

German cabinet

“Europe will succeed if we work together”

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The German cabinet approved a comprehensive agenda for the German EU presidency that begins on January 1. Today more than ever it can be said that it is only by working together that Europe will be strong enough to compete internationally.

Fifty years after the signing of the Treaties of Rome the objective is to adapt the European Union to the changed conditions on our continent and in the world. The continuing process of globalization raises numerous questions with regard to the future and the competitiveness of the European economic and social model.

There are a number of areas, such as trade, environmental issues, and security, where member countries are not able to protect their interests effectively and sufficiently on their own. Europe must show that it is able, in a globalized world, to continue to pursue policies that are in keeping with its own values.

The European Union wants to bring its ideas regarding a sustainable, efficient, and just socioeconomic system onto the global stage and to preserve the European way of life.

Moving the constitutional process forward

One of the key tasks of the German presidency will be that of moving the constitutional process forward. The European Union needs a foundational document that clearly lays out its structures and mechanisms. The EU constitutional treaty, signed by all the member states and ratified by a majority of them, continues to be seen as the best basis for this.

The "Berlin Declaration" to be issued by the heads of state and government on March 25, 2007 will attempt to provide a guideline with regard to the values and objectives of the EU. A debate will ensue that everyone is urged to take part in.

An agreement on the historical and cultural foundations of the European idea and European interests, based on shared values and convictions, will help to strengthen our sense of unity. History has not created Europe as something finished and definitive. Europe can only be what the European peoples and nations want to make of it.

For more growth and employment

Europe must continue to be economically competitive without giving up its social and environmental achievements. The German presidency will seek agreement on a balanced package of measures aimed at promoting competitiveness, growth, and employment as well as social cohesion and a healthy environment.

Strong impetus needs to be provided to pass better legislation aimed at strengthening the competitiveness of European enterprises. Research and innovation must be strengthened in Europe with a view to generating impetus for growth and employment.

Taking climate change more seriously

The EU has assumed a leading role in the global effort to counteract climate change. The German presidency will seek to establish a common position on climate change for the period after 2012.

It will be important to reach an agreement on further emission reduction targets and to include major greenhouse gas producers in the agreement. On this basis the EU will be better able to convince additional countries of the need to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

Safeguarding energy for the future

A secure, economic, and environmentally friendly energy supply is an important issue for the further development of Europe. Europe is heavily dependent on energy imports. The German presidency will focus on increasing energy efficiency, expanding the use of renewables, as well as seeking closer cooperation with supplier, transit, and consumer countries. It will also work toward the adoption of an ambitious energy action plan at the European Council in March 2007.

Our security can only be protected by working together

All EU countries can be affected by terrorist attacks and organized crime. This has made it necessary to engage in closer cross-border cooperation between police forces and offices of public prosecution. Refugee flows and illegal immigration to Europe are affecting us all and require a common European response. Germany will be working towards this objective during its presidency. In this context we must not lose sight of the need to respect human rights and personal freedoms.

Active foreign policy

The German Presidency will endeavor to apply Europe's weight towards resolving foreign policy conflicts and challenges being faced at the present time. It will also be important not to lose sight of long-term objectives of importance for the security and stability of Europe.

By way of example, we will have to continue to work to stabilize the western Balkans and draw the region closer to Europe. We must expand European policy on good-neighborly relations. We need to strengthen our relations with Russia and Central Asia; the same applies to our cooperation with the countries of the Middle East.

New "trio" format

Over the next eighteen months Germany will be cooperating closely with the follow-on presidencies, held by Portugal and Slovenia, in a new "trio" format aimed at improving the continuity of EU policy. The agenda it will be pursuing was formulated jointly with Portugal and Slovenia and is due to be adopted by the European Council at its meeting December 14-15.

The three-country presidency is a significant innovation in EU procedure and will make it possible to improve project planning and implementation.