

ANNUAL REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION 2016



KINGDOM OF BELGIUM
Federal Public Service
Foreign Affairs,
Foreign Trade and
Development Cooperation



**ANNUAL REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE LEGISLATIVE CHAMBERS, PURSUANT TO
ARTICLE 2 OF THE LAW OF 2 DECEMBER 1957 ON THE
ADOPTION OF THE EEC TREATY**

PREAMBLE

2016 was a **difficult year of crises** for the European integration project, which reached its **low point** with victory for the supporters of the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union in the **Brexit** referendum at the end of June. On 19 February 2016, the European Council agreed once again to a new arrangement for the United Kingdom within the European Union. Based on this agreement, Prime Minister Cameron led a campaign for continued British membership. The agreement, which included a number of difficult adjustments to the free movement of persons (restrictions in access to social benefits), would only be implemented if the British people voted for further British membership. However, on 23 June, 51.9% of the British electorate voted for the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. Prime Minister Cameron immediately resigned, and was succeeded on 13 July by Theresa May, who emphasised that Brexit actually meant Brexit. The remaining 27 Member States indicated as early as 29 June that there was no possibility of negotiations prior to formal notification. It immediately became clear that the British did not have a withdrawal strategy. Formal notification was hastily postponed until 2017. In July, the United Kingdom relinquished its presidency of the Council, which was planned for the second half of 2017, but otherwise, only acute **uncertainty and insecurity** prevailed.

The **27 Heads of State and Government** held an informal meeting in **Bratislava** on 16 September to examine the near future of the European project. It is clearly vital that the functioning of the institutions does not come to a standstill, and that the Union acts on the concerns of citizens in order to restore faith in the European project. A **roadmap** was adopted, which focuses on the **near future**.

On 22 March, the Union was shaken by a **terrorist attack** in Brussels, and further attacks followed in Nice and Berlin. As a result, internal security issues remained high on the agenda. In April, the European Parliament gave the green light for the new Passenger Name Record Directive (European PNR), which will make it possible to prevent, trace, investigate and prosecute terrorist offences and serious crime.

With a view to **more effective protection of the European external borders**, an agreement was reached in June on establishing a European border and coast guard. Whereas the border agency Frontex primarily had a coordinating function in the past, the new agency will now have 1,500 border guards at its disposal.

The **migration issue** also dominated the agenda in 2016. On 18 March, an agreement was concluded with **Turkey**, which entered into force on 20 March and was designed to halt irregular migration from Turkey to the European Union, and replace it with legal forms of resettlement for refugees within the European Union. The agreement with Turkey confirmed the Turkish perspective on visa liberalisation, but linked it to the strict fulfilment of all necessary technical conditions. Thanks to the implementation of this agreement, irregular migrant flows via Turkey to Greece were stemmed.

The enforcement of the agreements made in the area of relocation and resettlement remained contentious, and little progress was achieved in reforming the Common European Asylum System. A number of Member States remained opposed, with the result that the **balance between solidarity and responsibility** came under increasing pressure.

Measures taken to **promote growth and employment** were also a central theme of 2016. The Council already agreed to an extension of the **European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI)**, which was launched in June 2015, until the end of 2020, and also agreed to an increase in its financial capacity to €500 billion. The Fund generated its first investment results. A proposal to revise the **Posting of Workers Directive** met with opposition from 11 national parliaments. The Commission ruled that its text was not in breach of the subsidiarity principle, meaning that negotiations could be resumed later in the year.

The EU ratified the Paris Agreement on climate, in an accelerated procedure, and contributed to the convention's entry into force in November. Moreover, work began on translating the European commitments into policy measures.

In 2016, significant focus was given to **modernising the digital internal market**, by making the online trade in goods and services more attractive for users, and by creating a transparent and reliable legislative framework. Many concrete measures were discussed, such as tackling practices of

unauthorised geo-blocking, a regulation on the cross-border portability of online content services and the opening up of the 700 MHz band for mobile broadband.

In the area of trade, the EU signed a **Comprehensive and Economic Trade Agreement (CETA) with Canada**. After obtaining additional clarifications, the necessary powers of attorney of all federated entities were collected in Belgium, and Minister Reynders subsequently signed the CETA treaty on behalf of Belgium on 29 October. The EU also signed an economic partnership agreement with the SADC, and interim agreements with Ghana and Ivory Coast, meaning that these African partners acquired privileged access to the European market, as well as an agreement with Ecuador, meaning that this country can accede to the already signed EU free trade agreement with Peru and Colombia. On the legislative front, the EU also strengthened the rules for export controls in 2016, on goods which are used for the death penalty, torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, in order to prevent the EU facilitating human rights violations in third countries through its exports. In November, a regulation was approved to put an end to the financing of armed groups by means of controls on trade in minerals from conflict areas.

On 1 January 2016, part of the **EU-Ukraine Association Agreement** provisionally entered into force. However, there was a significant ratification problem. In a referendum in the Netherlands on 6 April 2016, 61% of the electorate voted against ratifying the agreement. The required participation quorum of 30% was narrowly achieved. On 15 December, the Heads of State and Government of the 28 Member States of the European Union took a legally binding decision in which the points of concern exposed during the referendum were addressed. On this basis, the Dutch government would be able to proceed to the ratification of the agreement.

Given the coordination and establishment of the Belgian position, the Directorate-General Coordination and European Affairs (DGE) organised around 306 meetings in 2016, ranging from coordination meetings, to ad-hoc and consultation meetings.

In 2016, the Directorate-General Coordination and European Affairs (DGE) was also responsible for the **general monitoring and coordination of the transposition of European legislation by the competent authorities** in our country. In general, a significant decline in the transposition of directives by Member States was observed. Belgian transposition figures evolved in a similar fashion. In the scoreboard of 11 December 2016, Belgium exceeded the European permitted norm of 1%, with a score of 2.3%. **SOLVIT Belgium** (which forms part of the DGE) processed 111 dossiers. 66 cases concerned problems faced by a Belgian citizen or company in another Member State, the other 45 dossiers concerned complaints against a Belgian government department. 88.9% of the problems were adequately resolved, thanks to the mediation of Solvit.

In 2016, the European Union carried out further implementation of the common communication priorities. Significant emphasis was also placed on communication about Europe towards citizens in Belgium. In collaboration with the Europe Direct information centres and the Representation of the Commission in Belgium, the fifth edition of Europe Day was celebrated under the slogan "Our Europe: yesterday, today and tomorrow". In April and November, two educational events were organised once again in the Egmont Palace, under the title "*Over Europa praten: dat doen we samen*" (Let's talk about Europe together). 54 secondary schools with a total of 1,322 participants were able to debate and conduct a dialogue with Minister Didier Reynders. The brand-new app about Europe developed by the DGE in 2015, "The European Union on the map", was further promoted during the academic year 2015-2016. This game tests young people's knowledge of the European Union, and is used as an educational tool in addition to the paper version of the self-adhesive puzzle "*Help build the European Union*" which was also updated at the end of 2016.

This report briefly outlines the primary activities of the Union in 2016. For a more comprehensive overview, the report from the institutions themselves could provide a useful starting point.

Bernard Hauwen
Director-General for European Affairs a.i.
DGE

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I. The Union's institutional framework

The United Kingdom decides to leave the Union

On 19 February 2016, the European Council reached an agreement regarding a new arrangement for the United Kingdom within the European Union. Based on this agreement, the British Prime Minister Cameron led a campaign for continued British membership. The agreement, which included a number of difficult adjustments to the free movement of persons (restrictions in access to social benefits), would only be implemented if the British people voted for further membership. However, on 23 June 2016, a majority of 51.9% of the British people voted for the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. The United Kingdom's departure from, and establishment of a new relation with the European Union has far-reaching consequences for our country in all areas which fall under the aegis of the Union. Prime Minister Cameron immediately resigned after the referendum, and was succeeded on 13 July by Theresa May, who emphasised that Brexit actually meant Brexit. The British government subsequently announced that it would initiate the withdrawal procedure, enshrined in Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, by March 2017 at the latest, with a formal notification of its intention to leave the Union. To this end, the Treaty anticipates a negotiation period of 2 years.

As early as 29 June 2016, the remaining 27 Member States emphasised that there was no possibility of negotiations prior to formal notification, and that access to the internal market required acceptance of the four freedoms. The 27 Heads of State and Government reiterated these principles on 15 December, and established a number of agreements with regards to the division of roles between the institutions during negotiations. The Commission will conduct the negotiations on behalf of the Union, and Frenchman Michel Barnier has been appointed as chief negotiator. He will systematically report to the European Commission, the Council, and its preparatory bodies. Since September, the Directorate-General Coordination and European Affairs (DGE) of the FPS Foreign Affairs has organised a series of sectoral meetings on the consequences of Brexit. These meetings have made it possible to draw up an initial inventory of the questions which need to be resolved, as well as our own concerns.

Inter-institutional agreement on "Better law-making"

On 13 April, the new inter-institutional agreement on better law-making between the three institutions was signed. Considerable attention was given to its implementation, with in particular a new, more inclusive approach in determining the work programme for the coming work year, for which the three institutions signed a joint declaration in December. In addition, work continued on agreements relating to information sharing during the negotiation of international conventions, agreements on the use of delegated acts, and the creation of a shared database with legal cases.

II. Economic and Financial Affairs

Economic and Monetary Union

In 2015, work began on deepening the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) on the basis of the **Five Presidents' Reports**. With regards to the first phase of the report - "**deepening by doing**" (1 July 2015 – 30 June 2017), important progress was made on two fronts in 2016. For example, on 20 September 2016, the Council published a recommendation in which Member States were called on to establish **National Productivity Boards**. In addition, on 19 October 2016, the official appointment took

place of the president and members of the **European Budget Committee**, which is designed to strengthen multilateral budget supervision in the Eurozone.

Banking Union

The discussions regarding the proposal of the European Commission for a **European Deposit Guarantee Scheme**, as published in November 2015, were continued in 2016. In June, the Council reached an agreement regarding a **roadmap for the completion of the banking union** and agreed to a **legislative package with risk mitigation measures** which was published on 23 November 2016. Discussions regarding risk-sharing were subsequently continued. The package amends four existing legislative measures, contains clarification of the Bank recovery and resolution Directive, and more specifically, anchors the final provisions of the Basel III agreement.

Capital Markets Union (CMU)

In September, the European Commission decided to publish a new communication on the CMU, entitled "**Accelerating reform**". The communication called for swift completion of the initial measures proposed in the Action Plan 2015. In addition, the Council and Parliament reached an agreement at the start of December with regards to modernising the **Prospectus Directive**.

European Semester 2016

The European Semester 2016 started in November 2015 with the publication of the Annual Growth Survey and a series of recommendations for the euro area. In February, the European Commission published a series of country reports for each Member State, analysing their economic and social policies. They found that **there is no longer a macro-economic imbalance in Belgium**. In May, the Commission presented the Country-specific recommendations for the next 12 to 18 months. The recommendations were approved by the European Council in June and adopted by the Ecofin Council in July.

Tax system

At the end of January, the European Commission presented a **package of measures against tax avoidance** based on the 15 action points of the **OECD** against Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (**BEPS**). At the end of June, the Council approved a directive laying down rules against tax avoidance (**ATAD**) which has a direct impact on the functioning of the internal market.

On 25 October, the European Commission put forward a proposal (**ATAD 2**) with a view to measures against **hybrid mismatches**, this time with regards to countries which are not members of the European Union. Despite extensive technical negotiations, Member States have so far been unable to agree on a general approach.

After the Commission had first put forward a proposal for a **Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base (CCCTB)** before withdrawing it, it put forward a new two-step proposal on 25 October. In the first stage, the Common **Corporate Tax Base (CCTB)** would be realised in practice, and the second phase would involve its **Consolidation (CCCTB)**.

European Fund for Strategic Investments

The **European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI)** is the first pillar and also financial arm of the Investment Plan for Europe, and relates to financial aspects. It was set up in June 2015 and has achieved good results, to the extent that it realised 52% of the total target investment figure in December. As such, on 14 September, the Commission proposed **extending its term to 2020** and **increasing its financial capacity** from 315 to **500 billion euro**. The text took account of criticism regarding **additionality** and the **geographical coverage** of the Fund. The Ecofin Council reached an agreement regarding the extension of the EFSI. On the subject of investments, Eurostat and Epec published "**A Guide to the Statistical Treatment of PPPs**" on 29 October with the aim of clarifying the statistical handling of public-private partnerships.

Multiannual Financial Framework

In September, the Commission presented a **mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020** in which the resources for **investments and migration** in particular were increased. In December, the Council reached an agreement on a common position, except for a reservation on the part of Italy which still needs to be lifted. The agreement covers top-ups amounting to 6.009 billion euro instead of 6.334 billion, the amount which the Commission had initially proposed. Belgium took swift action to limit the impact of the mid-term review of Member States' financial contributions as much as possible, due to the budgetary pressures currently encountered by many Member States.

By reallocating resources, the budget impact for all Member States amounts to **5.064 billion euro** and **around 58 million euro for Belgium**, instead of the 80 million contained in the initial proposals of the Commission. An agreement was also reached regarding aspects of **flexibility, for which the instruments will be used further, with due observance of the ceiling of the Multiannual Financial Framework**. However, Italy still needs to rally behind the Commission's position, as does the European Parliament, the second branch of the budget authority.

Budget 2017

The **budget 2017** will be drawn up in conjunction with the revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework, in the sense that elements of this revision are included in it, although they were negotiated separately. On 17 November, the Council and the Parliament reached agreement on **commitments**, which amount to **157.858 billion euro**, and **payments**, which amount to **134.490 billion euro** for 2017. The Belgian contribution to the 2017 budget totals **2.948 billion euro**, whereby we retain a margin, in comparison with the original draft budget 2017, of **58.49 million euro**. This margin needs to be enough to cover measures which are not covered in the budget, but which were added in 2017: 500 million euro for the Youth Employment Initiative, 275 million euro for the European Fund for Sustainable Development, and a contribution to the solidarity fund for the earthquakes in Italy.

III. Employment and Social Affairs

Workers' rights

At the insistence of several like-minded countries, including Belgium, the Commission put forward a proposal in March for a **targeted revision of directive 96/71 on the**

posting of workers. The proposal is intended to ensure equal conditions for remuneration and competition, both for companies which post workers and local companies in a host Member State. However, the Working Group activities regarding the social questions were hampered, given that this initiative is **politically sensitive**. For example, there is a deep **divide between the Member States who support a revision of the rules on posting – including Belgium – for the purposes of combating unfair competition and better protecting workers' rights**, and a small group of Member States who are strongly opposed to a revision of the current rules, fearing negative consequences for their workers who are posted abroad.

Moreover, in May 2016, the **national parliaments of 11 Member States** initiated a **yellow card procedure** since the proposal **was apparently in conflict with the subsidiarity principle**. The Commission finally reacted to this procedure on 20 July, and kept the original proposal. Nonetheless, the political positions which were defended in the Council regarding the revision of the directive largely appear to have evolved favourably since the EPSCO Council of 8 December 2016.

Belgium made considerable efforts to support the revision of the 'posting of workers' directive, and decided, along with a group of like-minded Member States, to take a united position on the basis of common priorities, including the application of the key concept of remuneration from the first day of posting, or the fight against so-called 'letterbox companies', and abuses when workers are posted.

Employment policy

In June, the European Commission approved the **New Skills Agenda for Europe**, which outlines its vision of the strategic importance of skills in supporting employment, growth and competitiveness. The cross-cutting aim of the agenda is to help strengthen the skills of European citizens and provide support for the development of skills which are matched to the current needs of the job market. The Commission proposes **10 actions** which will be implemented in the coming two years. The ministers who welcomed this initiative at the EPSCO Council in October, were invited, along with the Employment Committee (EMCO), to a discussion on the initiative. As a result, Belgium stressed the importance of 'e-skills', the value of informal skills, and identifying future jobs.

Social questions and social integration

On 2 December 2015, the Commission proposed the so-called **Accessibility Act**, a *directive proposal on the mutual adjustment of the legal and administrative provisions of Member States regarding accessibility requirements for products and services*. Under the Dutch and Slovakian presidencies, a total of 16 meetings took place within the Working Party on Social Questions. This proposal for a legislative act **specifies the common requirements regarding the accessibility of certain key products and services** for persons with a disability, and is intended to deepen the internal market and exploit its potential for the benefit of companies, and citizens with a disability or a functional limitation.

Despite the efforts made during successive presidencies, **many delegations have not yet approved the substantive basis of this initiative**, specifically due to its technical nature and **broad scope**. The vast majority of Member States therefore maintain a general scrutiny reservation with regards to the Commission's proposal, and ask that **certain aspects which already fall under a sectoral directive**,

including transportation, media services or audiovisual services, are **excluded** from the scope of the directive proposal.

In addition, the Commission published a Communication in March of a first draft of the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, although the intentions of the Commission remain vague. The initiative is clearly very broad, and is in line with the Five Presidents' Report on the deepening of the EMU. In the first instance, it is intended to **increase social convergence within the euro area**, on the understanding that **the Member States which are not members of the euro area can voluntarily join the initiative**. At the same time, the Commission held a broad public consultation on this issue, which was concluded on 31 December 2016. The results of this were taken into account for the elaboration of the pillar, which will presumably be proposed at the start of 2017.

IV. Justice and Home Affairs (JHA)

Justice

In the area of data protection, the **EU-US Umbrella Agreement** was signed in 2016. The agreement, for which negotiations had been conducted since 2011, allows for a protective framework for the exchange of personal data for police and judicial purposes. Furthermore, work continued on coordinating the EU position within the Council of Europe with regards to the revision of Convention 108 on the protection of personal data.

In the area of criminal law, multiple dossiers were handled. After a long impasse, an agreement was reached on the directive on the fight against fraud to the Union's financial interests (**PIF directive**). On the issue of establishing a **European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO)**, significant progress was made. A compromise text was as good as finalised. It did however become clear that not all Member States will participate, for which the enhanced cooperation procedure will probably be used. The purpose of the EPPO is to tackle criminality which damages the financial interests of the EU.

A general approach was achieved on adjusting the **terrorism directive**, with the aim of combating new forms of terrorism and the threat from foreign terrorist fighters. With regards to **e-evidence and encryption**, which are essential in optimising the admissibility of digital evidence and investigation possibilities regarding the internet and telecommunications, progress was made on the impact of encryption in criminal procedures.

In the area of civil law, multiple issues were likewise discussed. A resolution was made which authorises enhanced cooperation with regards to **matrimonial property regimes registers and registered international partnerships**.

In the area of **contract law**, the Council approved the basic principles and political approaches with regards to the directive proposal on acquiring **data with numerical content**. Orientation was also given to the future activities. In the area of **family law**, negotiations were started for the proposal to revise Regulation Brussels IIa.

Internal security

Following new attacks in Paris (November 2015), Brussels (March 2016) and Nice (July 2016), the Council decided that the implementation of measures from the

European Council Statement of 12 February 2015 on anti-terrorism needed to be accelerated. The attacks on the Christmas market in Berlin (December 2016) also highlighted the relevance of a uniform and efficient EU response to the terrorist threat.

In 2016, many resolutions were taken in the fight against terrorism. In the area of **information exchange and interoperability**, the European Counter Terrorism Centre was set up within Europol in January. It is intended to vastly improve information exchange and cooperation between the national anti-terror services. The **PNR directive (Passenger Name Record)** was formally adopted in April, and provides for the establishment of a European Passenger Name Record, for the purpose of preventing, detecting, investigating and prosecuting terrorist offences and serious crime. With regards to **strengthening the Schengen framework** and the control of external borders, an agreement was reached at the end of 2016 on adapting the Schengen Borders Code. As such, anyone entering or leaving the Schengen zone (via air, sea or land) will now be systematically checked in all relevant databases. With regards to the **fight against radicalisation on the Internet**, the Commission organised the second assembly of the Internet Forum, at the end of 2016. An agreement was also reached at the end of 2016 regarding the adjustment of the **Firearms Directive**.

At the informal Bratislava Summit in September, significant attention was given to internal security. In the Declaration, calls were made for further intensification of the cooperation and information exchange between security services, the establishment of ETIAS (EU Travel Information and Authorisation System) and a systematic effort against radicalisation, and to bolster prevention.

Migration

Among other things, 2016 was characterised by the implementation of the resolutions concluded in late 2015 regarding **resettlement and relocation**. In March 2016, the **EU-Turkey Statement** was presented, which was intended to stem irregular migration from Turkey to the EU, and replace it with legal methods of resettlement for refugees (through the 1:1 scheme). Arrivals in Greece have subsequently decreased.

In May, a recommendation of the Council was approved to allow the Member States who since the autumn of 2015 had started **border checks at their internal borders** in response to the uncontrolled secondary migration flows, to continue these checks within a European framework. This recommendation was extended by three months in December.

In the spring, the Council approved the extension of Frontex's mandate, which was transformed into a **European Border and Coast Guard**. The primary aim of the European Border and Coast Guard is to ensure European-integrated management of the external borders. The new Border and Coast Guard entered into force in October, and will be fully developed in the coming year.

With a view to further strengthening the external borders, additional legislative proposals were initiated. Discussions are currently underway. An agreement on the establishment of an **Entry-Exit System (EES)** needs to be reached with the European Parliament before June 2017. At the end of 2016, a proposal for a regulation was also made, regarding the establishment of an **EU Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS)**. An agreement needs to be reached with the Parliament in 2017 in this respect.

In the area of visas, an agreement was concluded in the autumn regarding an **enhanced visa suspension mechanism**.

The Commission also put forward several legislative proposals to reform the **Common European Asylum System**. A partial general approach on the part of the Council was adopted in December with regards to Eurodac, as was the case, just before the end of the year, for the EASO (European Asylum Support Office). Eurodac is the information system which was introduced to compare the digital fingerprints of asylum seekers and illegal immigrants, meaning that it can be determined which Member State needs to investigate the asylum application.

The discussions on transposing the procedure regulations and the Qualification Directive, and the revision of the Reception Directive, are all still ongoing. The most difficult discussion concerns the reform of the Dublin system. There is still no agreement between Member States on the acceptance of the mandatory distribution of asylum seekers, and finding the right balance in terms of solidarity. Conclusions were approved regarding a **European Integration Action Plan**.

From summer onwards, the emphasis was on the **external dimension of migration**. A new framework was established regarding **migration partnerships** for countries of origin and transit. By concluding bilateral partnerships, the EU intends to achieve concrete results as quickly as possible in the area of migration management and migration returns, thereby making use of all the policy lines and instruments at their disposal. In 2016, emphasis was placed on concluding partnerships with Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali and Ethiopia. These countries play an important role, particularly for the route via the central Mediterranean region.

V. Internal Market, Competitiveness, Industry, Telecommunications, Transport, Application of European law by Belgium (Transposition – SOLVIT – EU Pilot)

V.1 Internal market, Competitiveness, Industry, Telecommunications, Transport

In October 2015, the Commission announced the strategy for the single market for goods and services, highlighting that European integration is not yet an unqualified success, as can be ascertained by the persistent obstacles or the incorrect application of many of the existing rules, particularly in the services sector. Further deepening of integration was therefore once again on the agenda in 2016: the sharing economy was developed and clarified as a new economic model. The emphasis was placed on SMEs and start-ups, and specifically on smoother access to finance. Another working point was better access to regulated professions, which took shape with the introduction of the European Professional Card.

Competitiveness in the European Union was the subject of continuing research by the Council, particularly from the perspective of making transport carbon-free and developing e-skills. Emphasis was placed on an integrated approach which encompasses both the traditional business sectors and SMEs/start-ups, but is also focused on education (e-skills) and market-focused R&D.

Unity was lacking with regards to the place of **industrial policy** on the European agenda. Among a number of Member States, including Belgium, there was a concern that this policy would no longer be part of the working programme of the Commission in 2017, since nothing tangible had materialised since the repeated calls in 2013. The

Commission itself is of the opinion that industrial policy makes a contribution to competitiveness, especially in the defence and aerospace sectors, in a specific context in which the European Union has to deal once again with a crisis in the steel sector which makes wide-ranging efforts to establish value chains. Another point on the European agenda was creating a stable and predictable operating climate for energy-intensive business sectors.

To stimulate growth and competitiveness in Europe, the Commission will make additional efforts to develop the **internal market**. This development took a distinctly **digital** turn when the Commission approved the 'e-commerce' strategy in May. This is focused on providing smoother access for consumers and businesses to digital goods and services, therefore not only boosting the digital economy, but also contributing to the development of networks and services.

One of the large-scale reforms initiated by the co-legislators is the reform of the regulations on cross-border e-commerce, in order to achieve a harmonisation of the rules, the cross-border delivery of parcels via greater price transparency and regulatory supervision of the market, the prevention of unjustified geographic obstacles which hinder access to websites in other Member States, or which consists of requesting different prices depending on the domicile of the customer. Furthermore, efforts were also made to reform European legislation on copyright, with a number of proposals on the cross-border use of digital content (transferability) and the fight against infringements of intellectual property rights. With a VAT proposal, the Commission wanted sellers to incorporate one electronic registration and payment system, and establish a common threshold for start-ups. For many of the issues which had incurred delays, effective working contacts (good timing) with the European Parliament was a decisive factor.

The activities in the area of **telecommunications** were focused on fostering the coordination and management of the radio spectrum (using the 700 MHz band for mobile services), investing in ultra-fast broadband networks, and improving the institutional framework and regulations (Electronic Communications Code). A revision of the audiovisual media services directive is also planned, which in particular is intended to encourage European productions. The privacy directive will also be revised, which will have an effect on the processing of personal data. Finally, a new Council Working Party will look into the numerous challenges in the area of cyber security.

The European digital economy is a byword for the free flow of data. For example, Europe intends to work towards a new freedom of data for which the protection of personal data is not applicable, with due respect of public order and security.

The development of **e-skills**, which is highly rated by Belgium, is an important priority which includes, inter alia, an action plan for online government services.

For the digital issue, which is sensitive from a technical and political perspective, Belgium has generally advocated an ambitious and coherent approach with simple (simplified) regulations which are future-proof and technology neutral, and which do not entail an unnecessary burden for businesses. Belgium would therefore like to see harmonisation where possible, and a better application of the principle of mutual recognition. Our country considers the free flow of data to be essential, and fully supports the integral development of a digital internal market in which a central role is assigned to citizens, whose trust needs to be strengthened, and for businesses.

The Council once again expressed its intention to work towards a **European Patent with Unitary Effect** as an instrument for growth and employment, and towards a Unified Patent Court (UPC), for which a local section will be established in Belgium.

With regards to the **transport market**, important issues from the time of the Barroso Commission were settled in 2016. This was the case in particular for the fourth rail package, which includes a technical and political component, and has been on the table since the end of 2013. After nearly two years of negotiations, the Member States finally reached an agreement in the Council in October 2015 (general approach). Things subsequently moved fast and the round of negotiations with the European Parliament was completed as early as April. The most sensitive points of the political component concerned the balance between the extent and pace of the opening up to competition, which implied the possible continuation of a direct awarding of public service contracts, the maintaining of the integrated structures (DB or SNCF) and the capacity to ensure fair competition, and the consequences for the smaller national networks, etc.

With regards to air transport, an agreement on the draft regulation for passenger rights appeared to be unfeasible, since the positions of two Member States with regards to the territorial scope of the regulation were irreconcilable. There is still concern regarding the safety and protection of means of transport, specifically in the area of drones, the use and protection of passenger data and competition between external partners.

V.2 Application of European law by Belgium: Transposition - SOLVIT-EU PILOT

The efficient application of EU law, via the **prompt and accurate transposition** of European directives, is vital for the European Union in order to achieve its aims in the Treaties. In Belgium, each governmental body is responsible for the transposition of European directives within their sphere of competence. The **general follow-up and coordination** of the transposition process of the different governmental bodies is ensured at the administrative level by the Directorate-General Coordination and European Affairs (DGE) at the FPS Foreign Affairs.

Transposition results: unfavourable evolution

At the start of the year, a significant deterioration in the transposition of directives by Member States was observed at the European level. Belgium followed the same trend. Our country contended with a transposition backlog of 2.8% (or 29 late directives) as of 12 June 2016, a clear regression compared with November 2015, when Belgium had a transposition backlog of 1.1%. When the scoreboard was closed on 11 December 2016, Belgium had achieved a score of 2.3% (23 late directives) thanks to major efforts. Despite these efforts, the permitted European standard of 1% was consequently exceeded for the third semester in a row. In addition, Belgium still needs to transpose one directive that has a backlog of more than two years. The European Commission operates a zero-tolerance policy in this regard.

SOLVIT

The Belgian SOLVIT centre was part of the mediation network which the European Commission set up in 2002. There is a similar centre in every Member State. As part of the European Economic Area (EEA) there are also centres in Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein. SOLVIT is intended to provide solutions to citizens and businesses in

the event that a government body in another Member State applies European legislation incorrectly.

The Belgian SOLVIT centre ended 2016 with the resolution of 111 cases, of which 88.9% were settled favourably. The centre handled 66 Home cases (a problem in another Member State) and 45 Lead cases (a problem with a government body in Belgium).

EU PILOT

If the European Commission considers EU law has either been transposed or is currently executed incorrectly, it will ask the Member State to transpose the legislation accordingly or apply it correctly via the EU Pilot system, an informal and confidential online information exchange system. In 2016, a total of 31 EU Pilot cases were opened by the European Commission against Belgium. 28 of these cases are still ongoing, 2 were concluded positively and 1 was concluded negatively (for which an infringement procedure is expected). It is estimated that Belgium has managed to conclude 65 to 70% of the total number of cases positively, and in so-doing, avoid an official infringement procedure.

Actions taken in 2016 to optimise transcription practice in Belgium

In practice, Belgium often plays a leading role in negotiations, but our country lags behind when it comes to transposition. It is often the case that **the drafting of transcription texts starts (too) late**. Encouraging closer contact between the negotiators and the future transcribers is one of the most important action points for optimising/improving Belgian transcription practice. During the coordination meetings within the DGE, the feasibility of the transposition deadline must be discussed and awareness must be raised among the different transposition actors. Via an update of the Eurtransbel database, all draft legislative texts are communicated to the departments which are potentially competent for transcription at a very early stage. To facilitate the daily operations of all the bodies involved, a detailed manual on the Belgian transcription process has been elaborated and distributed among the Presidents of the two chambers of parliament, the Presidents of all FPSs and PPSs and all federal and federated Euro-coordinators.

VI. Climate and Energy

The European agenda on climate was dominated by the follow-up of the global Paris Agreement, and the climate conference in Paris (COP21). One of the main challenges in this respect was the swift ratification of the agreement by the EU and its Member States. After China and the United States both announced that they would ratify the Paris Agreement at the G20 Summit at the start of September, the pressure on the EU increased. There was a risk that the agreement would enter into force at the start of the Marrakech climate conference (COP22) and that discussions would take place regarding its implementation, without the EU being able to fully participate. As such, the Slovakian presidency convened an extraordinary Environment Council on 30 September. The Council approved a resolution for accelerated ratification on behalf of the EU. After the European Parliament had given the green light, and India also ratified the agreement on 2 October, the dual threshold was reached, meaning that the agreement entered into force on 4 November and therefore before the start of COP22.

Besides the focus on the follow-up of the Paris Agreement, the EU also continued to work on its own internal policy, in particular the realisation of the Energy Union and the implementation of the climate section of the 2030 package. The main evolution in this respect in 2016 was **twofold**:

1. Handling of the proposal to revise the European Emissions Trading System (ETS). The Dutch Presidency limited itself to an orientation debate at the Environment Council in June, the Slovakian presidency on the other hand proved to be more ambitious and worked towards a general approach (political agreement) at the Environment Council of 19 December. Disagreement on the elaboration of a "*carbon leakage*" framework, in order to adequately protect European industry, and the funds which were set up to help the new Member States in their transition to modern and low-carbon energy systems, prevented an agreement being reached within the Council.

2. On 20 July 2016, the European Commission came up with a draft regulation on effort-sharing for the non-ETS sectors (effort-sharing regulation). As such, national targets were imposed on Member States for the transport, waste, buildings and agriculture sectors. For our country, it concerns a reduction target of 35% by 2030 (compared with 2005).

The **European Council of March 2015** approved the establishment of an Energy Union which consists of five pillars: enhancing supply security, completing the internal market, increasing energy efficiency and reducing demand, making the economy carbon-free (link with the climate) and fostering research and development.

The legislative work began in February with the **gas supply** package, to which an external dimension was linked, with a view to better supply security. Only limited progress was made on this issue, in which compliance with the *acquis* of the Intergovernmental Agreements (IGA) and with the trade agreements was incorporated, as well as the revision of the Gas Security Directive of 2010. At the Energy Council in December 2016, work was resumed with a view to an agreement in the first semester of 2017.

In November, the Commission presented an essential element to fulfil the commitments of the COP 21 and to transpose the European Council rules in the area of energy from October 2014. It concerns an extensive package of "clean energy" legislative proposals, which are intended to enable the European Union to make a swifter transition to a clean and decentralised energy supply system, by encouraging energy efficiency and the development of renewable energy sources, and ensuring consumer participation by reforming the electricity market.

VII. Agriculture and Fisheries, Public Health and Environment

Agriculture

The focus was on the continuing crisis affecting the dairy, pork and fruit and vegetable markets. New support measures were announced, specifically with regards to the voluntary limiting of dairy production. In addition, the Council made a thorough assessment of international trade issues, including the negotiations with Mercosur, the exclusion of sensitive agricultural products from the EU's supply, and the TTIP and safeguard mechanisms. In this context, the Commission published its report on the cumulative effect of the concessions in the free trade agreements, and the need to protect sensitive products, as well as markets which are sensitive for EU agriculture.

The Council used the report from the Agricultural Markets Taskforce, which was set up in January 2016, as a guideline for its activities in strengthening the negotiating position of farmers in food production chains, and the fight against anti-competitive trade practices. Although some progress was achieved, an agreement on revising regulations for organic farming did not materialise. With regards to the contribution of agriculture in the fight against climate change, discussions were held on the proposals for effort-sharing and soil use, in particular regarding the emphasis on the targets for agriculture and the sharing of flexibility.

The Council adopted conclusions on food loss and wastage, and on antimicrobial resistance. In addition, the Council approved the basic regulations in the area of animal health, plant health, zootechnical legislation and official controls. Work also continued in the areas of medicines and fertilisers. Finally, the European Platform for animal welfare was also set up.

Fisheries

The multiannual plan for several species, with the aim of sustainable fisheries management in the Baltic Sea, was approved. In addition, consultations were organised regarding the multiannual plan for the North Sea, which concerns Belgium. As a result of the approval of the regulation on deep-sea species, a fishing ban now applies lower than a depth of 800 metres in the North eastern area of the Atlantic Ocean. Moreover, agreement was reached on a long-term plan for cod fishing. This is almost comparable to a revision of the regulation on technical measures, to encourage more selective fishing. At the end of the year, agreement was also reached for 2017 regarding the fishing possibilities in EU waters and as such, Belgian priorities were largely taken into account.

Public Health

With regards to medical aids, a final compromise was achieved between the Council and the European Parliament in June 2016, under the Dutch presidency. The Health Council adopted conclusions regarding antimicrobial resistance (or AMR for short), one of the primary threats to health. The conclusions include a call to concrete action, with the request to Member States to draw up a national action plan against AMR by the middle of 2017 (containing measurable objectives), starting from the *one health* approach - with a focus on both veterinary and human health.

Rebalancing the pharmaceutical system in the EU and its Member States was the second crucial theme. The Health Council adopted conclusions in June. With regards to the pharmaceutical system, the Dutch presidency wanted to find the right balance between fostering innovation on the one hand, and ensuring the availability and affordability of medicines on the other.

Finally, the presidency adopted conclusions in which a 'roadmap for action' regarding food products was ratified. Reference was made to the need to make it easier for consumers to make healthy choices, by ensuring the food products are improved. Member States were asked to draw up national plans, with an inter-sectoral approach (involvement of agriculture, economy, health, etc.). The Commission will need to support this process by evaluating benchmarks and implementing new ones, among other things.

The Health Council of 8 December debated the role of health in the context of the European Semester. This discussion had previously been covered at the high-level Working Group for Health. Over the years, cooperation developed between this Working Group and the Social Protection Committee. Within the Council, there was general agreement on continuing to include health in this process, provided there is respect for national competences within the current structures.

Environment

In addition to the climate issues, the Environment Council also gave attention to the issues of the circular economy, the trade in wild animal species, sustainable water management, air quality, biodiversity and chemical substances in 2016. Regarding the circular economy package and specifically the action plan, the Council adopted conclusions regarding the action plan of the Commission in June. Our country played an active role in the discussions. Under the Dutch and Slovakian presidency, the proposals to revise waste legislation - the legislative section of the circular economy package - were discussed within the Council, but made little concrete progress.

With regards to the air quality issue (NEC), the Council and European Parliament reached a final compromise at the end of June 2016. This legislation will impose national ceilings on Member States for various pollutants, which will need to be achieved by 2020 and by 2030. These ceilings should both result in a general objective to reduce premature deaths. In the area of biodiversity, the Commission presented an action plan for the trade in wild animal species in February 2016. The Dutch presidency picked this up as a priority theme, and adopted conclusions at the Environment Council in June.

After the issue of sustainable water management was placed on the agenda during the informal Environment Council in July 2016, the presidency adopted conclusions at the Environment Council in October, as a follow-up. Above all, the conclusions are a signal to the European Commission to reflect thoroughly and in good time on the parameters of the future water framework directive after 2027, bearing in mind the evaluation of the current policy framework. Since the last conclusions regarding chemical products, human health and the environment in 2009, numerous initiatives have been started up at the EU and international level. Consequently, the presidency submitted conclusions to outline the state of play, and also to urge the Commission to transpose the provisions of the 7th Environmental Action Plan regarding chemical substances, and a European strategy for a non-toxic living environment.

VIII. European Trade Policy

Multilateral

At the multilateral level, 2016 started with the follow-up of the 10th Ministerial Conference (CM10) of the World Trade Organisation. Specifically, there was a relaxation of the rules for the Least Developed Countries with regards to preferential origin and preferential treatment for their service providers. In the meantime, the Council also examined the post-Nairobi agenda to draw up a balanced list of the subjects which the now 64 members of the WTO need to agree on at the CM11, which will be held in Buenos Aires in December 2017, to determine stricter rules for world trade. A number of possibilities have already been explored to date, including research by the European Union, which is supported by Belgium, into initiatives to reduce fisheries subsidies and a framework for e-commerce.

Plurilateral

As the final element of the agreement reached in Nairobi on 16 December 2015, the Council approved the Information Technology Agreement (ITA) on behalf of the European Union on 17 June. As such, more products will eventually be eligible for customs duty abolition in 50 countries, including the 28 EU Member States, compared to the number of products for which the agreement was reached in 1996. Furthermore, more discussions were held throughout the year, especially in Geneva, regarding the Environmental Goods Agreement (EGA) and the Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA). With regards to the EGA, the parties left without an agreement. Belgium had at least fully supported this agreement, given that it is in line with our country's environmental objectives. Moreover, the European Union had demonstrated its involvement in the person of Commissioner Malmström, who exercised the role of co-chair of the Ministerial Meeting of 4 December 2016. However, there is still hope among the parties that work can be resumed in the run-up to CM11. Regarding TiSA, an agreement did not materialise either, despite the second revised offer presented by the European Union on 17 November 2016.

Bilateral

With regards to bilateral trade agreements, the efforts of the European Union were focused inter alia on continuing negotiations with the United States on the TTIP. These negotiations have now been suspended pending discussions with the new American government (although clear progress was made during the 15th round of negotiations in October, particularly with regards to cooperation in the area of sector-specific legislation, Belgium and the European partners believe that the negotiations are not yet sufficiently advanced to be able to start the final phase). In addition, attention lay on Mercosur (exchange of offers in May, for which certain defensive concerns, of Belgium in particular, were taken into account), on Japan (hope of completing the negotiations in the course of 2017 after 17 rounds of negotiation) and to the start of negotiations with Mexico, the Philippines and Indonesia.

In September, the European Union and its Member States signed an Economic Partnership Agreement with a number of countries of the Southern African Development Community, in particular with the aim of perpetuating European trade preferences granted to certain partners which are not part of the LDC group. At the end of October, the European Union and its Member States also proceeded to sign the CETA agreement with Canada. With regards to Belgium, the signing of this dual mixed agreement (in the European and Belgian sense), was preceded by an agreement within the Consultation Committee, relating to a range of statements to clarify the scope of the Agreement, its implementation and the various steps for ratification. On 11 November, the European Union and its Member States signed the Protocol of accession of Ecuador to the free trade agreement which the European Union concluded with Colombia and Peru in 2012.

Legislative framework

On 22 November 2016, the European Council and the European Parliament reached an agreement on a regulation setting up a Union system for self-certification of responsible importers of tin, tantalum and tungsten, their ores, and gold originating in conflict-affected and high-risk areas. This regulation, which is supported by Belgium, will enter into force in 2021 and is intended to put an end to the financing of armed groups and human rights violations resulting from trade in minerals from conflict areas. Another notable development following years of disagreement between Member

States was that Coreper achieved the qualified majority required to formalise the negotiating position of the Council on 13 December, regarding a proposal to modernise the trade protection instruments of the European Union. Belgium supports the negotiating position of the Council and is delighted that the negotiations with the European Parliament can finally begin, in order to provide the European Union with the means to tackle unfair trade practices.

Outreach

As part of the intensive political and social debate on the European Union's trade policy, the DGE increased its efforts in the area of transparency and public diplomacy. The reasons for this increase were the supporting work for the minister (in particular at his traditional meeting with the Federal Council for Sustainable Development on 22 February), the numerous requests on the part of economic actors and civil society, the participation in sessions with background information for the media, and the introduction in January of a reading room for the federal and federated members of Parliament to consult confidential documents.

IX. External European Union relations, Development Cooperation and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

IX.1 External relations

The tragic events in Belgium on 22 March partly helped ensure that the **terrorism issue** remained a constant and important feature within the external relations of the European Union in 2016. This was also the case for the **migration issue** which emphatically remained on the agenda of the Foreign Affairs Council, both in the composition of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and that of the Ministers for Development Cooperation.

Attention for both of these issues was also reflected in the special focus the European Union gave to **Neighbourhood** policy and the situation in **Syria, Iraq and Libya**. In the context of the Syrian issue, relations between the EU and **Russia** - which had already seriously deteriorated at the start of the Ukraine crisis - deteriorated further. At the end of 2016, partly prompted by the importance and need for a coherent and coordinated approach with regards to the migration issue, a discussion was initiated by High Representative/Vice President Mogherini on relations between the EU and **Africa**, partly in light of the 5th EU-Africa Summit which will be held in 2017.

The internal developments in Turkey ensured that the annual debate on **enlargement** and the conclusions to be adopted by the Council were on the cutting edge. The General Affairs Council of December was ultimately unable to adopt a general package of conclusions which was accepted by all Member States. In 2016, 4 negotiating chapters were opened with Montenegro (*there are now a total of 26 opened, including 2 which are provisionally closed*), 2 chapters with Serbia (*a total of 5 opened including 1 provisionally closed*) and 1 chapter opened with Turkey (*a total of 15 opened including 1 provisionally closed*). In February, Bosnia-Herzegovina officially submitted its request of accession to the EU. In September, the Council gave the Commission a recommendation to make preparations in this respect. As such, Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for European Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, handed over a detailed questionnaire to the Bosnian authorities.

With the "EU Global Strategy", of which the European Council took note in June, the EU demonstrated that it intends to be a **global player** and as such, except for the

Neighbourhood policy and the countries included in the enlargement and rapprochement process, also gives considerable attention to the **other regions in the world**. In addition to the launch of the debate on Africa, referred to above, mention can also be made of the 11th "Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM)" (15-16 July) at Ulan Bator, the "EU ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting" with the countries of South East Asia (13-14 October) and the meeting between the EU and the countries of Central and Latin America and the Caribbean at Santo Domingo (25-26 October). There was also a meeting of the "Gulf Cooperation Council" and Summit meetings with India, China and Canada.

With regards to **institutional matters**, this global focus of the EU was reflected in the signing of Framework agreements with New Zealand (5 October), Canada (30 October) and Cuba (12 December) and the initialling of the Agreement with Malaysia. On 25 October, the Agreement on the creation of an International EU-LAC Foundation was also signed.

2016 also witnessed the genuine initiation of debates on the question of the future partnership between the EU and **ACP Group** countries ("Africa, Caribbean and Pacific Ocean"). On 22 November, the European Commission and the European External Action Service issued a Joint Communication with a number of possible options for the future. This Communication will now form the basis for further discussions within the EU.

As is the case for all other spheres of EU policy, the elaboration, conceptualising and implementation of EU external policy finds itself in a new situation following the British Brexit referendum and the election of **Donald TRUMP** as President of the United States of America.

The "EU External Relations" Directorate of the Directorate-General Coordination and European Affairs also continued its programme of **internships** for candidate Member States. Internships were organised for diplomats and public officials from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Serbia.

IX.2 Development Cooperation

2016 was characterised by various new European initiatives in the area of cooperation. During the presentation of the global strategy for foreign and security policy, which will also be applicable to development cooperation, specific guidelines were provided for relations with third countries in the context of the **European agenda on migration**. These guidelines consisted of encouraging a holistic approach, with the incorporation of all policy measures and instruments, including development cooperation. The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Mogherini took the lead in realising this new approach, and in elaborating the "Migration Compacts" with five priority countries (Senegal, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Ethiopia) with the aim of increasing the high-level political dialogue with these countries, and encouraging the seizure and return of illegal immigrants.

At the EU emergency trust fund for stability and the tackling of the deeper causes of irregular migration and displacement in Africa, which was established at the Valletta Summit on 12 November 2015, a large number of projects were proposed which fall under one of the following three groups: Sahel and Lake Chad, the Horn of Africa and North Africa. Along with other Member States, Belgium insisted that the first Executive Council for this emergency trust fund be organised in 2016, in order to clarify the strategic guidelines in the context of the Migration Compacts.

Member States also agreed on the financing conditions of the *Facility for Refugees in Turkey*, for which the European Union will set aside 1 billion euro, and Member States 2 billion euro, for additional humanitarian aid for refugees in Turkey, and for the communities which receive them. This aid is primarily intended to meet immediate needs, by providing food, healthcare and education.

The discussions on the establishment of a new *European Fund for Sustainable Development - EFSD* resulted in a common position from the Council with regards to the specific legislation for the guarantee fund, which is intended to tackle the fundamental causes of migration by creating employment, fostering **investment**, and encouraging sustainable development in the partner countries in Africa and the EU neighbouring countries.

European current events in the area of cooperation were also given shape by the preparation of the new **European Consensus on Development**, which was on the agenda of the European Ministers for Development Cooperation during the meetings of the Development Cooperation department of the Foreign Affairs Council. The outcome of a public consultation and expert seminar were also included in the Commission's "Proposal for a new Consensus on Development. Our world, our dignity, our future". This proposal will be discussed in 2017 and will be the subject of a joint statement (Commission, European Parliament and Council) during the European Development Days in June 2017.

Under the **Dutch presidency**, the common position of the European Union was prepared with a view to the World Humanitarian Summit, which will be held in Istanbul in May. Emphasis was placed on access and protection, the relation between humanitarian aid, development cooperation and efficiency. Joint Programming received renewed attention in the conclusions of the Council, which made a recommendation for its intensification.

Under the **Slovakian presidency**, the priority went to negotiations for the legislation on EFSD referred to above, and to energy issues. The first report with the results of the cooperation was published during this semester. This report is based on the new "EU International Development and Cooperation results Framework" and is an important instrument for the European Union in terms of transparency, education and visibility. The common position of the EU for the "Second High Level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC)" was defended at the start of December 2016.

Finally, Belgium promoted **digitisation** in the cooperation at the European level, and consequently created a special dynamism. The Council then formulated its conclusions, which were supported by the Slovakian presidency. Digitisation was presented as a lever to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, in accordance with the Belgian vision. In 2017, a working document is expected from the European Commission regarding the cross-cutting integration of digitisation in the European Development Policy.

IX.3 The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

2016 was characterised by persistent crisis situations on both flanks of the EU, as well as the launch and implementation of the **Global Strategy**. High Representative Mogherini presented her Global Strategy at the European Council of 28 June 2016. After the updating of the European Security Strategy in 2008, the Global Strategy lays

out new guidelines in the context of a vastly changed security situation - a divided vision for joint action. The document was welcomed by the Foreign Affairs Council of 17 October, and emphasises the nexus between internal and external security. Furthermore, the need to increase the credibility and effectiveness of European external actions was highlighted.

For the practical elaboration of the Global Strategy, the priority first went to **implementation in the area of security and defence**. The Foreign Affairs Council of 14 November determined the level of ambition in the conclusions and established implementation measures to improve three core functions: the response to external conflicts and crises, capacity building of partner countries, and the protection of the Union and its citizens.

On 30 November, the European Commission presented the **"European Defence Action Plan"**, which proposes new financial instruments for capacity development and defence cooperation as a support for the European defence industry.

The Foreign Affairs Council of December ratified a joint list of 40 proposals for the implementation of the **EU-NATO** joint declaration in Warsaw. In December, the European Council emphasised the need for action to give the cooperation more shape.

The mandate of the **EUNAVFOR MED operation SOPHIA** was extended with two tasks: capacity building and training of the Libyan coast guard, and helping to apply the UN arms embargo to international waters off the Libyan coast. In the meantime, the political and security situation in Libya means that the **EUBAM Libya** mission cannot develop locally.

The **EUSEC RD Congo** mission, which has worked towards capacity building in the Congolese army since 2005, was ended on 30 June 2016. Two thirds of the functions were transferred to the PROGRESS programme of the European Development Fund.

In July 2016, the EUMAM RCA mission was succeeded by **EUTM RCA**, with a mandate for education, training and strategic advice for the armed forces of the Central African Republic as part of *"Security Sector Reform"*. The mandate of the **EUPOL Afghanistan** mission was ended after 9 years.

The mandate of **EULEX Kosovo** underwent a considerable reduction in the number of its executive functions, coupled to a halving of its staff. At the same time, preparations continued in The Hague for the establishment of **Kosovo Specialist Chambers** to prosecute specific crimes against humanity, war crimes, and other crimes under Kosovo law.

X. Presenting Europe

The Belgian EU communication policy consists of achieving a proactive approach in cooperation with the EU institutions. As such, the following initiatives were realised during 2016: the celebration of "Europe Day" for final year students in secondary education in Belgium on 9, 10 and 12 May; the organisation of centralised actions "Over Europa praten : dat doen we samen" (let's talk about Europe together) with final year students in secondary education in the Egmont Palace, the updating of the "Bouw mee aan de Europese Unie" (Help build the European Union) puzzle, and the online application for primary education in Belgium, the citizen dialogues, debates and the information campaigns by the Belgian Europe Direct network in cooperation with

the Europese Beweging (European Movement) and the support of the Foreign Affairs department.

The information network Europe Direct was actively deployed in 27 secondary schools as part of "*Europe Day*" in May, under the slogan "**Our Europe: yesterday, today and tomorrow**". On 12 May, Deputy Prime Minister Reynders gave an EU lecture in the "Don Bosco College" at Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe, while speakers from the Foreign Affairs department gave similar talks in **26** other secondary schools, across the educational networks.

Following on from the success of the first interactive centralised youth exchange with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for European Affairs Didier Reynders in Brussels in November 2015, educational information sessions were organised in the Egmont Palace in April and November under the title "**Over Europa praten : dat doen we samen**" (Let's talk about Europe together). **54** secondary schools with a total of **1,322 participants** engaged in dialogue with the minister about Europe, its institutions and the impact of these on day-to-day life.

At the end of 2016, **the existing self-adhesive puzzle "Help build the European Union"** by the Communication unit of the Directorate-General Coordination and European Affairs (DGE) of the FPS Foreign Affairs was updated. The layout was adapted in order to improve the educational use of the puzzle and generate interest in Europe among young people. The puzzle is available free of charge at all Europe Direct information centres, and at the Representation of the European Commission in Belgium.

COLOPHON

FPS Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation

Directorate-General Coordination and European Affairs (DGE)

Publisher:

Dirk ACHTEN

FPS Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation

Rue des Petits Carmes 15

1000 Brussels

diplomatie.belgium.be

Twitter: @ BelgiumMFA

Facebook: Diplomatie.Belgium

June 2017

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Legal depot: 0218/2017/003

