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2.3.1 Presidencies of the Council of the European Union



The topic of migration and asylum remained high on the EU political agenda in 2020, and both Presidencies of the Council of the European Union included relevant priorities in their programmes. The four priorities of the Croatian Presidency in the first semester of 2020, under the motto 'A Strong Europe in a world full of challenges', were presented as a Europe that develops, a Europe that connects, a Europe that protects and an influential Europe. In line with 'a Europe that protects', the Croatian Presidency focused on strengthening internal security, providing more effective control of external borders, ensuring full interoperability of IT systems and strengthening resilience to external threats. The programme reiterated the common goal of finding a comprehensive solution for a sustainable and effective migration and asylum policy.[175]

The German Presidency of the second semester of 2020, using the motto 'Together for Europe's recovery', set the following guiding principles:

- Overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic permanently and economic recovery;
- A stronger and more innovative Europe;
- A fair Europe;
- A sustainable Europe;
- A strong Europe in the world.

Migration-related issues were underlined and covered under the dimension of a 'Europe of security and common values', where emphasis was placed on Europe remaining a place where all people, regardless of their background, convictions and world view, can be free and safe. The German Presidency committed to push for a reform of the asylum and migration policy, based on the European Commission's proposals, with the aim of updating the regulations on responsibility and solidarity; complying with humanitarian standards; preventing the overburden of individual Member States through fair distribution of those seeking protection; and effectively tackling secondary movements.

The programme of the German Presidency also made reference to the introduction of mandatory procedures at the EU's external borders to categorise and assess asylum applications in preliminary proceedings at an early stage. Other goals included the expansion of the EU's capacity for resettlement; the development of efficient mechanisms for effective repatriation of rejected asylum applicants; the effective protection of external borders; the expansion of partner-based

cooperation with third countries; the development of a comprehensive approach to mitigate the causes of displacement and irregular migration; and the increase in capacity to analyse the European migration situation in order to create effective early-warning mechanisms.[176] The German Presidency also launched the Migration 4.0 process, focussing on digitalisation, migration forecasting and the use of artificial intelligence in the field of border management and asylum.

In January 2020, UNHCR offered its recommendations to the two Presidencies, which were based on five core principles:[177]

- Foster responsibility-sharing and solidarity within the EU through a fair, transparent and proportional system; ensuring family unity; and supporting a predictable disembarkation and processing mechanism.
- Ensure access to territory and fair and fast procedures, including accelerating the processing of manifestly well-founded and unfounded cases and investing in initial stages of the asylum procedure.
- Support integration and efficient and rights-based return systems through incentivising compliance with the system; investing in integration; and ensuring access to assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programmes.
- Invest in resettlement and complementary pathways through the implementation of a three-year strategy for resettlement; expansion of complimentary pathways; making progress on the Union Resettlement Framework; and facilitating family reunification.
- Addressing statelessness through a comprehensive EU strategy and action plan, and incorporating a statelessness dimension in the context of EU enlargement.

In addition, UNHCR invited the two Presidencies to provide more support to countries which house the most refugees.

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[175] Croatian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. (2019). *A strong Europe in a world of challenges: Programme of the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the European Union*. https://vlada.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/Vijesti/2019/12%20prosinac/31%20prosinca/web_FINAL_PROGRAMME_EN_FINAL.pdf

[176] German Presidency of the Council of the European Union. (June 2020). *Together for Europe's recovery: Programme for Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union*. https://www.eu2020.de/blob/2360248/e0312c50f910931819ab67f630d15b2f/06-30-pdf-programm-en-data.pdf

[177] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (January 2020). *UNHCR's Recommendations for the Croatian and German Presidencies of the Council of the European Union (EU): January - December 2020*. https://www.unhcr.org/be/wp-content/uploads/sites/46/2020/01/200107-FINAL-UNHCR-Recommendations-for-the-Croatian-and-German-Presidencies-of-the-Council-of-the-EU-2020.pdf

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