



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
NATIONAL COUNCIL

Plenary Meeting of the LXVI COSAC

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Videoconference

Background Note

Session I

**Achievements of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the
EU**

Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU 2021 - Achievements and the Current Situation

This is Slovenia's second Presidency of the Council of the EU. It took up the reins of the Presidency at a time when Europe and the world are facing the COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected people's health, had a major impact on economies and social life, and has restricted travel.

Under these circumstances, Slovenia prepared its six-month Presidency programme under the slogan of "Together. Resilient. Europe."

In the programme, the priorities are divided into four chapters:

1. The Resilience, Recovery and Strategic Autonomy of the European Union
2. Conference on the Future of Europe
3. A Union of the European Way of Life, the Rule of Law and Equal Criteria for All
4. A Credible and Secure European Union, Capable of Ensuring Security and Stability in its Neighbourhood

Slovenia will round off the work of the current Trio, which also includes Germany and Portugal, and pave the way for the next one with its initiatives and activities.

The emphasis is on ensuring an effective response to the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic and building resilience to possible future health crises. The coronavirus pandemic has revealed critical gaps in the capacity of the EU and its member states to address cross-border health emergencies. In response, key steps have been taken to create a European Health Union. In July, the Slovenian Presidency [reached a compromise between member states on updating the responsibilities of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control \(ECDC\) and on establishing new rules on cross-border health threats](#), which allowed negotiations with the European Parliament to start. In so doing, the Slovenian Presidency, which represents the Council of the EU in negotiations, has already managed to [reach an agreement on strengthening the European Medicines Agency \(EMA\)](#). There are concerted efforts to establish a new European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA).

Slovenia wants to use the political momentum to ensure that the EU is better prepared for different types of crises (natural disasters, uncontrolled migration flows, cyber threats, etc.). At their [informal meeting in July](#), the European Affairs ministers supported the efforts of the Slovenian Presidency towards a more comprehensive approach, particularly focusing on better crisis management coordination in the Council of the EU and on strengthening the resilience of the internal market and the Schengen Area. On this basis, the Presidency decided to prepare conclusions of the General Affairs Council in November. The focus is also on enhancing cyber resilience and establishing an updated, integrated and clear EU cybersecurity crisis management framework. This requires establishing a Joint Cyber Unit, a subject the Slovenian Presidency [addressed in the Council conclusions on exploring the potential of this initiative](#).

Slovenia continues to work toward European economic recovery based on the digital transformation and green transition. Finance ministers have started approving [national recovery and resilience plans and have already signed off on 22 of them](#). 17 countries are already eligible to receive funding from the Recovery and Resilience Facility, allowing for initial investments and reforms in member states. The European

Commission has already paid advances to these member states amounting to 13% of the grants awarded, for a total of €52.4 billion. Most of the projects focus on boosting the green transition and digital transformation, as well as on enhancing economic and social resilience.

Very intensive work is underway on the environment and the Green Deal. In July, [a deal was reached between the Council and the European Parliament on an amendment to the Aarhus Regulation](#), which aims to guarantee access to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to legal recourse in environmental matters. The climate and energy [Fit for 55](#) legislative package is being considered as a priority, with the aim of ensuring that the reinforced target of a 55% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2030, compared to 1990 levels, is reflected in binding European legislation in as balanced and coherent a way as possible. A swift agreement on the package is crucial for several reasons, including in response to rising energy prices in Europe, to which the Slovenian Presidency reacted immediately and is now taking further steps to support and mitigate the impact of high prices on consumers and the economy. As part of international climate negotiations, the EU Council [adopted conclusions](#) on the EU's mandate at the COP26 (UNFCCC) in an effort to reaffirm its commitment to scaling up the mobilisation of international climate financing and to invite other developed countries to increase their contributions between 31 October and 12 November in Glasgow. The country holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU, together with the European Commission, is also tasked [with representing the EU at the meeting in international relations, conducting negotiations with third countries, and coordinating EU member states](#). The Slovenian Presidency presented the EU's positions at the first part of the hybrid meeting of the contracting parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Kunming, China. By adopting the Kunming Declaration, the contracting parties committed to an ambitious global [biodiversity](#) framework with the aim of halting biodiversity loss by 2030 and getting it back on the path to recovery.

Slovenia continues to consider and prepare compromise proposals on the digital transformation, which is a key factor for Europe's recovery and resilience. The focus is on the negotiations on [the Digital Services Act](#) and [the Digital Markets Act](#). By adopting them the EU will create a new standard for regulating online platforms. The Slovenian Presidency has set itself the ambitious goal of reaching an agreement among the member states in the Council on both acts. The High-Level [Conference on AI: From Ambition to Action](#) was organised in a hybrid format, where participants mainly addressed [the Artificial Intelligence Act](#) published in April this year, which aims to improve the functioning of the internal market by establishing a uniform legal framework, in particular for the development, marketing and use of artificial intelligence in line with the Union's values. This is another priority of the Presidency. The event marked the official launch of the InTouchAI.eu international initiative, which will support and promote the EU's vision of a sustainable and trustworthy AI worldwide. The development of AI is also inextricably linked to data accessibility. To speed up their circulation and use, member states have agreed on [the Data Governance Act](#) and negotiations are currently underway with the European Parliament. [The adoption of the regulation on establishing the European High Performance Computing Joint Undertaking \(EuroHPC\)](#) represents an important step in strengthening technological autonomy, paving the way for the development of the next generation of supercomputers in Europe.

The Conference on the Future of Europe has entered a crucial period of thematic debates with the launch of the European Citizens' Panels. All four European Citizens' Panels have begun their work: (1) Stronger Economy, (2) European Democracy, (3)

Environment and Climate Change and (4) The EU in the World. Each of the four panels is composed of 200 randomly selected European citizens from 27 member states. The discussion considers contributions published by European citizens on [the Multilingual Digital Platform](#). At the end of October, the second plenary session of the conference took place at the European Parliament in Strasbourg. Through the Executive Board of the Conference, which is co-chaired by a Slovenian member of the Council, Slovenia managed to find an appropriate solution for inviting representatives of the Western Balkan region to the plenary debates. At the beginning of September, Slovenia also devoted the entire [16th edition of the Bled Strategic Forum](#) to a discussion on the future of Europe.

Based on [the European Commission's second annual report on the rule of law](#), the October session of the General Affairs Council held a general horizontal debate on the rule of law situation in the EU. On the proposal of the Slovenian Presidency, the debate focused on the institutional checks and balances amidst covid-19 with the attention to the roles and responsibilities of the respective branches of power. The agenda of the November meeting also includes a specific debate for the five member states, listed alphabetically, per protocol requirements.

During the first months, the presidency ensured an effective response to unforeseen events related to migration and security. In August, it organised an extraordinary meeting of interior ministers as part of the Council of the EU's Crisis Response Mechanism (IPCR) on the situation at the external EU border with Belarus, issuing a [Presidency statement](#). It later convened an extraordinary meeting of interior ministers to address the impact of the current situation in Afghanistan at the political level. In a [joint statement](#), the ministers called for the stabilisation of the situation in the region, the provision of humanitarian aid to the vulnerable population, and support to third countries hosting migrants and refugees. The situation in Afghanistan was discussed again in informal meetings in early September between [the defence ministers](#) and [the ministers of foreign affairs \(Gymnich\)](#). In addition, efforts are ongoing to make gradual progress on the adoption of the proposals of [the Pact on Migration and Asylum](#).

On 6 October, Slovenia successfully held the EU-Western Balkans Summit, attended by all EU leaders, and adopted [the Brdo Declaration](#), which reaffirmed the need for a European perspective for the Western Balkans and reasserted the commitment to the enlargement process. The highlights of the joint statement include cooperation on confronting the pandemic and post-pandemic economic recovery, in particular through the implementation of the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) for the Western Balkans, which aims to mobilise EUR 30 billion for the region. Here, connectivity, in every sense of the word, both within the region and between the region and the EU, plays a key role. It is important for the region to credibly implement the agreement on the Common Regional Market and the Green Agenda. Leaders of the Western Balkan partners attended the summit and aligned themselves with the adopted statement. EU leaders expressed their readiness to reinvigorate and enhance regular political dialogue with the region and welcomed EU-Western Balkans summits becoming regular events.

Ensuring a positive future for young people in the Western Balkans is of particular importance for Slovenia. *Inter alia*, it decisively contributed to the adoption of [the Western Balkans Declaration on Ensuring Sustainable Labour Market Integration of Young People](#), which includes concrete steps to gradually establish, implement and enhance Youth Guarantee schemes.