

ESTONIA'S PRIORITIES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION DURING THE SLOVENIAN PRESIDENCY

GENERAL AFFAIRS

Estonia intends to **ratify the Treaty of Lisbon**, this will be preceded by discussion in parliamentary committees and public debate. Estonia is interested in smooth ratification of the Treaty in all Member States in order to ensure the entry into force of the Treaty by first half of 2009.

Estonia supports active continuation of the **EU enlargement process** according to previously agreed principles. Estonia expects the enlargement process to be more active than in 2007, since a large union of likeminded states holds more prominence in the globalised world and can therefore profit from opportunities offered by globalisation. Estonia is underlining the importance of complete fulfilment of the current enlargement criteria in order to give a clear message of expected homework to candidate countries, and by doing so raising the quality of the process itself.

COMPETITIVENESS

In order to improve the competitiveness of the EU and to achieve the Lisbon agenda objectives set for 2010, Estonia emphasises the importance of ensuring the continuity of the **Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs**. The Integrated Guidelines should remain largely unchanged as they are still relevant and constitute a balanced framework for policy development also for the next three-year cycle of the strategy. During the next cycle focus should be kept on the implementation of reforms and on further actions in four priority areas agreed by the 2006 Spring European Council: knowledge and innovation, unlocking business potential, investing in people and modernising labour markets, energy and climate change. We should set as few new objectives or as few binding targets in new areas as possible. At the same time, the Community Lisbon programme should be better prioritised and even more ambitious than the previous one setting out those Community level actions which add the greatest value to reforms undertaken by Member States.

Estonia is interested in a balanced solution as regards the amendment of the **Working Time Directive** and the draft directive establishing **working conditions for temporary agency workers**. The existing flexibility of working time regulation, i.e. the provisions on individual opt-out should be maintained. It is also important to ensure the protection of temporary agency workers and to improve the quality of agency work by ensuring that principles of equal treatment are applied.

Estonia supports the EU measures in the field of health services, in order to enable the provision of safe, high-quality and efficient **cross-border health services**. We find it important to clarify regulation regarding the reimbursement of cross-border health services in order to ensure the legal certainty and improve the availability of these services to citizens. It is also important to enhance practical cooperation in the fields of providing necessary information to citizens, service providers and competent authorities, and of recognising prescriptions. We support the creation of a European network of centres of reference in order to make treatment of rare diseases more efficient and to promote mutual learning between health care professionals.

Estonia supports starting constructive discussion about the efficient market regulation in the field of **electronic communication** to enhance competition, consumer protection and effective use of radio frequency resource Estonia favours measures that improve security and compatibility of communication networks, provide clear benefits to the citizens and society as a whole.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY

Estonia wishes to reach an agreement on the principles of the **internal market package** and find solutions to the problems related to import of electricity from third countries. Creation of a well functioning internal market is very important. In order to achieve this goal, opening of energy markets and removal of obstacles related to the development of energy networks and cross-border energy trade is essential, both inside the EU and with the third countries. We support proposals that contain clear and uniform regulation of energy trade with third countries, can be adjusted to small energy systems and take into account national security matters.

Climate change and renewable energy package is an important step towards the targets agreed upon on during the spring European Council 2007. The principles of burden sharing between Member States should, throughout the package, take into account national security, GDP and forecast of economic growth of member states. Emission trading system must be transparent and guarantee equal opportunities to all market participants regardless of their size.

AGRICULTURE

Estonia's aim is to continue the **health-check of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)** as a result of which necessary adjustments should be made in CAP measures. Estonia wishes that the new Member States could implement the single area payment scheme until the end of 2013 and should not start implementing the single payment scheme in-between. Estonia supports a fairer system of direct support schemes for all Member States, simplification of cross compliance and increased funding for rural development measures. The final aim of the reforms should be abolishment of market organisation measures (including milk production quotas).

FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

In order to assure smooth functioning of the financial system, the decisions on **strengthening the financial stability of the EU** should include effective measures regarding the regulatory framework for financial markets, financial supervision and cross-border financial crises management. The specific characteristics and interests of smaller Member States where the majority of the financial sector is often foreign-owned should also be taken into account. The regulatory framework must provide an adequate mechanism for distribution of costs during the financial crises between the home country and the host country.

When developing the **European strategy to combat tax fraud**, Estonia considers that Member States should agree upon concrete measures to fight against tax evasion above all through increased cooperation and exchange of information between fiscal administrations. The objective is to reduce the volume of tax fraud which should increase considerably the budget revenue of Member States, facilitate maintaining a balanced budget or reducing the budget deficit.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

Estonia wishes to facilitate the access to data of justice systems of the Member States by enhancing the usage of information and communication technology in the provision of public services by the Member States. Estonia believes that **establishing cross-border electronic authentication (mutual recognition of digital signatures)** is a prerequisite for proper functioning of the existing and future electronic systems.

Effective safeguarding of internal security in the **Schengen** area is essential for Estonia. Estonia's objective is to ensure readiness of Tallinn Airport to join the Schengen area on 30 March 2008, and to ensure the implementation of recommendations outlined in the evaluation reports. It is important for Estonia that the introduction and development of the second generation Schengen Information System (SIS II) would take place according to the agreed time schedule. Estonia also supports discussions about the future of FRONTEX and using of new technologies in border management.

Estonia's aim is to provide flexibility in facilitating legal **migration** based on labour market needs and to balance instruments of facilitating immigration and preventing illegal immigration. We support minimum harmonisation of rules at EU level regarding the migration of highly qualified workers from third countries, but are of the opinion that the degree of opening of labour markets to third country nationals should remain a decision of individual member states. It is also important that the principle of Community preference is fully applied. We support the establishment of sanctions at EU level against employers of illegal third-country nationals and rapid adoption of the directive on returning illegal third-country nationals. Continuous monitoring of implementation of readmission agreements is also important for Estonia.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Estonia's objective within the development of the **European Security and Defence Policy** is to further develop military and especially civilian crisis management capabilities. It is important to continue the involvement of international organisations and third countries in crisis management activities. In order to achieve this, Estonia plans to enhance its performance capabilities and actual input and participation in crisis management missions. Estonia continues to stress the importance of balanced co-operation between the EU and NATO, and therefore supports relevant initiatives put forward by member states. In the civilian sector Estonia prioritises successful launch of the ESDP mission to Kosovo and achieving desired goals for the EU police mission in Afghanistan. In the military field Estonia prioritises fulfilment of assumed obligations within the framework of the Nordic battle group.

Estonia supports maintaining good and solid relations between **the EU and the US** in developing further towards economic integration and political consensus. Effective cooperation between the EU and the US should increase the stability in our neighbourhood as well as in other areas of the world. The continued work and new initiatives of Trans Atlantic Economic Council established during the EU/US summit in 2007, further aid trade and economic integration between the partners. In addition, achieving mutual visa-free travel has an important place. Estonia continues to stress the need for more effective cooperation in energy security between the EU and the US and calls for wider dialogue and coordination in this sector.

Estonia's goal is further development and implementation of strengthening measures of the **European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)**, also prompt implementation of agreed decisions. ENP must be balanced and comprehensive to allow continuous reforms in Southern and Eastern European partner states. Estonia prioritises progressive enlargement of four fundamental freedoms of the EU to ENP partner states, conclusion of free trade Agreements and development of visa simplification and readmission procedures. Estonia prioritises eastward development of the ENP.

Estonia's objective is to develop a strategic partnership between **the EU and Russia** based on common values through uniform implementation of all the aims agreed under the roadmaps of the four Common Spaces. Considering the need for a steadier legal footing for the EU in the relationship with Russia, it is important to reach an agreement in the EU regarding the common mandate for the negotiations. It is also important to concentrate on Russia's accession process to the WTO. Estonia is of the opinion that the principles of rule of law should play a more central role in the negotiations between the EU and Russia.

In the relationship with third countries Estonia's aim is further stabilisation of **Western Balkans** and the continuing EU presence in the region. Recent developments in Kosovo require that the EU preserve unity regarding Kosovo's status, also preserve the role of a key player in the process and establishment of a civilian EU mission in Kosovo. The EU must ensure that further developments in Kosovo follow propositions included in UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari's plan. It is equally important to intensify relations with neighbouring countries, especially with Serbia, and to enhance its EU perspective.