

18 months in the Service of Europe

Results of the Spanish-Belgian-Hungarian Trio Presidency

On the 1st of January 2010, the Spanish-Belgian-Hungarian Trio took over the task of the Presidency at a time of serious challenges and unforeseen turbulence. We had to demonstrate our ability to adapt ourselves to ever changing conditions and, at the same time, we had to work on our original objectives. The three Presidencies were deeply committed to accomplish more at European level. We needed a more united, a more integrated, competitive and social Europe built on a strong and sustainable economy, capable of facing global challenges. Our work was firmly driven by the idea to realize these values and we were all in agreement that the response to current challenges should strive for a stronger Europe.

The management of the aftermath of the financial and economic crisis has largely determined our work. In close collaboration with the Presidents of the European Council, the Commission and the Eurogroup, we had to deliver major and difficult decisions in the fields of economic governance and financial stability at a time of a sovereign debt crisis in the Eurozone. A new system of financial supervision was agreed and launched and a final decision on the package of reinforced economic governance is within reach. The first European Semester has been successfully concluded in due time, thus setting a precedent and greatly contributing both to future financial stability and to competitiveness in Europe.

It was our firm resolution to safeguard the stability of the common European currency: a European Financial Stability Facility was set up and a decision to amend the Treaty was taken to enable the establishment of a European Stability Mechanism with a view to preventing future sovereign debt crises. We made a qualitative step towards an economic union which complements the monetary union.

We have endeavoured to enhance the competitiveness of the European economy. Member States embraced the Europe 2020 Strategy for Jobs and Growth and agreed on measures aimed at strengthening the single market. Member States also agreed on the simplification of the regulatory and administrative environment for small and medium enterprises.

We reinforced the common policies of the European Union. Above all, the foundations of a common energy policy have been laid and the main features of the future of cohesion policy endorsed by Member States. It was agreed that cohesion policy is the main instrument for promoting overall harmonious development across the Union. With the adoption of the European Danube Strategy, Member States chose to promote cooperation and prosperity. The main orientations for a strong Common Agricultural Policy during the next Multiannual Financial Framework have been set.

Right from the outset, we set as an objective to advance European legislation on a wide range of issues with profound impact on the daily life of European citizens. New regulation has been adopted on providing food information to consumers. The EU citizens' right to request the Commission to initiate legislation became a real option; the application of 'the polluter pays' principle was further developed in the European legislation regarding environment and transport; and a directive on patients' rights in cross-border health care was adopted so as to enhance the freedom of choice of patients who seek treatment in another Member State. In other words, our ambition was to bring the Union closer to its citizens.

We have been intensively engaged in preserving and fostering the inclusive character of the European Union and in combating exclusion and violence against women. Member States committed themselves to implementing a European platform against poverty and social exclusion under the Europe 2020 Strategy. A European Framework for National Strategies on the inclusion of the Roma was adopted through which Member States will have to take action in the fields of education, employment, health and housing.

When the Trio leaves office, FRONTEX, the common European agency for the management of the external borders will have been reinforced while the freedom of movement has been reaffirmed as an essential acquis of the European Union.

The Trio ensured the continuation of the enlargement process. As a major success, accession negotiations with Croatia are to be concluded before the term of the Trio ends. Negotiations with Iceland were launched, and progress was made with Turkey. Furthermore, the European perspective of the Western Balkans was affirmed and several potential candidate states advanced their integration process.

While the conclusion of an ambitious, balanced and comprehensive multilateral trade agreement remained an EU priority throughout the trio Presidency, the EU also continued to pursue bilateral and regional trade agreements with key partners and signed a Free Trade Agreement with the Republic of Korea, the most ambitious trade agreement ever concluded by the Union.

Spain, Belgium and Hungary have fully realized the potential which the Trio Presidency collaboration has to offer. This teamwork, in close cooperation with the Commission and the European Parliament, can serve as a best practice for future Presidencies. Based on a common vision for a stronger and more integrated Europe, continuous consultations and a division of labour characterized by mutual trust have helped this Trio to lead Europe in rising to some of the greatest challenges she has faced in her postwar history. All this required high ambition and all-out effort. We worked together in a spirit of cooperation, partnership and friendship, hoping to contribute to a more innovative and stronger Europe. The results we may have achieved are the success of the entire European Union.

Budapest, June 29 2011