



PRIORITIES FOR THE LUXEMBOURG PRESIDENCY OF THE BENELUX COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS IN 2019

In 2019, under Luxembourg's presidency, the Benelux will focus on...

- **energy transition and combatting climate change**
- **strengthening the internal market**
- **promoting digitisation**

INTRODUCTION

In 2019, for the third time since the new Benelux Treaty entered into force in 2012, Luxembourg holds the presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Benelux Union. The Grand Duchy will strive to apply the values that characterise the country - **reliability, decisiveness and openness** - for the Benelux: listening to citizens, providing support for the business community and working together with the various stakeholders in order to act in the general and common interest of the three Benelux countries. Through better cooperation amongst the countries, the Benelux seeks to promote the prosperity and well-being of its citizens.

The 2019 annual plan adopted by the Benelux Committee of Ministers on 10 December 2018 describes in detail the specific measures that the three countries wish to take during the course of this year. Within the framework of implementing this annual plan, Luxembourg intends to focus especially on strengthening the **internal market, energy transition and combatting climate change**, as well as **digitisation**. These are areas where the Benelux Union can play a truly pioneering role within the European Union.

These priorities are perfectly coherent with the line of action of the Benelux Union which, via concrete projects and an exemplary cross-border cooperation, aims to support and promote European integration.

In 2019 the Benelux Union is celebrating the **75th anniversary of the signing of the Customs Convention between the three countries**, the event that lies at the basis of the Benelux Economic Union. This important step forwards in the Benelux cooperation will be commemorated in collaboration with the **Luxembourg National Archives**. By taking this occasion to initiate a process of

joint reflection, the Benelux wants to look to the future and think about ways in which it can repeat its positive contribution to deepening the European internal market and promoting European integration.

Along these lines, the Luxembourg presidency will work on **implementing the new Benelux Treaty on Police Cooperation** that was signed on 23 July 2018. Within the framework of the Benelux Strategic Police consultation, the Benelux continues to elaborate and make optimal use of opportunities for operational cooperation, such as joint training courses for personnel, mixed patrols, strengthening of the national infrastructures and information exchange.

A similar objective is sought with the implementation of the declaration of intent with actions and measures to strengthen cooperation on human trafficking, which was signed on 2 December 2016.

ENERGY TRANSITION AND COMBATting CLIMATE CHANGE

The risks entailed by climate change are omnipresent. It is one of the greatest challenges confronting us today and will require a radical energy transition. In 2019 the Benelux Union will continue its projects on energy transition and **combatting climate change**.

The Luxembourg presidency wishes to emphasise **two particular aspects**: climate mitigation (bringing global warming under control) and climate adaptation (moderating and alleviating the consequences of climate change). The focus will lie above all on facilitating the changeover to a low-carbon economy. In addition, in the energy field the Benelux cooperation can be concretised via cooperation to accelerate the transition to 100% renewable energy-based electricity and sustainable mobility, in particular through common initiatives relating to electric driving and second-generation agrofuels.

Exploiting the economies of scale that the Benelux can offer, these perspectives will be integrated into the follow-up to the so-called **“Talanoa” dialogue** that was held on 24 September 2018 in the presence of civil society representatives from the three countries. This dialogue, which is based on the Benelux recommendations on energy efficiency, transport, financing and the achievement of a just transition, led to the signing of the Benelux “Talanoa” declaration by Ministers Marghem (BE), Wiebes (NL) and Dieschbourg (LU).

Via in particular the formation of a Benelux Expertise Network on the circular economy, the Benelux Union is continuing to carry out specific projects on **implementation of the circular economy**, which are incorporated into the framework of well-developed forms of cooperation in the climate and energy field, such as the Pentalateral Energy Forum, the North Sea Consultation, the Gas Platform and the Benelux Energy Expertise Network.

An important pillar of this initiative is a joint exercise in the Benelux and the Pentalateral Energy Forum¹ on the national **energy and climate plans**. This gives form to the regional dimension of the energy union within the context of the **energy transition**, an essential component of the fight against climate change.

¹ The Pentalateral Energy Forum, which was set up in 2005 together with Germany and France, is a politically-directed joint venture between governments, supervisory authorities, grid managers and market actors. The competent energy ministers meet on a regular basis. Austria and Switzerland also became members of the Forum in 2011.

Within the framework of the UN climate negotiations, under the Luxembourg presidency a **Benelux climate platform** is being set up to keep the global temperature increase under two degrees. To help ensure this, the Benelux Union is focusing on renewable energy, cross-border supply security and environmental and sustainability education.

In November 2019 a conference is being organised in Luxembourg to help young people better understand that every day they have to live and act within the limits of the planet.

STRENGTHENING THE INTERNAL MARKET

In order to maintain a favourable growth climate with opportunities for citizens and companies, the internal market must continue to adapt itself to new developments and challenges. In this connection, **official consultations about the future of the internal market** are being organised in the Benelux in 2019.

Under the Luxembourg presidency, the interests of consumers and companies in the Benelux continue to be a central concern. The Luxembourg presidency will strive to further implement the Benelux recommendation on **territorial supply constraints** (TSCs) in the Benelux. This recommendation aims to resolve the difficulties experienced by companies due to the fact that some producers and wholesalers receive only limited access to the supply networks of their choice within the internal EU market. Given that in the survey on this issue the perceived impact of TSCs on companies in the Benelux was only examined for retailers, we will explore whether **companies from the non-retail sector** (e.g. craft industries, etc.) can be **integrated** into the solutions for the problems that have been identified. The outcomes of this survey constitute valuable contributions for the EU's actions on TSCs.

To further strengthen the interaction with the EU internal market, the consultation to harmonise **enforcement of EU legislation within the Benelux** will continue, with the focus on joint implementation and enforcement. In this way the laboratory function as well as the push-effect of the Benelux Internal Market within the EU can be optimally exploited.

In this connection, the Luxembourg presidency will be closely following the European developments within the framework of the ECBM, the legal instrument developed by the European Commission. The concept for this instrument, which focuses on cross-border harmonisation of rules, was developed by the Luxembourg presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2015.

PROMOTING DIGITISATION

The Benelux will further **improve** the **digital infrastructure** so as to make specific projects possible across borders as well. These include mobile payments, self-driving cars, the **extension of the 4G and 5G networks**, improvement of cross-border health care and a common approach to advertisement fraud on the basis of digital exchanges.

Within the context of ever-increasing **e-commerce**, postal services are explicitly concentrating on serving the entire Benelux, and cross-border mergers and cooperations of Benelux services are continuing apace. For continued integration, **further improvement of the digital infrastructure** is necessary in order to make projects such as mobile payments, self-driving cars and digital exchanges between and with government institutions possible across borders as well.

The digital evolution and the application of artificial intelligence will have a strong impact on the nature and content of jobs, and thus also the employment market in the Benelux. Radical changes are also expected in specific areas such as mobility, e-commerce or the health sector. Through close cooperation and exchange of expertise, the countries can facilitate and optimise these transition processes within the framework of **joint reflection on the impact of artificial intelligence on jobs and society**. Specifically for the cross-border challenges, digital developments in principle offer special technical possibilities to allow information exchanges to take place more smoothly.

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Regulation on Electronic Identification and Trust Services (eIDAS) establish an environment that creates a broader basis of trust for mutual data exchange. This makes it possible to more easily reach **operational agreements for cross-border digital information exchange** in many areas between the Benelux countries: data on cross-border patients, mobile payments, digital consignment notes, real-time exchanges between inspection services within the framework of risk rating, digital pre-employment screening, etc.

DIMENSION OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

With regard to **intergovernmental cooperation**, the Luxembourg presidency wants to promote cooperation between the Benelux countries with respect to foreign policy. For the purpose of making decisions and defending common interests, such strategic consultation is growing ever more important in a Union with a large number of members. The presidency will promote the adoption of joint Benelux positions in the Council of the European Union. A number of ministerial and senior official consultation meetings between the three countries will be organised on this subject.

Furthermore, the Benelux countries will continue to maintain contacts with other country groups, such as the Baltic states, the Scandinavian countries or the countries of the Visegrád Group. The Luxembourg presidency also wishes to carry forward the tradition of joint Benelux working visits to third countries, on both the ministerial and senior official levels.