



## **Letter of 28 January 2015 from the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the House of Representatives on substantive preparations for the 2016 Dutch Presidency of the Council of the European Union**

An update on the preparations for the Dutch Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2016 was sent to the House on 31 October 2014.<sup>1</sup> The update mainly concerned organisational aspects of the Presidency. The content of the Commission Work Programme has now also been announced, and an assessment was sent to the House on 23 January 2015. The government is pleased to inform the House in this letter of its intended image and message and what it hopes to accomplish with the Dutch Presidency in the run-up to and during the first half of 2016. This letter is also the government's response to the recommendations on priorities for the Netherlands' Presidency made by the Social and Economic Council (SER) in its letter of 19 December 2014.<sup>2</sup>

The letter is structured as follows: (1) it starts with a brief review of matters on which the government believes the EU should focus, on the basis of the 'strategic agenda for the Union in times of change' adopted by the European Council of 26 and 27 June 2014.<sup>3</sup> The strategic agenda also guides the Commission Work Programme, which was presented in December 2014, and will largely determine the agenda of the Dutch Presidency. (2) Then it presents the point of departure of the Dutch Presidency: a Union that focuses on the essentials, creates growth and jobs through innovation, seeks engagement in European societies, and connects with citizens. (3) This is followed by a number of observations on the role of and scope for the rotating Presidency in the changed EU created by the Lisbon Treaty. This includes consideration of the role the House might play. The appendix sets out plans for organising the various Council configurations in the first half of 2016 to ensure that they contribute to achieving specific results on the five objectives in the strategic agenda. This does not represent an exhaustive summary of all activities that will take place during the Dutch Presidency as part of its agenda – which will be presented in the Presidency programme to be issued in the final quarter of 2015 – but it does

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<sup>1</sup> Letter of 31 October 2014, Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives 2013/14, 21501-20, no.923.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ser.nl/nl/publicaties/overige/2010-2019/2014/prioriteiten-voorzitterschap-eu.aspx>.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 30 June 2014, Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives 2013/14, 21501-20, no. 897.



give an idea of the emphases the Netherlands seeks to make in the various Council configurations.

### **1. The Netherlands' ambitions: the strategic agenda is the point of departure**

The run-up to the Dutch Presidency comes at a time when Europe is cautiously beginning to emerge from years of economic crisis, and at a time of growing concern among its citizens. Unemployment is still too high, particularly among young people, and a growing number of people are living in poverty. An ageing population will place a greater burden on the shrinking percentage of people employed. In the meantime, the global economy is rapidly changing. In the digital age, member states will have to adapt to remain competitive, improve their potential for growth and safeguard their welfare systems. Scarce resources, the costs of energy and the impact of climate change are major challenges: the current dependence on imported energy makes Europe vulnerable. One important prerequisite for economic stability in Europe is security in and around the European Union.<sup>4</sup> The situation on the EU's borders is far from stable. Europe also faces threats associated with radicalisation and extremism. As the recent acts of terror in Paris showed, the values on which the Union is founded are under pressure, from both inside and outside the EU, and internal and external security are becoming increasingly interwoven. Irregular flows of migrants require a joint response and coordinated action. These are significant challenges, at a time of growing misalignment between the radical measures regarded as necessary to tackle pressing problems and public support for these far-reaching measures.

In recent years the Netherlands has advocated – and will continue to advocate – a Union that focuses on the essentials, a Union that has added value for Europe's citizens and companies. One of the key tasks here, as argued by the SER, is to create jobs and economic growth.<sup>5</sup> The Netherlands' position is largely reflected in the European Council's strategic agenda. The Netherlands played a leading role in drafting the agenda: the debate leading to its adoption was initiated in part as a result of the Dutch ' call for an EU-wide follow-up to the subsidiarity exercise. The exercise found growing support for sharper prioritisation of the EU's tasks, in order

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<sup>4</sup> 'Turbulent Times in Unstable Surroundings – Policy Letter on International Security', Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives 2013/14, 33 694 no. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Letter of 21 May 2014, Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives 2013/14, 21501-20, no. 87.



to increase its added value to Europeans on essential points of policy and at the same time reduce the administrative burden. The strategic agenda sets out five overarching priorities that will guide the Union's work over the next five years, as it tackles the challenges it faces:

1. a Union of jobs, growth and competitiveness;
2. a Union that empowers and protects all citizens;
3. towards an Energy Union with a forward-looking climate policy;
4. a Union of freedom, security and justice, and
5. the Union as a strong global actor.

Alongside these priorities, the agenda also considers how EU policy should be shaped and implemented. Subsidiarity and proportionality are key principles in this process: the Union should concentrate on areas where it can make a difference and refrain from taking action where member states are better placed to achieve policy objectives. National parliaments should be more involved in this process.

The Commission, Council and European Parliament must now jointly aim for tangible results on the five objectives in the strategic agenda, which will produce clear improvements for Europe's inhabitants and companies. The government seeks to use the Dutch Presidency to help achieve such tangible results, and will therefore make the strategic agenda its main focus in the run-up to and during the Presidency. This is vital if we are to build confidence and equip European societies for the future.

The government is pleased to note that the five objectives in the strategic agenda are clearly reflected in the Commission Work Programme presented on 17 December 2014, after the Council had been consulted on it for the first time and to the Dutch government's satisfaction. The priorities included in Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker's political guidelines, which build on the strategic agenda, are also reflected. The 23 legislative initiatives in the programme will largely determine the legislative agenda of the Dutch Presidency. However, tangible results on the objectives of the strategic agenda will not only take the form of legislation. Europe is about more than just rules. Other instruments, such as the exchange of knowledge



and best practices, innovative ways of working, mechanisms for political agenda setting, the consolidation of peer pressure and mutual learning, smart use of EU budget resources and other kinds of initiatives may also be deployed. This is discussed in further detail in the appendix in relation to each Council configuration.

## **2. Points of departure: focus on essentials, innovative growth and jobs, connection**

In setting a course to achieve tangible results on the five objectives in the strategic agenda, the government has opted to focus on essentials, innovative growth and jobs, and connection as its principles. These three concepts clearly reflect what the Netherlands stands for in Europe:

1. A **Union that focuses on the essentials** and that adds value to what member states themselves can and must do. The five objectives in the strategic agenda clearly indicate the priorities on which the Union must focus. The government will aim in all the Council configurations to lastingly improve the quality of legislation, make it simpler and more workable and, where possible and necessary, reduce the administrative burden and costs. This agenda of better legislation is not merely a deregulation exercise; besides a reduction in legislation, it aims above all at higher-quality legislation. This is important for citizens, companies and municipalities and other public authorities, and will promote sustainable economic growth and competitiveness.
2. An **innovative Union focused on growth and jobs**; a Union which – by daring to pursue innovation – enhances its economic and foreign policy clout and fosters Europe's global competitiveness. If the Union wishes to remain an economic powerhouse in a rapidly changing world, innovation will have to top its agenda. Innovation is the key to sustainable and inclusive growth, improvement and renewal, and the best response to the pressure exerted on us by globalisation. Only by renewing and improving itself will the Union be able to compete with other economic blocs. The innovation agenda has many facets: it involves removing obstacles to innovation in the internal market; ensuring all European funds focus more on innovation, and stimulating research and innovation using all European funds and programmes specifically intended for the purpose;



strengthening the digital economy; encouraging national policy reform, and promoting a society that renews and challenges itself. Creating jobs is the top priority. But Europe's social identity should also be an integral part of the strategic agenda: it is meant to benefit people.

3. **A Union that connects** – a Union that is based on fundamental values and is supported by its citizens. Support for European decision-making can be generated by offering visible opportunities for public input and influence. Strengthening democratic legitimacy will remain a key issue for the government in the run-up to and during the Dutch Presidency of the Union. This will require active involvement by people and civil society organisations, so they know that their views have been heard. The government wants to encourage this type of involvement. Transparency in decision-making is key. Support for the EU will also be strengthened if the Union actually achieves results for citizens and companies in areas that are important to them. The Dutch government will therefore be working towards this end.

### 3. Role of and scope for the rotating Presidency

Though the Netherlands will hold the Presidency of the Council, it will not hold the Presidency of the European Council and the Foreign Affairs Council, each of which has its own permanent President. As already noted in the letter to the House of 31 October, since the Lisbon Treaty the role of the rotating Presidency has been largely to serve: the work of the Presidency consists to a large extent of advancing the Union's agenda, which is to a large degree determined by the ongoing legislative process. The dynamics of the European Parliament, which is a co-legislator in almost all areas, must also be considered. The role of the Presidency is largely that of a reliable and efficient intermediary that forges compromises between the 28 member states and between the Council, Commission and European Parliament. Other member states and the European institutions therefore judge a Presidency by how it fulfils this role.

Another reservation concerns the flexibility that will be required: unforeseen events can and sometimes must make a deep impression on a Presidency. It is possible that situations will arise



that require rapid action and to some extent push measures already under consideration to the background.

Having said this, there is scope for every Presidency to make its mark. The Dutch Presidency offers our country an opportunity to draw attention to matters that are important to the Netherlands, particularly during the planned informal meetings of Council configurations. The Netherlands seeks to seize this opportunity, and will in due course set out a list of current dossiers and issues which it has singled out in a Presidency programme to be finalised in the last quarter of 2015. The programme will fit into the framework of the broader trio programme that the Netherlands will draft with its partners Slovakia and Malta. A start will be made on this in the first quarter of 2015, referring in part to the request of the House. The Council generally adopts the trio programme in the month prior to the first of the three Presidencies.

Finally, the Dutch Presidency of the Council is also important for the Dutch parliament. The States General have already played a leading role in strengthening and modernising the role of national parliaments. The 'Leegte report' provides useful suggestions for this process. The Dutch Presidency will therefore give the parliament an ideal opportunity to place democratic legitimacy firmly on the agenda and raise the level of organisation and dialogue between parliaments. Possibilities include making more effective use of existing opportunities for parliamentary involvement at national level. Equally, existing European instruments could be used more actively to strengthen collaboration with other national parliaments. This includes improved collaboration and information exchange between national parliaments and the European Parliament, in the framework of the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs (COSAC) and the Article 13 Conference, for example. The government will be pleased to act in concert with the House on this matter.



## **Appendix: Details for individual Council configurations**

It is customary for the ministers in a number of Council configurations to attend additional informal meetings in the member state that holds the Presidency. A total of eleven informal ministerial councils – some of them combined – are planned in the Netherlands. Two other ministerial meetings are envisaged: a ministerial conference on the Urban Agenda and an EU-US ministerial summit on Justice and Home Affairs.

As stated in the letter, the details for each Council configuration set out below do not represent an exhaustive survey, but instead give an impression of the particular aspects the Netherlands wishes to emphasise, in addition to the rolling agenda.

### *General Affairs Council*

The added value of the General Affairs Council (GAC) lies, among other things, in the fact that it works with the Commission and the European Parliament on multiannual legislative programming annually. The Commission is expected to issue a proposal for a new Interinstitutional Agreement in 2015; the negotiations on this may continue into the first half of 2016. In line with objective 4 of the strategic agenda (a Union of freedom, security and justice), over the past year the Netherlands has invested a great deal in the theme of the rule of law in the Union. The Netherlands is therefore keen to keep this subject firmly on the agenda during its Presidency, at the informal GAC for example. The Netherlands will continue to press for coherence between internal and external human rights policy at the GAC and, where relevant, at the Justice and Home Affairs Council. The informal Council will also be able to look ahead to the interim evaluation of the Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF), planned for 2016. A conference will be organised for the purpose, as discussed with the House.

### *Foreign Affairs Council*

European external policy is in line with Dutch foreign policy. To help achieve objective 5 of the strategic agenda (the Union as a strong global actor), the Netherlands intends to promote decisive and effective EU external policy and action, anchored in the member states. Security, justice and future sustainability are key issues for the Netherlands. The agenda for the informal



Foreign Affairs Council (Gymnich) will be determined by the High Representative and will focus mainly on current events, which can be anticipated to only a limited extent. It is clear that much attention will continue to be focused on the EU's neighbours to its south and east. The review of the European Neighbourhood Policy announced in the Commission Work Programme is in line with this, and the Netherlands recognises the need for such a review.

A number of priorities in the Union's external policy are of particular interest to the Netherlands. During its Presidency the Netherlands will continue to lobby for a broad, integrated approach. This will involve, among other things, a stronger link between the internal and external dimensions of security, promoting the coherent deployment of instruments (including Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)) and resources, and improved cooperation between the institutions, to strengthen the legitimacy of external action. The Netherlands also intends to devote particular attention to human rights, including the follow-up to the review conference (in 2015) of UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

#### *Foreign Affairs Council – Defence*

The radically changing international security situation, both close to Europe and further afield, requires a more robust Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), as reflected in objective 5 of the strategic agenda. The European Council will discuss this matter again in June this year. Any new arrangements agreed at this summit will be implemented during the Dutch Presidency in the first half of 2016. To strengthen the CSDP, the Netherlands would like to focus mainly on further deepening defence cooperation in Europe. A strong CSDP is in the interests of the Union, of NATO, and of individual countries. The Netherlands plans to present proposals that would strengthen states' commitment to defence cooperation, for example by increasing peer pressure and monitoring defence budgets. The Netherlands would also like to focus more on creating incentives for defence cooperation in Europe. The existing partnerships between the Netherlands and Germany and between the Benelux countries could serve as examples. Finally, the Netherlands seeks to obtain a clearer picture of the role of national parliaments in both promoting closer defence cooperation in Europe and using rapidly deployable European military units.



### *Foreign Affairs Council – Trade*

Trade policy contributes to two of the objectives in the strategic agenda: a Union of jobs, growth and competitiveness and the Union as a strong global actor. In line with the Netherlands' long tradition as a trading nation, the government intends to use the Presidency to give a new dynamism to the European trade policy agenda: fair and open global trade with concern for people and planet. In terms of substance, the bilateral negotiations with the US (TTIP) and Japan will demand considerable attention. TTIP is an absolute priority for the Dutch government, given the benefits that this ambitious treaty is expected to bring. During its Presidency the Netherlands will invest in the WTO round, the implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement reached in Bali and plurilateral talks on services and green goods. The Netherlands will seek to focus specifically on promoting sustainable trade through trade agreements.

### *Foreign Affairs Council – Development Cooperation*

Further steps will be taken during the Presidency towards embedding the post-2015 sustainable development goals in European policy, and securing their financing (following up on the Financing for Development conference), as set out in the Commission Work Programme for 2015. The Dutch Presidency will have to play a role in determining Europe's position on the shape of future relations between the EU and the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) after the Cotonou Agreement expires in 2020.

The Presidency will present an ideal opportunity to further develop the Netherlands' aid and trade agenda at European level, as part of the fifth objective of the strategic agenda: the EU as a strong global actor. The informal Trade Council and the informal Development Council will take place back-to-back, with a combined session for trade and development ministers. The Netherlands intends to put international corporate social responsibility and sustainable global value chains on the agenda for this session, since they concern both the trade and the development agendas. A conference will be held for this purpose in late 2015.

### *Competitiveness Council (Internal Market, Industry, Research and Innovation, Space)*

Fully in line with the strategic agenda, the Netherlands will focus during its Presidency on promoting economic growth. Focal points will be a stronger internal market and an effective



European investment agenda. To achieve these goals, a modern, competitive industrial policy that safeguards competition and creates a level playing field for businesses will be essential. Europe will also benefit from legislation that is simple and of high quality. The Netherlands supports the Commission's proposal to issue a strategy for the internal market. It believes the untapped potential in the internal market for services should feature as an important point in the strategy, with a focus on strengthening national reforms that are designed to open up the market for services and on more ambitious implementation of the Services Directive. Furthermore, the Netherlands will seek new EU initiatives targeting services sectors with major economic potential and improving the governance of the internal market.

Strengthening Europe's digital internal market is a priority for the government. The digital economy can provide a huge boost for innovation and for growth and jobs in Europe, yet it still faces problems like outdated and restrictive legislation. The government is therefore pleased that the Commission has announced a Digital Single Market package. The Dutch government will aim to make the package stimulate competition and innovation in the digital economy by removing barriers to e-commerce, guaranteeing cybersecurity, modernising copyright and increasing confidence in the digital economy (e.g. Big Data and Smart Industry).

Research and innovation are the basis for economic recovery and lasting growth and jobs, and they give us the knowledge and innovations we need to tackle social challenges, both now and in the future. European action can make a real difference here. Effective implementation of European research and innovation programmes (now combined in Horizon 2020), supporting applied research while maintaining scientific excellence, as well as the creation of a European Research Area (ERA), will play a pivotal role. The Netherlands will prioritise the evaluation of the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (2007-2013), and the joint establishment of large-scale research facilities for the ERA. It will also focus on the rapid developments in science, which is becoming more and more open and digital ('Science 2.0' or 'Open Science'). In line with the government's recent paper on science policy,<sup>6</sup> the Netherlands supports the Commission's efforts to enhance the impact of science, and will work

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<sup>6</sup> *Wetenschapsvisie 2015: Keuzes voor de toekomst* ('Science in 2025: Choices for the Future'), 25 November 2014.



above all to advance open access to scientific publications and the use of research results. The Netherlands also believes it is important to encourage public-private partnership and the involvement of SMEs, to ensure scientific knowledge is used in tackling social challenges, through Horizon 2020 and the European space programmes Galileo and Copernicus.

#### *Economic and Financial Affairs Council*

The Dutch Presidency of the Ecofin Council will concentrate on stimulating growth and jobs through healthy public finances, structural reforms and investment, with the Netherlands particularly keen to draw attention to the need for structural reforms. It is vital that structural reforms be encouraged at both European and member state level, in order to permanently raise the growth potential of the EU member states. Another priority of the investment agenda is improving and widening access to finance in the real economy. In this respect, it is important that concrete steps be taken towards a European Capital Markets Union. This should make it easier for companies to obtain capital, offering alternatives to bank financing. Finally, during the Dutch EU Presidency the government plans to present detailed proposals for a more transparent budgeting system and more predictable EU contributions as part of the interim evaluation of the Multi-annual Financial Framework.

#### *Justice and Home Affairs Council*

The Netherlands considers it vital to promote European cooperation in the area of freedom, security and justice, in accordance with the fourth objective of the strategic agenda. It is therefore important that arrangements already in place are implemented more effectively. When it comes to Justice and Home Affairs, therefore, the key principles are consolidation and implementation. Cooperation and innovative arrangements will also be needed in two specific areas in response to developments in society and technology. These areas are cybersecurity and efforts to tackle cybercrime, in line with the second Dutch National Cyber Security Strategy issued in 2013 and the cyber conference the Netherlands will hold in 2015. The Netherlands also attaches importance to making progress where possible in the current talks on the Smart Borders package.



It is also important that the EU respond to current developments. The rise of jihadism and the growing influx of asylum seekers and illegal immigrants are important issues. These developments will be taken into account, in coordination with the Foreign Affairs Council, when the agenda for the JHA Council is set.

During the Presidency the Netherlands will also make vigorous efforts to bring about consolidation and implementation in tackling organised crime, including human trafficking, people smuggling, the development of financial crime squads, and policy on return and victims. This is in line with the proposals in the Commission Work Programme concerning a European Security Agenda.

#### *Agriculture and Fisheries Council*

As regards European agriculture and fisheries policy, the Netherlands seeks to promote sustainable, climate-smart, resource-efficient, animal-friendly agriculture and fisheries that will ensure safe, reliable food production for the Earth's nine billion inhabitants in 2050. This will also require a level playing field and European rules that are in line with practice. In this connection, the Netherlands looks forward with interest to the proposals for simplifying the Common Agricultural Policy.

#### *Environment Council*

In this context Better regulation specifically means addressing the need for more consistent and more workable environmental directives. The Netherlands will focus on three main themes: climate, the circular economy and healthy people in a healthy environment. Our Presidency will take place after the Climate Summit in Paris, in December 2015, and the expectation is that the global agreements reached there will have to be fleshed out and implemented in 2016. In connection with this, work is also under way on legislation implementing the EU climate and energy package 2030 on the subjects of carbon emissions trading, source control policy and possibly also the Effort Sharing Decision. The Netherlands will also seek effective EU measures in support of the transition to a circular economy (from waste to resource) in line with the prospects presented in the Commission Work Programme. The third main theme – healthy



people in a healthy environment – will specifically address air pollution, drinking water, nanomaterials, endocrine disruptors, microplastics and biodiversity.

The Commission has announced a fitness check for the Birds Directive and Habitats Directive, which is likely to be completed in 2016.

#### *Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council*

With regard to education, the Netherlands will align its plans with the priority in the strategic agenda to develop the knowledge, skills and employability of the working population. The Commission Work Programme 2015 announced relevant proposals that will be included in this effort. The match between education and the labour market, and the excellence and modernisation of higher and professional education, are the Netherlands' main themes, and its key aim is to promote the exchange of best practices in national policy. Alignment will also be sought with the Europe 2020 strategy and the priorities for European educational cooperation, which are due to be updated later this year.<sup>7</sup>

Culture, the media and the creative industries also contribute to innovation, and to a Union of jobs, growth and competitiveness. The Netherlands' priorities will be a debate on the infrastructures and platforms required for the digital heritage, including Europeana, and making progress in the debate on the review of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive. The outcomes of the REFIT evaluation and a Presidency conference on audiovisual works will galvanise this process.

#### *Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council*

EU transport policy aims to stimulate economic growth, create jobs and make Europe more competitive. The Netherlands supports these goals. Investment in TEN-T infrastructure is essential if we are to develop a first-rate infrastructure. The Netherlands will pursue a properly functioning European transport market with a fair global and European playing field and clear European state aid frameworks. It will seek better legislation, simplification and reduction in the

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<sup>7</sup> Review of Education and Training 2020 strategy; Riga communiqué on vocational education; ministerial conference as part of the Bologna Process for higher education.



administrative burden for all modalities. With regard to sustainable mobility, the Netherlands will work within the EU to promote the further development and use of Intelligent Transport Systems, self-driving cars and the use of sustainable fuels such as LNG and biokerosene. The link between the environment and transport agendas will also be a focus of the combined informal Environment and Transport Council, partly in connection with urban development. The global strategy for air transport will be the focus of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Assembly in autumn 2016. The Netherlands also supports a global approach in maritime affairs.

It is essential that we strengthen the internal telecommunications market on the basis of a free and open internet, by modernising European legislation on telecoms, the media and the internet, including the scrapping of roaming charges. This will help preserve a level playing field for traditional and new players (e.g. ISPs), and strengthen competition and investment in the telecommunications sector.

In the area of energy, the Netherlands is keen to take an ambitious approach to achieving a properly functioning internal energy market, and to the transition to a carbon-neutral energy supply, with a focus on security of supply and European competitiveness. It will seek a cost-effective approach to sustainable energy and energy efficiency, building on the agreements on the European Climate and Energy Policy Framework.

For the Netherlands, the completion of the internal energy market will provide the basis for the Energy Union envisaged by the Commission. To this end, the Netherlands will take specific steps to bring about regional cooperation, incorporate sustainable energy into policy and strengthen the energy infrastructure. It will also press for an EU external energy policy to diversify energy resources and suppliers.

#### *Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council*

The Netherlands is keen to advance objective 2 (protect and empower) of the strategic agenda. During its Presidency it will prioritise action to promote decent work. This is a matter of tackling the downside of the free movement of workers, which includes abuse, sham employment arrangements and a downward spiral in terms and conditions. Worker mobility can boost



economic growth and employment, but the downside has to be addressed to increase public support for the free movement of workers and of services. 'Equal pay for equal work in the same workplace' is the key principle as far as the Netherlands is concerned. Another aspect of decent work concerns working conditions. The Netherlands is in favour of better legislation, particularly legislation offering workers more protection from carcinogenic substances. It will also draw attention to the need for member states and Europe's cities to exchange knowledge on combating poverty. National and local policy can be strengthened by sharing best practices. The matters highlighted by the SER in its recommendations tie in closely with the government's priorities in this area.

In the field of health, the Netherlands will seek further European measures in the fight against antimicrobial resistance. Furthermore, in the Netherlands' view, a European agenda must be developed for the further improvement of market access rules for medicines, in order to ensure that Dutch patients can continue to benefit from new, innovative, affordable, safe medicines in the future.

As regards equal treatment and rights, the Netherlands will take up the response to the Communication on LGBT rights that is due to be issued in 2016. This is another subject that is relevant to coherence between internal and external human rights policy.

### **Other ministerial meetings and conferences**

#### *Ministerial conference on urban development (Urban Agenda)*

During its Presidency, the Netherlands plans to focus on cities. Cities are engines of economic growth, seedbeds for innovation, and important actors in efforts to achieve the EU 2020 objectives. The Netherlands believes – as does the Commission – that the economic and social potential of Europe's urban areas can and must be put to better use. It will therefore work for improved procedures at EU level: an Urban Agenda for Better Regulation and Innovation. The aim of the Urban Agenda is to prune and improve any European legislation that unnecessarily restricts urban development, and to share best practices on innovative solutions to Europe's



urban challenges. Dutch urban innovations will be offered an international platform (the Innovation Relay 2016) during the Presidency.

*EU-US ministerial meeting on Justice and Home Affairs*

This ministerial meeting is held every six months, once in the country that holds the EU Presidency and once in the US (Washington). During the Dutch Presidency the meeting will be held in the Netherlands (Amsterdam). EU dossiers with a bearing on cooperation between the EU and US on Justice and Home Affairs issues will be discussed. These include data protection, PNR data, counterterrorism and jihadism.