



Benelux non-paper

on the reinforcement of a transparent, values and rules based European Union

Committed to strengthening the EU, the countries of the Benelux – Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg – believe that an EU with strong institutions is best placed to defend the values at the heart of the European project, while delivering the concrete added value its citizens and Member States seek.

The Benelux countries are committed to strengthening the building blocks of the EU, which are the shared respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights. EU values and principles should be applied effectively and unconditionally at all times. Therefore, the Benelux countries believe that EU instruments to monitor, promote, and enforce the rule of law need to be enhanced. Furthermore, they support the creation of an effective and efficient peer review mechanism on the rule of law to intensify the dialogue between Member States on strengthening the rule of law throughout the EU. The protection of the Union's budget in case of generalised deficiencies in the area of the rule of law should be part of the new Multiannual Financial Framework.

The future European Commission is encouraged to seek options to better separate its legislative mandate from its other core tasks. The Benelux countries urge the Commission to focus on the implementation and enforcement of the *acquis*, including Single Market legislation. Particular attention should be paid to the implementation of existing rules by Member States in order to ensure coherence of all related policies and a level playing field. This should be a priority for the Commission, including at the highest political level.

The cluster model around a number of Vice-Presidents of the Commission introduced in 2014 was helpful in implementing a comprehensive working method. The Benelux countries encourage the future Commission to continue this working method and to apply it at the administrative level as well. This cluster model should also clearly reflect the political priorities as set out in the Strategic Agenda.

The Benelux countries also underline that the EU needs to be a willing listener to concerns voiced by its citizens. The EU should be *big on big*: the European institutions and Member States will focus on delivering concrete results for citizens on the priorities identified in the Strategic Agenda, where European cooperation has a clear added value. In that respect, the Better

Regulation agenda needs to be applied fully across the entire spectrum of EU policy-making, with particular attention for the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality, and transparency. Ways should be sought, within the Treaties and existing instruments, to provide national parliaments with means to promote their ideas for new European policy and legislation, for instance by facilitating an informal "green card procedure" and by being more flexible about the deadline for national parliaments to submit options concerning the subsidiarity principle.

The institutions should encourage greater transparency in the legislative field. This will entail greater legitimacy, accountability, and effectiveness.

As regards its global role, the EU needs to build on its achievements and make the Common Foreign and Security Policy more effective and more responsive. This also requires the European Council to provide more strategic guidance on EU external action and foreign policy in order to deliver an EU that actively protects and defends its strategic interests on the global stage, and promotes a rules based multilateral order.

June 2019

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