of external policy instruments in an effective and coherent manner, and the presidency plays an important role in this regard, among other things by coordinating with the European Commission, which represents the Union externally in the field of trade policy and development cooperation. Particularly now that the Union has ten new member

states, expectations regarding its role in the world are higher than ever. The Dutch presidency will attempt to meet these expectations by continuing the current agenda, with a clear focus on four priorities:

Asia: During the second half of the year, the European Union will hold summit meetings with a number of important Asian countries, including China, India and South Korea. In addition, it will meet with the region as a whole at the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). The importance of these meetings for the Union is beyond dispute, both with regard to its economic relations with this very dynamic region and with regard to the political aspects of these relations.

The Wider Middle East: In the framework of its integrated approach to the Wider Middle East, the European Union wants to intensify its relations with the countries in the region, with a view to encouraging economic, political and social reform. In this regard, it will build, among other things, on the results of the EU-US and G-8 summits, while making use of the Union's wide range of policy instruments. The Netherlands will also make an effort to determine whether the deadlock in the Middle East peace process can be broken, which is relevant to the Union's approach to the wider Middle East as a whole.

Effective multilateralism: The role of multilateral organisations, in particular of the United Nations, has come under increasing pressure in recent years. The Union intends to strengthen this role. In this context, the Dutch presidency wants to achieve results in such fields as counter-terrorism, non-proliferation and trade. The Netherlands also wants to play an active role in the consultations concerning UN reform and to help ensure that the current WTO negotiations are completed with positive results.

European Security and Defence Policy: During the second half of the year, much attention will be devoted to the first major EU-led military crisis management operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the further development of military and civilian capabilities. In this context, for example, the Union will be working on its new capabilities objective: the Headline Goal 2010.

The Council will also be occupied with the relations between the European Union and the United States, which actually cut across all the priorities mentioned above, the relationship

between the European Union and Africa (e.g. the use of the Peace Facility and the negotiations on Economic Partnership Agreements), the effectiveness of EU development assistance and issues such as HIV/AIDS and reproductive health.

Thematic overview

I. Horizontal issues

EU enlargement

The enlargement of the European Union to include ten new member states came into effect on 1 May 2004. Integrating these new members and monitoring the relevant work processes will be key issues for the Dutch presidency.

The enlargement process will also continue during the Dutch presidency. The current enlargement will increase stability and security in Europe. A stable and united Europe is better equipped to play a more meaningful global role and to meet global challenges. Enlarging the area of shared norms and values in Europe is in the interests of everyone in the European Union. In addition, particularly in the long term, enlargement will lead to greater prosperity for the citizens of the Union

A number of south-east European countries have expressed a desire to join the European Union. Thus, for example, the accession negotiations with Bulgaria and Romania have already reached an advanced stage. In December, moreover, the European Council will determine whether Turkey meets the Copenhagen political criteria. If so, accession negotiations will also be opened with it, as decided by the Copenhagen European Council in December 2002. Since Croatia has been granted candidate status at the European Council in June 2004, work should begin on an examination of the *acquis*, in order to prepare for negotiations.

The Union's financial structure

The period covered by the Union's current multiyear budgetary framework, known as the financial perspectives, draws to a close at the end of 2006. Given the complexity of this issue, it is important to start the negotiations in good time and in an efficient manner. The Dutch presidency is responsible for ensuring that the negotiations proceed as smoothly as possible and that substantial progress is made. A key challenge in this regard is that the negotiations must be conducted with great care, given their relevance to all the Union's policy areas and their financial implications for the member states concerned. The European Commission has indicated that it aims to present its package of recommendations to the member states in June 2004. In this context, the level and structure of the budget, the approach to cohesion policy and the relationship with the expected proposals concerning the Union's own resources are of particular importance. The Dutch presidency will work towards the adoption of guidelines and principles concerning these issues, so that the negotiations can be completed on time in 2005.

The Union's organisational structure

As agreement was reached on the European constitution in June, the presidency will have to devote attention to further developments during the second half of the year. These include, for example, the signing of the constitution, preparations for its entry into force and, possibly, the provisional application of various sections.

II. Strengthening the European economy: the Lisbon Agenda

In the light of the current economic situation, it is essential to pursue economic reforms in Europe with renewed zeal. The recipe for these reforms – the Lisbon Agenda – already exists.¹ What is missing is implementation, and steps must therefore be taken to catch up. Now that enlargement is a reality, this boost to the European integration process should be seized to strengthen economic cooperation. This does not alter the fact that it will be difficult to introduce or finalise legislation, as the composition of both the Commission and the European Parliament is due to change. The Dutch approach therefore combines ambition with realism.

¹ The Lisbon process outlines a strategy for promoting economic growth, competitiveness and job creation while taking account of the environment. Structural reform, legislative improvement and the reduction of the administrative burden are key issues in this regard, as are the pursuit of an eco-efficient economy and social cohesion.

During the Dutch presidency, preparations will also be made for the mid-term evaluation of the Lisbon strategy. The 2004 Spring European Council instructed a working group led by Wim Kok to prepare this evaluation and to publish an advisory report before 1 November 2004. The aim is to give the economic reform process a fresh, material and decisive boost.

In particular, the Netherlands has identified a number of 'better regulation' issues as priorities of the Dutch presidency. European companies are overburdened by national and European legislation. This problem is being tackled in Brussels by means of the Action Plan for Simplifying and Improving the Regulatory Environment, whereby the impact of new EU legislation on companies is assessed and existing legislation is being simplified. The Action Plan is meant to have been implemented by the end of 2004 and will then be evaluated. In accordance with the request of the 2003 Spring European Council, a number of initiatives will be undertaken in the run-up to the European Council of November 2004. Thus, for example, an EU method for measuring the administrative burden will be developed, the impact assessments of planned legislation will place a greater emphasis on competitiveness and the administrative burden, and priorities will be determined for simplifying legislation. The Netherlands has given a boost to these initiatives through the Regulatory Reform Initiative, which it adopted together with Ireland, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom.

Economic policy coordination

Macro-economic stability and structural reform of the product, capital and labour markets will obviously continue to dominate the agenda during the Dutch presidency. Compliance with the Stability and Growth Pact is a key issue in this regard, even during periods of economic downturn. During its presidency, the Netherlands will be responsible for successfully integrating the new member states into the multilateral policy supervision process. The first convergence programmes will probably emerge during the Dutch presidency. While these programmes are being discussed, a number of new member states will end up in the excessive deficit procedure. The Netherlands will push for the procedure to be applied with care, taking account of the specific situation of each new member state. The Commission will draft special Broad Economic Policy Guidelines (BEPGs) for the new member states and will include them in its convergence report. A number of new member states will probably want to join the

European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM II), possibly during the Dutch presidency. The Netherlands will ensure that the debate is conducted with a view to the importance of maintaining a well-functioning exchange rate mechanism and preparing properly for the eventual accession of these states to EMU.

Financial services

As the Financial Services Action Plan is due to be fully implemented by 2005, the Netherlands will try to implement as many of the Action Plan's outstanding measures as possible. Depending on when they are presented by the Commission, the following directives will appear on the agenda: the capital requirements directive for credit institutions, the reinsurance directive, the Third Money Laundering Directive, the Eighth Company Law Directive (supervision of accountants) and the Consumer Credit Directive. In addition, the so-called Lamfalussy level 3 committees of European supervisors will continue to work on the convergence of financial sector supervision in the European Union. With regard to the other measures that are still needed to improve the internal market in financial services after the implementation of the Financial Services Action Plan, financial institutions will be invited to make an active contribution to the working groups established for this purpose by the Commission.

Taxation issues

. On the agenda is the amendment of the Directive on the common system of taxation applicable to mergers, divisions, transfers of assets and exchanges of shares concerning companies of different Member States. In the area of indirect taxation, work will be carried out on the proposal for a Directive on a one-stop shop for VAT and a proposal for a general anti-abuse provision in the Sixth Directive. The discussion concerning the proposal for a Directive on reduced VAT rates will also be renewed.

Customs

The Commission's proposal to amend the Community Customs Code will be dealt with during the Dutch presidency. This amendment aims to modernise and simplify existing

customs legislation, to promote greater standardisation, integration and electronic delivery of the services provided by customs authorities, and to focus attention on the security risks inherent in cross-border goods traffic. Enlargement and an increased emphasis on security-related customs checks on goods entering or leaving the European Union have provided an impetus for a number of important developments in EU customs legislation and practice. The customs authorities of the EU member states will intensify their cooperation to ensure adequate protection of the European Union's external borders against the illegal import of prohibited goods or goods subject to import restrictions.

The Dutch presidency will also work towards the completion of a regulation on controlling cash flows at the EU's external borders, in the context of the campaign against the funding of terrorism announced in the Declaration of the European Council on 25 March 2004.

Services

The internal market has greatly increased prosperity, but much still remains to be done. There is still a lot of untapped potential in the market for services, in particular, due to unjustified and obstructive national establishment requirements and licences and a lack of confidence in other countries' legislation. The proposal for a Framework Directive on services is meant to put an end to these problems. The Dutch presidency will strive to make substantial progress towards the adoption of this Directive

Community patent

For a long time, attempts have been made to reach agreement on a Community patent, the purpose of which is to make the patent system in Europe cheaper and thereby encourage innovation. The establishment of a uniform EC system of legal protection in patent procedures is also an important objective. Unfortunately, due to the continued resistance of a limited number of member states, it proved impossible to reach agreement on this issue during the Irish presidency, partly because a decision on this matter requires unanimity in the Council. Against this background, the chances of reaching agreement during the Dutch presidency appear to be very limited. The issue will only be placed on the Council's agenda if the

member states opposing the plan are willing to contribute in a constructive manner to breaking the impasse.

Under the Irish presidency, the Council adopted a common position on the draft Directive on the patentability of computer-implemented inventions ('software patents') by a qualified majority of member states. During the Dutch presidency, this dossier will come up for its second reading in the European Parliament.

Implementation

It is often the case that legislation to strengthen the internal market already exists but that the member states are failing to transpose it into national legislation. This implementation deficit is damaging the economy and should be eliminated as soon as possible, in the Netherlands as elsewhere. The Dutch presidency will therefore devote attention to this issue.

Company law and corporate governance

The Dutch presidency will actively pursue the implementation of the Action Plan on Corporate Governance by following up the Commission's recent proposals concerning corporate governance, company law, and accounting and auditing.

The aim is to make EU capital markets more efficient and attractive and increase the competitiveness of European enterprises. The Dutch presidency will strive to achieve political agreement on the directive on cross-border mergers.

Consumer policy

Under the Irish presidency, agreement was reached on the Directive on Unfair Commercial Practices. The Directive will undergo its second reading in the European Parliament during the Dutch presidency. In addition, the Council and the European Parliament also reached agreement on the Regulation on enforcement co-operation in the area of consumer law during the Irish presidency. Under the Dutch presidency, the Council will continue to discuss the Regulation abolishing bans on sales promotion.

Research, knowledge, education and innovation

Investing in human capital is important for encouraging economic growth and at the same time improving social cohesion. Education forms the foundation of the knowledge economy. In this context, 'learning from each other' will be a key theme of the Dutch presidency. Research, technological development and innovation also form an important part of the knowledge economy. The Netherlands feels that, for example within the measures to stimulate growth, more attention should be devoted to the development and application of sustainable technologies, including as an additional stimulus to competitiveness within the European Union.

The Dutch presidency will devote special attention to knowledge workers, the Commission's Directive and recommendations concerning the admission of researchers from third countries, and to the importance of fundamental research. The possibility of establishing a European research council to oversee fundamental research at European level is currently being examined. The mobility of researchers can be further stimulated by exchange programmes and student mobility (with a focus on the portability of student finance). Promoting mobility is also a key aspect of the new generation of European education and training programmes (Leonardo and Socrates). The focus on modern foreign languages and the European dimension of education is also connected to promoting mobility. Another key issue is the contribution made by education to social cohesion through activities aimed at promoting active citizenship.

Through the Action Plan to increase R&D investment to 3% of GDP, the Council is trying to improve investment in research and innovation, with a specific focus on R&D cooperation between knowledge institutions and the private sector, for example the European technology platforms, and increasing the range and mobility of researchers and high-tech start-ups. In addition, the presidency will evaluate the new instruments of the Sixth Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, focusing, among other things, on private-sector participation and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). On the basis of the Commission's communication on the future of European research and technology policy, the Dutch presidency will launch the preparations for the Seventh Framework Programme.

Corporate social responsibility

In all the efforts to promote a more dynamic and competitive economy, the sustainability of economic development must not be forgotten.

One way to achieve this sustainability is through policies that stimulate corporate social responsibility (CSR). This should also be encouraged at European level. At the beginning of the Dutch presidency, the European multi-stakeholder Forum on CSR will present a final report containing the results of a round of consultations on European CSR policy. In addition, the report will contain recommendations for future CSR policy in the framework of the objectives of the Lisbon strategy. The key issue is to make companies aware of their own responsibilities and to encourage them to pursue sustainable corporate policies.

Telecommunications and the information society

The ICT and telecommunications sector can make a significant contribution to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives. The eEurope 2005 Action Plan proposes a number of concrete actions. The Dutch presidency will focus in particular on a strategic discussion on future developments in the field of ICT and telecoms between 2006 and 2010. Other priorities will be network and information security, safe use of the internet, frequency policy, the introduction of digital television and preparations for the second session of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

Energy

The deadline for the liberalisation of the European corporate energy market is 1 July 2004. Security of supply is an important issue in a liberalised market. A political debate on electricity production capacity and interconnections for electricity and natural gas is therefore expected. In this context, the Council will devote a lot of attention to the energy dialogue between the European Union and the Russian Federation. In 2001, the EU set targets for the desired level of sustainable electricity consumption in 2010. On the basis of a communication from the Commission, the Dutch presidency will examine whether the Union is on schedule or

whether additional measures may be required. Special attention will be devoted to generating electricity by means of offshore wind turbines as a sustainable source of energy.

Chemicals

The Chemicals Regulation aims to establish a single system (REACH) for the registration, evaluation, restriction and authorisation of chemicals. The proposed regulation would replace over 60 existing directives and regulations. REACH will make it compulsory for companies that produce, import and use chemicals to collect information on the characteristics of a substance, assess the risks connected to its use and take the necessary measures to control any risks they may have identified. As a result of the combined obligation to collect information, assess risks and take measures independently, the burden of proof for ensuring the safety of chemicals on the market will shift from the authorities to industry.

This dossier is important both from an environmental perspective (safe and responsible use of chemicals) and from an industry perspective (innovation, global trade and competitiveness). The Dutch presidency will not be able to complete the first reading of the components of REACH in the form of a common position. Instead, it will strive to make as much procedural and substantive progress as possible.

Environment

Under the motto 'environment as opportunity', the Dutch presidency will endeavour to strengthen the environmental dimension of the Lisbon process. With the aid of examples of eco-efficient innovations, the Council will examine how the environment can contribute to the economic objectives of the Lisbon process.

Clean technologies are vital for the full exploitation of the synergies between the private sector and the environment. The Dutch presidency intends to boost the importance and the prospects of the environment as the third pillar of the Lisbon strategy. The informal Environment Council is meant to launch the debate in Europe on the environment as opportunity, which should contribute to the 2005 Spring European Council.

Despite the deadlock that has developed as a result of Russia's reluctance to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, the Netherlands will endeavour during its presidency to make progress in the field of international climate policy. In this context, the Dutch presidency is examining the possibility of adopting a feasible, forward-looking decision at the Tenth Conference of Parties to the Climate Convention, which will take place in Buenos Aires between 6 and 17 December 2004.

To further the quest for quieter, cleaner and more economical cars, the Dutch presidency will put the issue of sustainable mobility on the EU agenda. Attention will focus, among other things, on encouraging the use of carbon filters to counter fine particle emissions, tightening CO₂ emission requirements and tackling noise pollution at its source. The conclusions of the forthcoming 'Energy in Motion' conference will be discussed in the Environment Council. Among the current legislative dossiers, the Dutch presidency will at any rate focus on mining waste, fluorinated gasses and the Aarhus package. With regard to the latter, the aim is to adopt the legislation necessary to permit the Community to be a party at the second meeting of the parties to the Aarhus Convention in May 2005. In addition, the presidency will devote attention to the urban environment strategy and mercury strategy.

Agriculture and food safety

European agricultural policy is under pressure. The Netherlands will therefore use the presidency to focus extra attention on sustainable agriculture in relation to social constraints. The issue is to find the optimal balance between economic, social and ecological interests, while taking account of the societal constraints on the production and delivery of agricultural products and foodstuffs. The administrative burden is a key issue in this regard. The integration of the new member states into the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the further reform of the CAP are also key issues. Among the current legislative dossiers, the Dutch presidency will focus in particular on amending the Regulation on rural development and reforming the European sugar regime. The rural development debate will be closely related to the debate on the new financial perspectives. The presidency will also initiate a review of existing measures to combat avian flu.

Fisheries

In its internal and external fisheries policies, the Council will focus on the further implementation of the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), with an emphasis on the development of sustainable fishing opportunities. In consultation with the relevant stakeholders, the Council will focus on multiyear policies for preserving fish stocks and improving conservation and control measures, which take full account of environmental, economic and social factors.

Nature

In the field of nature conservation, the Netherlands will try to advance an EU proposal concerning Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT). The aim of this proposal is to combat illegal logging and the trade in illegal wood products. In close cooperation with the European Commission, the Netherlands will also organise a two-day conference to mark the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Birds Directive. In addition, the Netherlands will launch the consultations concerning the Commission's expected communication on the financing of the Natura 2000 network. However, it is still uncertain whether the Commission will issue this communication before the end of the Dutch presidency.

Water

Safety forms the cornerstone of international water policy. At the informal Environment Council in July, the Dutch presidency will draw attention to a European flood protection initiative, based on a separate approach for each river basin. In November, a stakeholders meeting will take place to prepare a European marine strategy, which will focus on the quality of the marine environment.

Spatial planning and urban development

The Dutch presidency will focus on incorporating territorial elements into sectoral and structural policy and the potential contribution of spatial policy to the achievement of the

Lisbon and Göteborg objectives. Although spatial planning is not actually an EU policy area, it is strongly influenced by various EU policy fields. The presidency will launch a policy process to place strategic cooperation in the field of spatial planning on the EU agenda. The influence of EU policy areas on spatial planning will be examined on the basis of insights acquired through the European Spatial Planning Observatory Network (ESPON), with an emphasis on sustainability.

With regard to urban policy, the focus will be on the role of cities as engines of social and economic development at regional, national and European level. A connection will be made between the potential of cities and the significant social problems that exist there. The aim is to strengthen the position of cities, for example through cooperation and the exchange of knowledge and experience between cities, member states and the European Union. A common framework is being developed and priorities and a timeframe for cooperation are being defined.

Transport

Under the motto ‘trendsetting in transport’, the Dutch presidency will focus on a common approach to international transport and water policy in the enlarged Union. The informal Transport Council will devote special attention to developments in the aviation sector and short sea shipping. The former is witnessing both mergers and the emergence of small new companies.

With regard to short sea shipping, the main priorities are to reduce the administrative burden and improve quality. Encouraging inland waterway shipping, for example through the use of innovative technologies such as River Information Services, an electronic communications system, is also important. Innovation will take centre stage at an informal ministerial meeting on infrastructural innovation and during the aforementioned ‘Energy in Motion’ conference on sustainable mobility. Improving road safety in Europe is also of crucial importance. Harmonisation at European level of the rules on driving licences can contribute to this.

Employment and social policy

The 'Jobs, Jobs, Jobs' report of the European Employment Task Force headed by Wim Kok has pointed out that the Lisbon objectives threaten to become unattainable if member states do not increase the tempo of their reforms. Under the motto 'a social Europe, responding to change', the Dutch presidency will make modernising the social policy agenda a high priority.

The Nice social policy agenda has made a significant contribution to job creation and efforts to reduce social exclusion and poverty. The task is now to lay the foundations for a social policy agenda for the coming period. The key question in this regard is how the social policy agenda can contribute to achieving the Lisbon objectives before 2010. In this context, the focus should be on implementing existing agreements, identifying obstacles to implementation at European and national level, learning from each other (best practices) and the involvement and cooperation of all parties. Key issues include an activating social security system, mobility, the combination of work and family, training and productivity. These issues will form the subject of a conference on employment opportunities, which will take place in Amsterdam on 25-26 October 2004.

The Commission has announced its intention to issue a communication in 2005 on the contents of the social policy agenda. The Netherlands will use the presidency to focus on the priorities and dilemmas faced by the European Union and the member states in their attempts to achieve the European Union's social objectives and employment targets. The results of this debate will form the subject of a conference with the motto 'A Social Europe: let's deliver', which will take place in Rotterdam on 8-9 November 2004.

Furthermore, the Dutch presidency will draw attention to the integration of women and ethnic minorities into the labour process. The Netherlands will actively try to achieve political agreement on the draft Directive on the equal treatment of men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services (Article 13 EC Treaty). A conference on effective intervention strategies concerning health and safety at work will look into improving the quality and effectiveness of legislation in this area.

Based on the Joint Pension Report of 2003, work will advance on the necessary reform of national pension systems. All European pension systems face the same challenge, namely, how to ensure sustainability in the long term, given the ageing of the population. In this context, attention will focus primarily on social protection systems, prolonging the working life of the population and the development of second pillar pension systems. As part of the groundwork for the next round of national action plans, the presidency will push for the adoption in the autumn of agreements on objectives, procedures and indicators in the field of pensions. In addition, the Netherlands will strive for decisions to be taken on working hours and the cross-border coordination of social security and will also try to make progress on optical radiation.

Health

The health programme focuses strongly on cooperation between member states. The main theme for the Dutch presidency is the relationship between health and other policy areas that affect health, such as agriculture and the environment. This theme will be expressed in various events, conferences and expert meetings that are taking place during the Dutch presidency. Specific issues include health and the market, infectious diseases, the cross-border mobility of health care professionals and what are known as priority medicines. In addition, attention will focus on maintaining and reinforcing a high-quality health care system in an ageing society, in other words, a system that is universal, accessible and affordable. In the Council, the Netherlands will try to make progress with the dossiers on patient mobility and the International Health Regulations.

Youth

The Dutch presidency will devote a lot of attention to the European Year of Education through Sport (see below). The further elaboration of the priorities of the White Paper on Youth and the implementation of the new Youth Programme will also be on the agenda.

Culture

The Dutch presidency aims to draw up a work plan at ministerial level to set priorities for future European cooperation in the field of cultural policy for at least two years. Priority will also be given to the Commission's proposals for a new generation of programmes promoting culture and the media. Substantively speaking, the Dutch presidency will concentrate on the mobility of art and other collections. Other issues include cultural heritage digitisation, cultural education and the protection of cultural property.

Sport

The European Union has declared 2004 the Year of Education through Sport. The programme therefore devotes ample attention to the educational role of sport. In December, the Netherlands will organise the closing event of the Year. In addition, it will try to ensure that this theme remains on the agenda after 2004. Key issues include sport and increasing participation by young people, and developing norms and values by promoting sport and exercise.

III. Strengthening the area of freedom, security and justice

Focus on the future of JHA cooperation ...

The Dutch presidency will present proposals aimed at the further development of a single European area of freedom, security and justice – an area shared by 25 member states since 1 May 2004. The aim is for the European Council of November 2004 to outline a new strategy encompassing the Union's ambitions and political orientation in the areas of the legal order and security and that it will adopt actions and follow-up actions covering the next five to seven years.

These actions will build in particular on the Treaty of Amsterdam and the conclusions of the Tampere European Council, which have played an important role in strengthening the area, where the law prevails and citizens feel safe and free.

The draft European constitutional treaty provides a new framework for the development of the area of freedom, security and justice, which also capitalises on the initiatives undertaken in the

wake of the attacks of 11 September 2001 and 11 March 2004. The proposals of the European anti-terrorism coordinator will therefore be taken into account. In addition, the Dutch effort will build on the Commission's evaluation of the implementation of the conclusions of the Tampere European Council.

... and priorities within the regular JHA agenda

Terrorism

The European Council's declaration on terrorism of 25 March 2004, and the European terrorism coordinator's report to the European Council of June 2004, will guide anti-terrorism activities during the Dutch presidency. Various working groups will start implementing the action points as a matter of priority. Key issues include improving cooperation between intelligence and security services, and between these services and the police, timely implementation of existing instruments and implementation of improvements based on the results of member state evaluations in the field of terrorism and the fight against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) terrorism.

The Dutch presidency will strive to make substantial progress towards the adoption of the Third Money Laundering Directive, which also relates to the suppression of terrorist financing. In addition, a debate will be launched at European level on the transparency and regulation of non-profit organisations. The European mechanism for freezing the assets of terrorists and terrorist organisations will be evaluated.

Return

For the Netherlands, the development of a European policy on return forms an integral part of measures to combat illegal immigration, since it is the final part of these measures and also has a preventive effect, due to the message it sends out. The return of rejected asylum seekers and illegal immigrants to their countries of origin can take place more effectively at European level. The Netherlands therefore intends to implement the preparatory actions adopted under the Irish presidency by means of the first integrated Community return programme, for which €15 million will be available in 2005. During the Dutch presidency, the Council will also

discuss new negotiation mandates for Community readmission agreements, joint return operations (e.g. charter flights) and the Directive on minimum standards for return procedures.

Integration policy

An integrated approach to asylum and immigration within the European Union requires a comprehensive consideration of all the stages in the migration chain. European asylum and migration policy can only be effective if it includes a sound integration policy. The issue of integration is increasingly appearing on the agenda in the member states. Further agreements can be reached on this issue at European level. The Netherlands has always supported the development of integration policy within a coherent EU framework. During the presidency, the Netherlands will strive to achieve agreement on the goal and basic principles of integration policy.

External relations

The European Union's external relations in the field of asylum and migration policy face a number of significant challenges. The main priority is to strengthen cooperation with third countries in relation to the external component of return policy. The Commission will issue a communication on strengthening Europe's readmission policy, which will be followed up. Greater protection for refugees in the region will also be discussed at European level, on the basis of a communication of the Commission following a request by the Thessaloniki European Council.

Security and borders

The introduction of the Visa Information System (VIS), which is scheduled for mid-2007 at the earliest, forms an important step towards a higher and standardised level of European cooperation in the fight against illegal immigration and the promotion of measures to return aliens residing illegally in the member states to their countries of origin.

The agency for the management of the external borders should be operational by 1 January 2005. In addition, the Netherlands plans to bring the review of the common manual on external border controls, including best practices, to a successful close.

In the future, visas, residence documents and passports will have to include biometric identifiers. This is relevant to the fight against illegal immigration and the fight against terrorism (as well as to EU-US relations). The Commission has submitted a proposal concerning the inclusion of biometric identifiers in passports, and political agreement has already been reached on the inclusion of biometrics in visas and passports.

Rome II (law applicable to non-contractual obligations)

This concerns a proposal for a regulation on the law applicable to non-contractual obligations. Rome II is a priority because it is unclear what law applies to torts. This leads to differences within the European Union that have a negative impact on the internal market. By the end of the Dutch presidency, a detailed examination of the proposal should have been completed and, if necessary, a number of political points of dispute should have been settled.

European order for payment procedure

This concerns the adoption of a uniform collection procedure for uncontested financial claims. The European order for payment should be regarded as a priority, since it directly promotes the internal market. By the end of the Dutch presidency, initial agreement should have been reached on the basis and scope of the proposal.

Practical obstacles to cross-border cooperation in civil law

In the framework of the multiyear JHA programme, the Netherlands plans to make international procedural law into a key objective. The regulations and directives on procedural law that have been or are about to be adopted in the framework of cooperation in civil law display a number of significant obstacles, especially in relation to cross-border service, language problems, differences between time-limits and the way they are calculated, and the

widely divergent costs of the various procedures within the member states. It is essential to remove these obstacles by means of closer cooperation between member states.

Judicial cooperation in criminal matters

The Dutch presidency will continue to work with undiminished vigour on the programme of measures for the mutual recognition of judicial decisions and judgments in criminal cases. Terrorist attacks underline the immense importance of effective and swift cooperation between member states in criminal cases, which can take the form of the mutual recognition of decisions, the promotion of the exchange of information and the approximation of legislation.

Mutual recognition: the development of the principle of mutual recognition in specific instruments can make a significant contribution to improving cooperation. The proposal for a Framework Decision on the European Evidence Warrant will play a central role in this regard.

Exchange of information: Under the Dutch presidency, the Council will discuss the Commission's proposal for improving the exchange of information at all stages of criminal proceedings by requiring member states to pass on information to Europol and Eurojust. In addition, the Netherlands will strive to make improvements at the operational level.

Work will begin on the approximation of the proposal of a number of member states concerning the storage of traffic data by telecommunications providers. This Framework Decision is meant to be adopted before June 2005. An entirely different issue, but one that from a thematic perspective also falls under approximation, is the adoption of a Framework Decision to strengthen the criminal law framework against ship source pollution. Finally, the Dutch presidency will start the negotiations on the Commission's proposal to enhance certain rights in criminal proceedings in the European Union.

Fight against organised crime

The Netherlands will take the first steps towards developing a strategic concept in the area of organised crime, in response to the need within the European Union to formulate policy on

combating organised crime and the related prioritisation of investigations at EU level. The strategic concept will primarily address implementation, operation and the relationship between existing instruments and institutions.

Drugs

The EU drugs strategy and the Action Plan on Drugs (2000-2004) are drawing to a close. The Dutch presidency will see the development of a new drugs strategy for 2005-2012, building on the conclusions of a conference held during the Irish presidency entitled 'EU Strategy on Drugs: The Way Forward', which laid down the relevant priorities. The European Council of December 2004 will approve the new strategy.

Development of SIS II

As far as possible, the Council will complete its current activities in support of the development and introduction of SIS II (Schengen Information System), including decisions concerning its long-term strategic and operational management, financing and location. In this context, it will also examine how SIS II can contribute to the fight against terrorism.

Police cooperation

In light of the Madrid attacks, among other things, it is vital to strengthen operational police cooperation in the European Union. The Dutch presidency will prioritise the removal of the obstacles faced by police services in relation to cross-border operations and cooperation. In addition, it will expand existing formal and informal EU networks, such as the network for the protection of public figures and the network connecting the various branches of the transport police. Other key issues include efforts to combat cross-border vehicle crime, police integrity, the implementation of Joint Investigation Teams and the fight against counterfeiting of the euro.

IV. An effective, coherent and committed external policy

An effective, coherent and committed external policy is one of the Dutch presidency's key objectives. Building on the priorities mentioned in the Irish-Dutch Operational Programme for 2004, the Dutch presidency will place additional emphasis on the following four issues on the Union's external agenda: Asia, the wider Middle East, effective multilateralism and the further development of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). It speaks for itself that the presidency will also pay attention to current affairs and other regional and thematic issues. Major events, in particular, may substantially alter the presidency's priorities.

Asia

In recent years, the importance of the Union's relations with Asia has increased significantly. Almost all the elements of external policy that are important to the European Union play a role in its relationship with this dynamic region: trade policy, development issues (including HIV/AIDS), non-proliferation, terrorism, stability and developments related to the rule of law and democracy, good governance and human rights. The European Union must take advantage of the increasing closeness of its economic relations with Asia. The Dutch presidency therefore plans to develop a sustainable, strategic relationship, while keeping an eye open for results that can be achieved in the short term. The relatively high number of meetings planned for the second half of 2004, including summits with China, India and South Korea and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), provides an ideal opportunity in this regard. ASEM, in particular, can be used to strengthen relations between Asia and the European Union across the board. The EU-China summit will not only be dominated by economic issues (WTO), but will also address such political issues as human rights and – possibly – the arms embargo. In addition to improvements in economic cooperation, the agenda of the EU-India summit will cover regional political issues. It is expected that the EU-South Korea summit will address trade issues and developments on the Korean peninsula.

Strategic partnerships with Mediterranean countries and the Middle East

The European Union believes in the importance of an integrated strategy towards the wider Middle East. The main objective is to deepen relations with and promote reform in the

countries in this region. On the basis of the decisions of the European Council in June, and building on the results, for example, of the EU-US and G-8 summits in June, the Dutch presidency faces the challenge of developing a long-term, integrated EU effort, with an emphasis on encouraging political (civil liberties, civil society and the media), economic and social reform. In addition, the presidency will examine how the Union could cooperate with this region in the area of European security policy. Local ownership and coordination with the United States' Greater Middle East project are also important issues. EU efforts must of course be complementary to the efforts of other international organisations, such as the United Nations and – potentially – NATO. In addition, the Netherlands will try to use its presidency to determine whether the deadlock in the Middle East peace process can be broken, which is also relevant to achieving progress in the Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean countries and the Middle East as a whole.

Effective multilateralism and cooperation with partners

Effective multilateralism is a key aspect of EU foreign policy. The European Union should not only support the United Nations' efforts to reduce poverty and promote economic development, but also to maintain international peace and security. Cooperation between the European Union and the United Nations in the field of conflict prevention and crisis management should be further encouraged.

Building on the European security strategy, which was adopted in December 2003, the Dutch presidency will strive to improve multilateral cooperation and achieve tangible results, for example, in such areas as non-proliferation, the fight against terrorism, and trade. This can be achieved, for example, by contributing actively to the debate on UN reform, developing and implementing the EU Action Plan on Non-Proliferation and including non-proliferation provisions in new agreements with third countries. In addition, the European Union will also have to carry out internal improvements by increasing the coherence and effectiveness of the various EU anti-terrorism instruments and contributing to the anti-terrorism programmes of countries of concern.

With regard to the multilateral trade system, the WTO negotiations in the framework of the Doha Development Agenda will also occupy a high position on the international economic

agenda for the coming months. The Union will have to make a positive contribution to these negotiations while actively presenting its position in meetings with third countries. The improved integration and more effective participation of developing countries in the multilateral trade system is a key premise of the Doha Round. The aim is to reach agreement on a negotiation framework for the remainder of the round before the end of the summer. This framework can then be extended until the next WTO Ministerial Conference in 2005. The fact that this will involve difficult decisions, for example in relation to farm subsidies, reinforces the need for wide-ranging coordination in various fora, including outside the usual confines of trade policy. In the field of bilateral economic relations, trade policy and investments will also be important issues during the various summits (e.g. with China and India) and other meetings in which the European Union is involved.

Other key issues on the trade policy agenda during the second half of 2004 include the implications of EU enlargement, Russia's application to join the WTO, the Association Agreement between the European Union and Mercosur and the amendment of the Generalised System of Preferences.

During its presidency, the Netherlands will carry out preparations for the UN Commission for Sustainable Development's policy year on water, sanitation and human settlements. In addition, where necessary, the Netherlands will already start the European Union's preparations for the 'Major Event of 2005', which is being organised by the United Nations to evaluate the follow-up to UN summits and the achievement of their goals.

European Security and Defence Policy

During the Dutch presidency, the implementation of the European Union's security strategy will also have an impact on European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). Preparations are currently under way for the first major EU-led military crisis management operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Netherlands will actively try to facilitate a smooth transition from the outgoing NATO-led stabilisation force (SFOR) to the new EU-led mission. In this context, it will also devote attention to effective cooperation with NATO elements that are remaining in the region. Furthermore, the Netherlands will push for the successful continuation of the EU-led police missions in Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Depending on international

developments and its own priorities and capabilities, the European Union is also willing to lead other civilian and military crisis management operations. As well as cooperation with NATO, this will require good cooperation with the United Nations.

During its presidency, the Netherlands will also push for the further reinforcement of the military and civilian capabilities of a Union of 25 member states, for example, by developing the Union's new military capabilities objective, the so-called Headline Goal 2010. The new Headline Goal highlights the need to eliminate the current deficiencies and also sets new requirements for rapid deployment, sustainability and interoperability. A start will be made on developing criteria and standards for measuring improvements in military capabilities. The Netherlands will strive for an evaluation of the European Capability Action Plan (ECAP), due in part to the operationalisation during its presidency of the European Defence Agency, which is meant to encourage cooperation between member states and help them to modernise their armed forces.

The concept for rapidly deployable battle groups, to be adopted during the Irish presidency, will be developed. From 2007 onwards, these battle groups – military units approximately 1,500 strong – should be available to be sent to crisis areas outside Europe within fifteen days. In the autumn, the presidency will invite the member states to announce their specific contributions to the initiative.

With regard to developing capabilities, the Netherlands will devote particular attention to EU-NATO coordination and cooperation, on the basis of the 'Berlin Plus' arrangements. In addition, the Netherlands will strive to improve transparency and cooperation between the European Union and NATO on a broad range of issues, including the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the fight against terrorism.

In the area of civilian crisis management, the Netherlands will push for improvements in the quality and availability of the existing police and judicial capabilities and devote attention to the coordinated deployment of civilian and military resources in crisis management operations.

The Netherlands will encourage integrated EU external action in conflict and post-conflict areas. This means, among other things, that funds like the Peace Facility for Africa will be used with care. In this context, the Netherlands can benefit from experiences gained through the operation of the Stability Fund established in 2004. The Netherlands will work to promote decision-making and implementation with regard to Peace Facility for Africa activities.

Relations with the United States

The strengthening of EU-US relations needs to take further shape in the field of both economic and foreign policy. The appointment of a new Commission, the US presidential elections and the lack of an EU-US summit during the second half of the year call for realism with regard to the results that may be expected. Areas in which cooperation needs to be developed include trade relations, the fight against terrorism and the wider Middle East. The Dutch presidency will work to ensure that transatlantic relations, including economic cooperation and trade relations, will be strengthened on the basis of a positive agenda.

Relations with countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Relations with countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia will receive a boost from the summits taking place during the Dutch presidency with Russia and Ukraine. In addition, the Netherlands will examine how the European Union can help to resolve the frozen conflicts in the region. In doing so, the Netherlands will be able to call on experience gained during its chairmanship of the OSCE.

Africa

Given the stagnation or even deterioration in development in large parts of Africa, the Dutch presidency is assigning a high priority to poverty reduction, the fight against AIDS, the promotion of economic growth and contributions to peace and security in Africa. Progress in the EU-Africa dialogue is also very important, and the Netherlands will therefore actively push for it. In addition, the Netherlands will strive to follow the negotiations on Economic Partnership Agreements and expedite them where possible. During the Dutch presidency, an interim evaluation of the EU country policy plans will take place in the framework of the

Cotonou Agreement, as well as an evaluation of the components of the Agreement itself. If the Commission includes this in its proposals for the Financial Perspectives, the Netherlands will try to accelerate the decision concerning the integration of the European Development Fund into the EU budget.

Development cooperation

The European Union is a key player in the field of development cooperation: more than half of all public development aid funds come from the European Union (i.e. the Commission and the member states) and it is also the main trade partner of many developing countries. During its presidency, the Netherlands will focus on three objectives: improving the effectiveness and transparency of European development cooperation, compliance with international agreements and promoting effective multilateralism. The Netherlands will pursue these objectives through efforts in a number of areas

The Netherlands will push for the continuation of the current reform of European development cooperation. The debate on the Commission's Annual Report for 2003 will take place during the Dutch presidency, after which the Council will hold its annual debate on the effectiveness of EU external policy. This will provide an opportunity to incorporate conclusions concerning the Commission's management of the budget and the allocation of resources into the budgetary and planning cycle in good time. The implementation of the agreements on coherence, complementarity and coordination reached by the Barcelona European Council is also very relevant to the effectiveness of European development cooperation. On the basis of specific project proposals, the Netherlands will try to make progress on coherence and promote further decision-making. The role of the private sector in European development cooperation will be increased through, for example, the adoption of Council conclusions on public-private partnerships. In April, the Council decided to establish an ad hoc working group that will examine proposals to promote coordination and harmonisation within the European Union. This working group will complete its activities during the Dutch presidency.

In line with the work of the Irish presidency, the Netherlands will schedule various meetings on the fight against HIV/AIDS. Among other things, these meetings will discuss the

improvement of public information on AIDS and the importance of accessible reproductive health facilities. The tenth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) will provide an opportunity to focus attention within the European Union on sexual and reproductive health and rights and on improving and expediting the implementation of the agreements adopted in Cairo. The successful implementation of the Cairo agenda will contribute to poverty reduction, gender equality, the improvement of the status of women and the fight against HIV/AIDS, which are all key objectives of EU development policy.

Consular cooperation

During its presidency, the Netherlands intends to take two specific initiatives to strengthen consular cooperation. The first concerns political and operational cooperation in resolving kidnapping cases involving EU citizens in third countries. The second concerns the establishment of joint consular emergency teams that can provide assistance in the event of serious disasters. By means of these initiatives, which will contribute to the security and welfare of citizens, the Netherlands hopes to make the EU more visible to its citizens.