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 (1 January to 30 June 2004)

Delegations will find attached the programme of the Irish Presidency: "Europeans - working together".

EUROPEANS – WORKING TOGETHER

**PROGRAMME OF THE IRISH PRESIDENCY
OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

JANUARY – JUNE 2004

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EUROPEANS – WORKING TOGETHER

Ireland's Presidency in the first half of 2004 comes both at a time of hope and challenge for the European Union. Ten new Member States will join the Union on 1 May 2004. The Irish Presidency is committed to ensuring that the goodwill and expectation created by the historic ending of the post-war division of Europe is harnessed and made to work in the interests of the people of Europe, and of the wider world.

Working together, Europeans can leave behind the divisions of the past and build a better Europe for all.

In the context of enlargement and of the changing global scene, the Union needs to become more effective and better able to respond to the expectations of its citizens and of the international community. The Irish Presidency will do all it can to take forward work on the new Constitutional Treaty.

The Irish Presidency will work to promote sustainable growth and employment in an enlarged Union. It will focus on policies which can provide security and a high quality of life for Europe's citizens. It will ensure that the EU engages actively with the wider world on the international agenda, in accordance with its values and principles.

Ireland is determined to manage its Presidency responsibilities in an effective, fair and balanced manner in the interests of the European Union as a whole.

One of the challenges facing the European Union today is the need to keep its citizens fully informed and engaged in relation to developments which affect their daily lives in so many ways. The Irish Presidency will work to foster a closer relationship between the institutions of the European Union and its citizens. It will conduct business in an open and transparent manner. Information about the Irish Presidency will be available online on www.eu2004.ie.

This will be the first Presidency to see the full implementation of the Seville European Council conclusions on the programming of Council activities which will help to ensure a coherent and strategic approach to the work of the Council. The Irish Presidency programme is fully consistent with the Multiannual Strategic Programme of the Council for 2004-2006 and the Operational Programme for the Council for 2004 which has been drawn up jointly by the Irish and Dutch Presidencies.

The Irish Presidency will cooperate closely with the European Parliament and the Commission in carrying out this programme.

Shaping the Future Union

IGC

Since its opening in October 2003 the Intergovernmental Conference has, building on the outstanding work of the European Convention, made very considerable progress towards agreement on a new Constitutional Treaty which would make the Union more effective and better able to meet the expectations of its people and the demands of the changing and complex international situation. There is broad consensus on the great majority of issues. But those on which differences remain are significant.

The Irish Presidency is determined to do all within its power to advance the work of the IGC. It will in the first instance consult with partners and on that basis make a report to the Spring European Council, at which point it may be possible to chart a more precise way forward.

Future Financial Perspectives

The financial and budgetary arrangements underpinning the Union are a matter of fundamental importance not only for the Union but also for its citizens. The agreed financial perspectives reflect the Union's priorities and goals over a significant period and are the means through which the Union equips itself to meet the challenges ahead.

The Irish Presidency will initiate discussion in the Council on the future financing of the Union from 2007 onwards following receipt of the Commission Communication which is expected early in 2004. Discussions in the Council will prepare for the subsequent presentation by the Commission of its entire package of financial and legislative proposals.

Objectives

The Irish Presidency will target its energies and focus work on the following priority objectives.

A successful enlargement and new neighbours

Making a success of enlargement will be a key priority. This will involve the successful integration of the new Member States into the workings of the Union and the extension of the Union's policies to them. The wider ongoing enlargement process will also be taken forward actively. The opportunity offered by enlargement to develop a stable and comprehensive framework for relations with neighbouring states will be pursued. Our aim is to work with our neighbours to achieve an extended zone of stability to the east and south.

Working Together for Growth

The Irish Presidency is committed to the goal of a strong and competitive European economy capable of delivering sustainable growth, quality employment and social progress to its people. The Spring European Council will provide the opportunity to give renewed vigour and dynamism to the Union's programme for economic, social and environmental renewal.

A Safer Union – Strengthening the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice

The people of the Union wish to live, work and carry on business in a peaceful, secure and safe environment. Developing the Union as an area of freedom, security and justice is a core objective of the European Union. Priority will be given to those measures specified by the Treaty of Amsterdam and the Tampere European Council as necessary to complete this objective. Practical cooperation measures directed at strengthening existing EU cooperation in the fight against drugs and organised crime and combating illegal immigration and trafficking in human beings will be also be pursued.

Global Engagement – The European Union and the Wider World

Working together, the European Union and its partners can make a major contribution to the promotion of a fairer, peaceful and more secure world. To do this, it must become more active, more coherent and more capable. No single State or group of States can tackle the complex problems of today's world. Effective multilateralism remains the best means of improving global security and extending the benefits of peace, development and respect for human rights to everyone.

The Irish Presidency will focus on strengthening the Union's support for the UN system through support for UN reform and cooperation with the UN on key peacekeeping and crisis-management tasks. It will also work to build up the Union's own capacity for conflict prevention and crisis management.

The Irish Presidency will give renewed emphasis to the Union's relationship with Africa.

The transatlantic relationship is uniquely important in meeting the challenges of today's world. The Irish Presidency will work to strengthen the EU-US relationship and other key partnerships on the basis of shared interests and values.

I

A Successful Enlargement and New Neighbours

A Day of Welcomes

The formal accession to the European Union of ten new Member States on 1 May 2004 will be a defining moment in the history of Europe. The Irish Presidency looks forward to welcoming the accession states as full members of the Union and to celebrating together this great moment at a “Day of Welcomes” to be organised in Dublin and throughout Ireland on that day.

Effectively integrating the ten new Member States

Making a success of enlargement and seizing the opportunities which it offers will be a key priority for the Presidency. This will be achieved by integrating the new Member States fully and effectively into the Union. At the same time, there will be a focus on extending and adapting existing programmes in all policy areas to the new Member States. The necessary steps will be taken to integrate them as rapidly as possible into the Lisbon strategy, Schengen Acquis and the economic policy coordination process.

The accession of the Republic of Cyprus to the European Union on 1 May 2004 provides an historic opportunity for agreement on a comprehensive settlement in Cyprus on the basis of the proposals submitted by the Secretary General of the United Nations. The Irish Presidency will fully support the efforts of the Secretary General and will encourage all parties to re-engage with imagination and determination in talks on the basis of his proposals with a view to reaching a settlement which will enable the accession of a united Cyprus.

The continued effective functioning of the Council in the transitional period up to 1 May and beyond will be a major focus of attention.

Bulgaria and Romania

The Irish Presidency is determined to advance the Union’s aim of concluding negotiations in 2004 with Bulgaria and Romania, with a view to their accession to the Union in January 2007, if they are ready. Agreeing the financial framework for these countries early in 2004 will greatly assist this objective.

Turkey

The Irish Presidency will support Turkey’s efforts to fulfil the necessary criteria with a view to the decision to be taken at the European Council in December 2004 on the opening of accession negotiations.

*Making a
success of
enlargement*

A Europe without dividing lines

The Western Balkans

Relations with the Western Balkans will remain an important priority for the EU throughout 2004. The Irish Presidency will build on the progress made during 2003 in developing the European perspective of the five countries of the region and will work to ensure the full implementation of the commitments made in the shared EU-Western Balkans Thessaloniki Agenda. The Irish Presidency will work closely with the countries of the region towards the achievement of their objective of eventual integration into EU structures through progress in the Stabilisation and Association Process and the fulfilment of agreed and objective criteria. Progress towards European integration will depend crucially on the efforts of the countries themselves, in cooperation with the Union.

The Commission Opinion on Croatia's application for membership of the EU is expected to be submitted during Ireland's Presidency. It will form the basis for a decision on the opening of accession negotiations.

The Wider Europe/New Neighbours Initiative

The Union's goal is the creation of a zone of security, stability and prosperity for its people. Through cooperation with our neighbours, we will seek to extend these conditions to 385 million inhabitants of the countries on the external land and sea borders of the Union. The Irish Presidency will continue work on the Wider Europe/New Neighbours Initiative to enhance relations with the Union's neighbours to the east and south on the basis of shared values of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law. We look forward to the adoption of 'Action Plans' for a number of our neighbours at the European Council in June 2004.

Relations with the Union's neighbours to the south will continue to be carried forward through the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership with a view to deepening and extending cooperation in the Mediterranean region. The Irish Presidency will take forward dialogue between the EU and its Mediterranean partners in particular through the Euromed Mid-Term Ministerial meeting to be held in Dublin in May 2004 and through making the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue of Cultures and the Euromed Parliamentary Assembly operational.

*Implementing
the Thessaloniki
Agenda*

*Extending the
zone of peace
and security*

EU-Russia relations

The European Union and Russia have a special strategic relationship. The Irish Presidency will work to develop closer relations with Russia based on common values and genuine partnership. Political dialogue on regional and global issues of concern will be an important aspect of our work. The EU-Russia Summit is an opportunity to take key issues forward and to set a course for the future. EU-Russia relations during our Presidency will embrace a comprehensive agenda including the impact of enlargement, the extension of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Russia to cover the new Member States, World Trade Organisation membership, environmental issues, cooperation in the area of justice and home affairs, on European Security and Defence Policy issues and dialogue on regional issues and Chechnya.

*The EU-Russia
relationship is of
particular
strategic
importance*

II

Working Together for Growth

The Lisbon Strategy

A strong, competitive and stable European economy is essential in order to deliver sustainable growth and a good quality of life for Europe's citizens. Working with Member States, the Commission and European Parliament, the Irish Presidency intends to give renewed impetus at the Spring European Council to the reform goals set out at Lisbon in order to achieve real progress in a number of core areas in the coming year.

The priority target areas identified are:

- **To promote economic growth and structural reform**

Investment in physical and human capital as well as research and development will be encouraged with the objective of supporting a recovery in growth and the transition to a knowledge-based economy. Growth oriented economic policies will be pursued, while seeking to maintain macro-economic stability and proceeding with structural reform of product, capital and labour markets.

- **To foster competitiveness**

Competitiveness is the key to generating and maintaining growth and employment. The focus of work will be to ensure that the impact of new Community policies is assessed appropriately and that the proposal for a Directive on Services is advanced significantly.

- **To deliver more and better employment**

The Irish Presidency will focus on the implementation of the employment guidelines for which the Employment Task Force's recommendations will be of particular relevance. It will also seek to promote effective adaptation to change by workers and companies, in particular through social dialogue, to enhance worker mobility, primarily through the amendment of Regulation 1408 and to prioritise life long learning and gender equality in the workplace.

- **To ensure sustainable growth**

The Irish Presidency will work to advance the Environmental Technologies Action Plan, with the objective of delivering growth and social progress decoupled from environmental damage.

*Sustainable
growth and
increased quality
employment*

The Union's ability to deliver on these key objectives is of course dependent on stimulating balanced economic growth in the years ahead. The Stability and Growth Pact and Broad Economic Policy Guidelines will continue to provide the macro-economic underpinning of the Union's economies and of the Euro.

Growth and Investment

The Irish Presidency will facilitate and encourage growth-oriented economic policies to boost the overall performance of the EU economy. It will seek to support investment in physical and human capital with the aim of addressing infrastructural deficits, improving access to communication and knowledge networks and developing a supportive environment for innovation and lifelong learning. The Irish Presidency will support the process of implementation of the European Action for Growth by Member States, the European Commission and the European Investment Bank.

*Investment in
infrastructure and
people*

Land and Air Transport

The Irish Presidency will focus in the transport sector on measures aimed at stimulating growth in an enlarged Union. It will work with the European Parliament towards adoption of the revised Trans European Networks proposals, recently agreed within the Council. It will also continue the work on liberalisation of key sectors such as the rail sector with the finalisation of the Second Rail Package and the first discussions on the forthcoming Third Rail Package. Mechanisms to provide incentives for modal shift away from roads where there are feasible alternatives will be pursued, in particular through measures to provide for the internalisation of the external costs of road transport.

*Liberalisation of
key sectors*

Progress will be sought at EU level in the aviation sector, including with the negotiation of aviation agreements with the US and other third countries. The momentum towards the development of Europe's strategic capability in satellite navigation will be maintained by promoting the Galileo project.

Maritime Transport

The Irish Presidency will focus on measures to reduce the risk of marine pollution, through the introduction of adequate sanctions for those responsible for such pollution. It will also work on further measures aimed at improving maritime safety and security, and increasing the attractiveness of the seafaring profession, with a view to promoting 'quality shipping' within the Union. The EU's maritime relations with third countries, both at a bilateral and multilateral level, will also be addressed.

*Improving
maritime safety*

Telecommunications

The Irish Presidency will strive to build on and develop existing initiatives to extend the information society to all. The mid-term review of the eEurope Action Plan will reflect the opportunities of enlargement. The benefits of broadband across the European Union will be highlighted. Regarding the sector as a whole, a follow up assessment of the situation in electronic communications will be conducted in advance of the Spring European Council.

Other initiatives which will also be progressed include the 'Safer Internet Plus' Action Plan and the "eContent Plus" programme (facilitating the development, use and distribution of European digital content on global networks and promoting linguistic diversity in the Information Society). The Council will also continue its work on the IDABC (Interoperable Delivery of Pan-European eGovernment Services to Public Administrations, Businesses and Citizens) which seeks to identify, support and promote the development and establishment of pan-European eGovernment Services and the underlying interoperable telematic networks. The adoption of this Decision is foreseen during the Irish Presidency. Conferences will also be hosted on the key issues of e-Government and the theme of content and demand stimulation in the context of national broadband deployment strategies.

The Irish Presidency will further the proliferation of the information society at an international level through follow up actions arising in the context of the World Summit on Information Society.

In view of the conclusion of the eEurope plus process and in consideration of the mid-term review of the eEurope 2005 Action Plan, the Hungarian Government, with the support of the Irish Presidency, will host a European Ministerial meeting on the Information Society in Budapest.

Energy

Securing reliable, efficient and sustainable energy sources is an important element in the sustainable development of the European economy. The Irish Presidency will concentrate on the completion and consolidation of the internal market in energy, in particular with regard to cross-border gas trade. The continued integration of sustainable development principles into the energy policies of the Union will also be pursued, notably through measures aimed at increased efficiency and conservation of energy. The International Conference for Renewable Energies will be an important and relevant event in Bonn in June.

*Extending the
information
society to all*

*Sustainable
energy*

Research and Development

The Irish Presidency will prioritise initiatives to advance the creation of a European Research and Innovation Area and in particular to achieve the research and development investment target of 3% GDP by 2010. It will support the further development and implementation of a workable light open method of coordination in order to achieve these objectives. The Irish Presidency will also facilitate discussion on excellence in basic research in Europe and the role of the EU in basic research on the basis of communications to be proposed by the Commission. It will work to initiate debate and ensure effective follow-up on the recent White Paper on European Space Policy.

The Irish Presidency will work towards progressing discussions on the financing and organisational issues relating to the establishment of the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) and on the wider international aspects.

Education, training and skills

The enlarged Union is rich in human capital and the Irish Presidency will foster measures to ensure the availability of education, training and lifelong learning which will be required if people are to realise their full potential in the knowledge society.

Recognising the importance of improved mutual recognition of qualifications for mobility, the Irish Presidency will particularly focus on the “Europass” initiative for transparency of qualifications and competencies.

The Council will also prepare its interim implementation report for the Spring European Council, setting out directions for the future on how best to pursue the essential educational, skills and training aspects of the Lisbon programme, and advancing work on the new generation of European education, training and youth programmes.

Competitiveness

Competitiveness is essential to maintaining and generating growth and employment across the EU. The Irish Presidency will give priority to those actions needed to stimulate entrepreneurship and research and development within the EU so as to give added impetus to the development of new businesses and economic activity. It will work to develop the integrated strategy for competitiveness in which context it will also consider the regulatory impact of major emerging policies. Coherence and synergies between different policy areas and their impact on competitiveness will be pursued as part of this strategy.

Greater investment in R&D

Realising people's full potential

Integrated strategy for competitiveness

The Irish Presidency will continue work initiated under the Italian Presidency on the proposal for a Regulation on Chemicals, with a view to achieving an effective balance between economic, social and environmental considerations.

Completion of the Internal Market

A strong and well functioning Internal Market is necessary to enhance the competitiveness of EU business and assist in meeting the Lisbon objectives. While much has been achieved over the past 10 years in ensuring that citizens and businesses benefit from the Internal Market, many obstacles persist. The Irish Presidency will give high priority to making progress on the Financial Services Action Plan in order to ensure that an integrated financial services market can become a reality by 2005. It will also progress discussions on the first legislative proposals emerging from the Corporate Governance and Auditing Action Plans which are designed to ensure European business practice and governance operate to the highest international standards. The Presidency will work to achieve progress in the area of consumer protection including the proposals on unfair commercial practices and enforcement cooperation. It will also seek to significantly advance work on the forthcoming Framework Directive on Services, regarded as a key measure to complete the Internal Market.

Work will continue on other important initiatives aimed at completing the Internal Market and improving the competitive environment for business and consumers, including the final steps necessary for the introduction of the Community Patent, agreement on recognition of professional qualifications and the Cross-border Merger Regulation.

A significant legislative programme designed to strengthen and modernise EU Customs will be pursued. The primary focus will be to make progress on a proposed regulation amending the Community Customs Code to provide for an EU wide system of risk-based security oriented controls and an EU-wide system for accrediting and managing authorised customs operators.

Taxation

The Irish Presidency will aim to resolve outstanding issues in the taxation of savings area regarding the conclusion of satisfactory arrangements with certain third countries so as to ensure the application by Member States of the provisions of the Taxation of Savings Directive. The Presidency will also work to facilitate the removal of barriers to the operation of business in the Internal Market, for example, the proposal to amend the Mergers Directive (Taxation).

In relation to the indirect tax area, the Presidency will prioritise the expected proposal in the VAT area in relation to the rules on the place of supply of services.

Financial Services Action Plan

Corporate governance

Consumer protection

Strengthen and modernise EU Customs

Taxation on savings

In the area of excise duties, the Irish Presidency will aim to progress the expected proposal for a stand-alone directive concerning mutual assistance in this area.

Employment and Social Inclusion

The provision of more and better jobs for the Union's citizens is an essential focus for economic development and a major concern for citizens of the Union everywhere. The Irish Presidency will seek urgent progress in implementing the European Employment Guidelines and will also build on the recommendations of the Employment Task Force. The key challenges in this area, as indicated by the Employment Task Force, will be to promote greater investment in education, training and innovation, to encourage greater adaptability and flexibility on the part of workers and companies and remove disincentives to employment.

More and better jobs

The Presidency will seek to promote closer cooperation with the social partners in facilitating change and, to this end, will convene the Tripartite Social Summit in advance of the 2004 Spring European Council. It will also seek to advance work in the area of exposure of workers to risks arising from physical agents and will address, on the basis of communications from the Commission, issues in relation to the Working Time Directive and data protection with regard to employees.

Social partnership

Social protection should be addressed in a manner consistent with the Union's commitment to social inclusion with particular emphasis on reducing the risk of poverty and modernising social protection systems. The common challenge for pension systems in Europe is to ensure both adequacy and long-term sustainability, particularly in the context of an ageing population. Work will be progressed on the need to reform national pension systems, in particular to avoid disincentives for people prolonging their working lives. The achievement of the target of a 60% employment rate for the economically active female population could also be beneficial in this regard.

Modernising social protection

Key initiatives will include :

- Finalisation of the reform of Regulations on coordinating social security systems for workers and others moving throughout the Union (reform of Regulation 1408/71)
- Progress of work in relation to the question of "making work pay", to ensure that social protection and employment policies are mutually supportive
- Progress of work in relation to national actions aimed at reducing the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Equality

Promoting equality and combating discrimination are key to ensuring that all across the Union can live in dignity and with respect. Legislation and funding measures for positive action are tools in achieving equality which will be progressed by the Irish Presidency.

*Promoting equality
and combating
discrimination*

Key issues will include:

- Progressing negotiations on the Proposal for a Council Directive implementing the principle of equal treatment between women and men in access to and supply of goods and services
- Finalising agreement with the European Parliament in relation to the Daphne II Programme on violence against women and children and the Community Action Programme supporting organisations active at European level in the field of equality between men and women.

A report by the European Commission on gender equality will also be presented for the first time to the European Council in March 2004.

Sustainable Development

The Irish Presidency will continue to promote the Union's progressive approach to environmental protection and sustainable development through the advancement of the Union's internal environmental policy and legislative programmes, environmental input to the Spring European Council's annual review of the Lisbon Strategy and participation by the Union in wider international environmental fora.

In leading the Environment Council's input to the Spring European Council, the Irish Presidency will place an emphasis on growth and social progress decoupled from environmental damage. It will work to advance the Environmental Technologies Action Plan. In this context, the place of innovation and investment in environmental technologies in securing both economic advantage and environmental gain will be particularly important.

*Environmental
technologies*

The Presidency will place a high emphasis on climate policy and legislation to support implementation of the Kyoto Protocol, and will also prioritise measures in the areas of waste management, air and water quality.

The Irish Presidency will maintain the Union's leadership in the promotion of sustainable development at international level, including through pursuit of the Plan of Implementation arising from the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002.

Agriculture and Food Safety

The overall objective of the Irish Presidency will be to support the European model of agriculture as defined by the Agriculture Council in November 1997 and endorsed by the European Council in December 1997. The specific objectives of the Irish Presidency will be to facilitate the application of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to the new Member States, to continue the process of simplification of the CAP initiated by the Mid-term Review decisions of last June and to enhance food safety standards.

To achieve these objectives the Presidency will aim to work closely with the new Member States on any procedural or substantive issues that affect them particularly; to conclude the negotiations on the reform of the Common Market Organisations for olive oil, cotton, tobacco and hops; to continue the examination of issues relating to the reform of the sugar regime; to progress the proposals expected from the Commission on the policy framework to apply to rural development during the period of the next financial perspective and to progress, and where appropriate conclude, legislative proposals in the field of food safety, including the Hygiene Package, official controls of food and animal feed, hygiene of animal feed and maximum residue levels for plant protection products.

An additional priority will be to secure agreement on the Commission's proposals for strengthening controls on the welfare of animals during transport. The Presidency will also progress agreement on an Action Plan for organic farming which is expected from the Commission during the first half of 2004. In relation to forestry, it will prepare the EU's position for the United Nations' Forum on Forestry in May and will commence the review of the EU Forest Strategy.

Developments in the WTO's Doha Development Round will be closely monitored and the positions to be taken by the EU in other international fora will be co-ordinated.

The Presidency will ask Ministers to consider, when they meet informally in May, how the impact of CAP reform on international trade as well as opportunities arising from existing and future international arrangements can best be communicated to the EU's trading partners and, in particular, developing countries.

New Member States

Further reforms

Food safety

Animal health and welfare

Organic farming

Forestry

International developments

Fisheries

The Irish Presidency, in recognition of the significant contribution of the fisheries sector to the development of peripheral regions of the European Union, will focus internal fisheries policy on maximising sustainable fishing opportunities for the European Union's fishing industry. This will be achieved by the implementation, in consultation with stakeholders, of development, conservation and control measures which take full account of regional socio-economic and environmental policy.

On external policy, the Presidency will seek to conclude new fisheries agreements with a number of third countries in accordance with the partnership approach. Advancing the interest of the Community in Regional Fisheries Organisations with a view to enhancing the role such organisations play in the sustainable management of international fisheries will also be a key area for the Irish Presidency.

Health

The Irish Presidency intends to focus on improved public health protection and added value at European level. It will aim to secure adoption of key health measures while ensuring that health considerations are fully reflected in measures covering other areas of EU activity.

Key health-related initiatives and proposals to be advanced will include those in the areas of pharmaceuticals, traditional medicines, food safety and medical devices. The Irish Presidency will also coincide with the introduction of a European Health Insurance Card and will facilitate the establishment of a European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.

Cardiovascular health will be particularly highlighted in the Council and at a specific conference in Ireland, while conferences will also be held on e-health and tobacco control. The Irish Presidency will also develop the work of the High Level Process of Reflection on Patient Mobility and contribute to the Environment and Health Action Plan. At an international level, the Presidency will be fully engaged with the review of World Health Organisation International Health Regulations.

Culture and Sport

One of the great strengths of the Union is its cultural diversity and this is an aspect that will be further enhanced with enlargement. The Irish Presidency recognises the importance of placing culture at the heart of European integration and is committed to fostering debate on the shape of future European cultural actions.

Sustainable fishing

Improved public health

Future culture actions

Key actions will include commencing discussion of the Commission's proposals for a post-2006 EU support programme and advancing the review of the Television without Frontiers Directive.

The EU declared 2004 the "Year of Education through Sport". The Irish Presidency will host the European launch of the Year in January in Dublin. It will seek to promote the many aims and objectives of the Year, including the application of the values conveyed through sport to developing knowledge and skills and the encouragement of the exchange of best practice on the role sport can play in education systems in promoting social inclusion.

*Year of Education
through Sport*

III

A Safer Union: Strengthening the Area of Freedom, Justice and Security

Developing the Union as an area of freedom, security and justice is a core objective of the EU, which the European Council has placed high on its political agenda. The Irish Presidency will continue to prioritise this task.

A key focus of the Irish Presidency, building on what has already been achieved, will be to take forward work on those measures specified by the Treaty of Amsterdam and the European Council in Tampere for the purpose of meeting this objective. The Irish Presidency will also prioritise measures which will build on existing cooperation at EU level directed to the fight against drugs and organised crime and combating illegal immigration and the trafficking in human beings. The Irish Presidency will also initiate the process leading to the development of the post Tampere agenda in the Justice and Home Affairs sector.

Immigration and Asylum

A common EU asylum and immigration policy is the goal set down in the Tampere programme in keeping with specific objectives identified in the Amsterdam Treaty.

Asylum

The Irish Presidency will seek to resolve outstanding issues on the Asylum Qualifications and Procedures Directives in keeping with the requirements of the Amsterdam Treaty. It will also take forward work on the proposal making provision for the continuation of the European Refugee Fund in the period 2005-2009.

New responses to asylum

The Irish Presidency proposes to look to new responses to the asylum question. It will, in accordance with the mandate of the Thessaloniki European Council, take forward discussion on further reinforcing asylum procedures in order to make them more efficient as well as on the means of better managing the entry of persons in need of international protection into the EU, including protection in the regions in a manner consistent with our obligations under the Geneva Convention.

Immigration

The Irish Presidency will prioritise actions aimed at combating illegal immigration while also taking forward measures intended to facilitate the development of a common approach to legal migration.

Combating illegal immigration

Work on combating illegal immigration will be taken forward on a number of fronts. Implementation of the comprehensive plan to combat illegal immigration and trafficking of human beings will be prioritised.

Implementation of the Return Action Programme will likewise continue to be taken forward as will work on the proposed Council Decision to enable Community financial support to be provided to that programme. Priority will be given to the development of a common policy on readmission.

With regard to legal immigration, work will be progressed on the proposed Directives on the conditions of entry and residence of third country nationals for the purpose of study, vocational training, and voluntary service and research in the context of the development of a common immigration policy.

*Conditions for
legal immigration*

External Borders and Visas

The European Council has emphasised the need to take forward work on the development of the Visa Information System (VIS). Priority will accordingly be given to the relevant Commission proposals. Work will also be taken forward on the related issue of biometric identifiers for visas and other purposes.

Work on the Regulation for the establishment of a European Borders Agency, whose task will include coordinating and supporting the efforts of the Border Services of Member States in combating illegal immigration, will be progressed in keeping with the mandate of the December Brussels European Council.

*European Borders
Agency*

Police Cooperation in Criminal Matters

The Irish Presidency will press ahead with implementation of the Tampere programme in the area of police cooperation and crime. The key focus for this purpose will be continued implementation of the relevant Action Plans and work programmes including those directed to combating organised crime, drugs and terrorism as well as other forms of crime which pose a threat to the security of the citizens of the Union.

Recourse to all the resources available to the Union, including full use of the possibilities offered by Europol, the European Police College (CEPOL) and the Police Chiefs Task Force will be encouraged. The Presidency will also focus on measures directed to facilitating co-operation in connection with major forthcoming sporting events in Europe - the European Football Championships and the Olympic Games. Other initiatives will be directed to the issue of vehicle theft and implementation of the Framework Decision on Joint Investigation Teams.

Organised Crime

The Irish Presidency intends to build on the outcome of the Dublin Conference on Tackling Organised Crime in Partnership held in November 2003 by bringing forward proposals to promote the development of cooperation between the public and private sectors to combat organised crime and by taking forward the other recommendations of the Conference.

*Combating
organised crime*

Drugs

The process of developing a new EU Strategy and Action Plan on Drugs for the period from 2005 onwards will be launched. A Conference on the EU Strategy on Drugs - The Way Forward to be held in Dublin in May 2004 will contribute to the development of that new strategy and is being organised and structured with a view to involving civil society in that process.

*EU Action Plan to
combat drugs*

The Irish Presidency will also prioritise measures directed to the problem of combating the supply of synthetic drugs and focus on the question of drug related crime.

Customs Cooperation

Customs cooperation also has a key role to play for the purpose of providing citizens with a high level of security. The Irish Presidency will begin the implementation of a comprehensive Action Plan for Customs Cooperation that is currently under preparation in the Council. This programme includes: measures to improve operational co-operation between EU Customs administrations; an evaluation of the existing legal instruments in the area of Customs competencies; and improved information sharing between Customs services. All these elements are critical components for Customs in combating serious cross-border crime including drug trafficking, terrorism and fiscal fraud. Closer cooperation with other law enforcement agencies involved in protection of the external border will also be given a high priority.

*Action Plan for
Customs
Cooperation*

Judicial Cooperation in Criminal and Civil Matters

The European Council in Tampere endorsed the principle of mutual recognition as the cornerstone of judicial cooperation in both civil and criminal matters. The Irish Presidency will take forward work on measures which remain outstanding under the dedicated action plans adopted for the purpose of giving effect to this mandate.

*Improving
citizens' rights*

Criminal Law

The Irish Presidency will accordingly seek to finalise work on the Framework Decision on the application of the principle of mutual recognition to the execution in the European Union of confiscation orders. Also on the agenda are Framework Decisions on the application of the double jeopardy principle and on a European Evidence Warrant. With regard to the approximation of areas of criminal law, work on the Framework Decision on ship-source pollution will be prioritised.

Civil Law

Work in the area of civil law area directed to giving effect to the principle of mutual recognition and to facilitating better access to justice will continue. To this end, the Irish Presidency will prioritise work on the Council Regulation creating a European Enforcement Order for uncontested claims in conjunction with the European Parliament with a view to its finalisation and will seek to take forward discussion on the Directive dealing with compensation to victims of crime. Work will also be taken forward on the Regulation on the law applicable to non contractual obligations and the Regulation to establish a European order for payment procedure. The Irish Presidency will also work to ensure coherence of approach in EU action in civil law matters both internally and in external relations.

Better access to justice

Schengen

The Irish Presidency will take forward work on the development of the Schengen Acquis. In this context the key issue will be the development of the second generation Schengen Information System.

Schengen Information System

Civil Protection

The Irish Presidency will take forward the work in the Council on prevention and intervention in case of natural and technological disasters. Priority will be given to the examination of, and response to, the Commission Communications on a Common Approach to EU Disaster Prevention and on the reinforcement of EU civil protection capacities, due to be tabled at the beginning of 2004. Work will continue on a successor programme to the current Community Action Programme, which will expire on 31 December 2004.

Protection against natural and technological disasters

The Irish Presidency will also continue to support the effective implementation of the Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear programme with particular regard to issues arising out of the first Annual Report submitted to Council in December 2003.

Relations with Third Countries

Justice and Home Affairs matters are an increasingly important aspect of EU relations with third countries. The Irish Presidency will give priority to the preparation and implementation of detailed work programmes in the area of external relations on the basis of existing agreements and Action Plans. The work programme will focus on priorities being established in the context of the Union's new neighbours in keeping with the Wider Europe Initiative, the Western Balkans, Transatlantic relations and the EU-Latin America and Caribbean Summit.

The Irish Presidency will also coordinate, as appropriate, EU input to the work of other international bodies such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe in areas of relevance to the Justice and Home Affairs sector.

IV

Global Engagement - The European Union and the Wider World

The European Union is a global player with responsibilities to the international community. The Union's engagement with the wider world is, fundamentally, based on values - democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. These values are best expressed through the Union's support for an effective multilateral system, its adherence to the principles of the UN charter and through its commitment to advancing sustainable economic, social and environmental development

Inspired by these values, the Union needs to be both coherent in its policies and effective in its actions to play a positive role on the global stage.

This means fully utilising, in a coherent way, all the instruments and capabilities at its disposal, both the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and also trade, humanitarian and development cooperation policies.

Ireland's Presidency comes at a time when the European Council has adopted the first European Security Strategy. The Strategy takes a comprehensive approach to Europe's security by identifying the key challenges that the Union must face in order to contribute to creating a fairer and more secure world.

The Irish Presidency will work quickly to take forward areas requiring action for the implementation of the Strategy. The European Council has identified in particular support for effective multilateralism, the fight against terrorism, strengthening relations with the Middle East region/Arab World and developing a comprehensive strategy for Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Presidency will also give renewed impetus to conflict prevention and to implementing the EU Strategy against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Key areas for the Irish Presidency in external relations

As Presidency, our aim is to effectively manage the overall external relations agenda of the European Union. The Irish Presidency will give particular attention to a number of key areas in which the values underpinning the Union can be given practical expression.

It will focus in particular on **effective multilateralism and EU-UN relations**; on **promoting conflict prevention**; on the **transatlantic relationship**; on **Africa**; on the **Middle East**; and on **human rights**.

The European Union engages with the world on the basis of its values

The Security Strategy provides a comprehensive and holistic approach to Europe's security

United Nations

The United Nations is the pivotal actor in the maintenance of global peace and security and, as Presidency, Ireland is committed to working ever more closely with the UN.

The EU has an opportunity to shape a positive and progressive position towards UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's call for reform of the UN system. Effective multilateralism and UN reform will be an important theme in the Union's dialogue with other countries to build support and momentum for Secretary General Annan's reform agenda.

The Irish Presidency will also advance EU-UN cooperation in crisis management. The European Union and the United Nations are natural partners in carrying out peacekeeping and crisis management. It will work closely with the UN on implementing the declaration on EU-UN cooperation in crisis management, which establishes practical means of cooperation to this end.

Non-Proliferation and Disarmament

A multilateral approach is also key in countering the threat of proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and in promoting disarmament. This is reflected in the Union's 'Strategy against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction' which the Irish Presidency has been tasked to carry forward. The Union's commitment to multilateralism permeates the Strategy; support for disarmament and non-proliferation treaties and fostering the role of the Security Council with regard to Weapons of Mass Destruction will be central elements of this work.

Conflict Prevention

Conflict Prevention will be an important crosscutting priority for the Irish Presidency. Conflict prevention is a holistic concept; it covers not only security factors, but also humanitarian, human rights, political, economic and social factors.

The Irish Presidency will explore the role of Non Governmental Organisations and civil society and look at the interface between CFSP actions and development cooperation activities in preventing conflict. These issues will be considered at a Conflict Prevention Conference in Dublin in the Spring. This will feed into a report on the Union's progress in implementing the 'EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts' to the European Council in June.

Promoting effective multilateralism is a key priority for the European Union

Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction can best be dealt with through effective multilateral cooperation

Conflict prevention is a holistic concept

Transatlantic relations

The transatlantic relationship is a core strategic partnership for the European Union and will be a central focus of the Irish Presidency. We will work with the US, and with Canada, on practical cooperation across the broad range of issues of common interest and concern. On the political side, there will be close, ongoing cooperation between the EU and the US on critical international issues, particularly the Middle East Peace Process and Iraq. Co-operation in the fight against terrorism will be taken forward. EU-US trade issues will also be advanced and renewed impetus will be given to the positive economic agenda. The Irish Presidency will seek common ground with the US and other partners on the world trade agenda post Cancun.

Ireland's Presidency will see both an EU-US Summit and an EU-Canada Summit. These Summits will provide an opportunity to re-affirm the vitality and importance of the relationship that the Union enjoys with the US and Canada.

Africa

The Irish Presidency will ensure that African issues are high on the EU agenda and will seek to re-vitalise cooperation with the continent.

There are 291 million people living below the poverty line in sub-Saharan Africa. An estimated 28 million are infected with HIV/AIDS. Over a dozen conflict situations exacerbate this humanitarian crisis. The EU must seriously, coherently and consistently engage with African partners to find comprehensive solutions to these problems. Our over-riding message as Presidency will be support for African-led initiatives to tackle the enormous challenges the continent faces.

A central area of discussion with African partners will be African conflict prevention, peacemaking and crisis management capacity. Dialogue at Ministerial level with the African Union and with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) will concentrate on these issues. In particular, the Irish Presidency will focus on the implementation of the Peace Facility for Africa. It will also seek to support positive regional developments in Africa, including the peace process in Sudan and in the Great Lakes region.

The Middle East

The Middle East Peace Process will continue to be ever present on the EU agenda. The Irish Presidency's core aim will be to promote the implementation of the Road Map as the basis for progress towards a just and lasting two-state solution. Its participation in the 'Quartet' will be based on this principle.

The transatlantic relationship is a core partnership for the European Union

A re-vitalised EU-Africa relationship must be based on support for African-led initiatives

The implementation of the Road Map is the key to progress in the Middle East Peace Process

The Irish Presidency will also work closely with our EU partners in strengthening the EU relationship with the Arab world. The EU recognises that the Arab world faces challenges which must be constructively addressed in the interests not only of the region, but of the wider world. The Irish Presidency will seek to deliver, as mandated by the European Council, a Strategy for relations with the Middle East region/Arab World.

Human Rights

Support for human rights is a core value which underpins the European Union. A specific initiative in this area will be the adoption of EU Guidelines for support of Human Rights Defenders. The EU Strategy for Children in Armed Conflict will also be implemented.

Ireland holds the Presidency of the Union during the 60th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights. A major aim will be to achieve a fruitful and effective Session of the CHR. The Irish Presidency will also seek to address human rights issues in its dialogue with other countries. In particular, Ireland looks forward to convening sessions of both the EU-China and the EU-Iran Human Rights Dialogue

Other central issues during the period of the Irish Presidency will include the EU's relations with **Asia** and **Latin America and the Caribbean**; the situation in **Iran** and **Iraq**; the **fight against global terrorism**; and the continued development of the **European Security and Defence Policy**.

Asia

In view of the increasing strategic importance of Asia, a significant element of the Irish Presidency programme will be the re-vitalisation of EU engagement with the continent, both bilaterally and on a regional basis. In a regional context, Ireland intends to host an ASEM Ministerial meeting in Ireland in April. This meeting will provide an opportunity for EU and Asian Foreign Ministers to review and re-invigorate the EU-Asia relationship.

In addition, the Irish Presidency will continue EU dialogue and cooperation with Japan, China, India and Pakistan.

Human rights is a core value of the union

A re-invigorated ASEM process is an important element in strengthening EU-Asia relations

Support for Afghanistan's transition to a secure and democratic society will continue throughout 2004. Under the provisions of the Bonn Agreement, the Afghanistan Transitional Authority, established in June 2002, is to be replaced by an elected government following elections scheduled to take place in June 2004. The international meeting on Afghanistan, due to take place in the Spring, will provide an important opportunity for the European Union to take stock of reconstruction, development and democratisation in Afghanistan.

Latin America and Caribbean

The Irish Presidency will advance the Strategic Partnership between the EU and the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region. Dialogue between the two regions will focus on the full range of political and economic relations, particularly the promotion of peace, democracy, stability and socio-economic progress. The EU-LAC Summit in Guadalajara, Mexico, in May will be the first external Summit in which the 10 new EU Member States will participate. In all, 58 countries from both regions are expected to attend.

*The EU-LAC
Strategic
Partnership*

Iran

The situation in Iran will remain high on the EU agenda. Continued cooperation by Iran with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is vital. Depending on progress made by Iran in the areas of concern, negotiations on a Trade and Cooperation Agreement as well as on parallel agreements on political dialogue and on cooperation in the fight against terrorism may re-commence.

*Cooperation by
Iran with the
IAEA is vital*

Iraq

A key aim for the Union in 2004 will be to assist in reconstruction and economic development in Iraq and to support the early transfer of sovereignty to the people of Iraq. The EU is committed to a central role for the UN in this process. The Irish Presidency will work closely with the 'Advisory Group on Iraq' established by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to help guide the process of stabilising and reconstructing Iraq.

*Support of the
stabilisation and
reconstruction of
Iraq is of central
importance*

A further important milestone will be a report by the High Representative and the Commission on a medium-term strategy for EU relations with Iraq. A progress report will be presented to the Council in March 2004. This will provide the Union with an opportunity to assess its approach to Iraq in the light of developments.

The fight against global terrorism

The Irish Presidency will continue the fight against terrorism through full use of the Union's internal and external instruments. It will work with partners to implement the Union's 'Action Plan against Terrorism' and will ensure follow-up to the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions. The issue of combating global terrorism will be an important element of EU dialogue with third countries.

*Action Plan
against
Terrorism*

European Security and Defence Policy

The capacity of the Union to prevent and to manage conflict situations outside its borders is a fundamental aspect of coherent and effective engagement with the wider world. The European Security and Defence Policy is a key instrument through which the EU can in a practical way contribute to conflict prevention and crisis management.

*ESDP provides
the Union with
the capacity to
prevent and
manage conflict
outside its
borders*

The Irish Presidency will work with partners to facilitate further development of the Union's capabilities, both civilian and military, under ESDP. The process of setting new goals in this area, with the horizon of 2010, will be taken forward. The aim is for the Union to be capable of mounting effective crisis management operations. 2004 will see the Union becoming increasingly operational in this regard.

*Effective crisis
management
operations are at
the heart of
ESDP*

During the Irish Presidency, a number of operations are expected to be underway. On the civilian side, Police Missions in both Bosnia and FYROM will be ongoing. Preparation will also begin for the prospective European Union operation in follow-on to the UN-authorized NATO-led peace stabilisation mission (SFOR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This will be an important challenge for the Union; SFOR is a significantly larger and more complex operation than any undertaken to date under ESDP. Civil-military coordination will be particularly important in this context.

The Irish Presidency will continue to build on the work of previous Presidencies in the development of military capabilities to carry out crisis management operations. In this connection, it will work with partners on the establishment of an intergovernmental agency for defence capabilities development, as agreed at the Thessaloniki European Council in June 2003.

*Development of
capabilities, both
civilian and
military, will be a
priority*

The development of civilian capabilities will be a particular priority. If the Union's operations are to contribute to long-term stability and security, it needs to look beyond solely military interventions. Moreover, post-conflict societies need assistance with policing, re-establishing the rule of law and building civilian administration.

Multilateral Trade Policy

The Council will continue to monitor closely developments in relation to the Doha Development Agenda with a view to resuming substantive negotiations and reaching agreement on a new WTO round as soon as practicable. A successful conclusion to the current round of multilateral trade liberalisation is vital for long term economic growth and development in the world, as well as for continued confidence in the multilateral system. The Irish Presidency will focus efforts in the Council on achieving balanced progress in the negotiations on all issues. A sustained effort has to be made to strengthen the institutions of the multilateral trade system and the integration of the developing countries in them.

Multilateral trade liberalisation is vital for growth

Development

Poverty and disease in the developing world remain the greatest of all the challenges facing humankind today. In keeping with its overall external relations objectives of enhancing effective multilateralism (including the revitalisation of the Doha Development Agenda), human rights, conflict prevention and relations between the EU and Africa, the Irish Presidency will give developing country concerns the highest priority.

The Irish Presidency will pursue with determination the fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals with their strong emphasis on poverty reduction, empowerment of people and sustainable development. The positive experience of Ireland's own aid programme with its partnership approach to development will inform its approach. A particular emphasis will be placed on the issue of aid effectiveness, including coherence and complementarity between the Union and the Member States aid programmes and activities.

Poverty reduction

Aid effectiveness

In particular, the issue of HIV/AIDS and its economic and social consequences will be highlighted. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is one of the most destructive in human history. Its immensely damaging consequences affect not only families but whole communities and societies, not only in the developing world. The Irish Presidency will host an international conference on HIV/AIDS in Europe and Central Asia on 23/24 February 2004 in Dublin.

Combating HIV/AIDS

The European Union has tremendous potential as a strong force for global development. It provides more than half of public development assistance worldwide and is the main trading partner for many developing countries. The Irish Presidency will work with the institutions, the Member States and partners in the developing world to ensure that this great potential is fully realised and that the Union continues better to fulfil its responsibilities to the developing world with which it has so many ties of history and friendship.

The EU is a force for global development