



Recommendations from members of the TEPSA network to the incoming Austrian Presidency

The Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) has a tradition of formulating recommendations to the incoming Council Presidency. Brendan Donnelly (Federal Trust for Education and Research, London), Nicoletta Pirozzi (Istituto Affari Internazionali, Rome), Mario Kölling and Ignacio Molina (Elcano Royal Institute, Madrid), Funda Tekin (Centre international de formation européenne, Berlin/Nice) and Petr Kratochvil (Institute for International Relations, Prague) contributed to the recommendations. Sabina Lange (European Institute of Public Administration, Maastricht) coordinated the process and composed the recommendations.

They do not necessarily represent the views of TEPSA or its member institutes.

The recommendations will be presented to the incoming Austrian Presidency by Funda Tekin on the occasion of the TEPSA Pre-Presidency Conference on 7-8 June 2018 in Vienna. The conference is organised by the Institute for Advance Studies (IHS) and TEPSA, with the support of: the Central European Initiative (CEI), the government of Lower Austria (Wissenschaft – Forschung Niederösterreich), the Austrian Society for European Politics (ÖGfE), the Austrian National Bank (ÖNB), the Federal Trust for Education and Research, the Austrian Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs and the Erasmus+ and Europe for Citizens programmes of the European Union.

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Preamble

Austria will take over the six-month rotating Presidency of the Council, at a time of critical political and legislative developments within the European Union. Citizens of the EU are tuned into tracking implementations of policies dealing with the consequences of the past financial and economic crisis, as well as the recent refugee and migration wave.

The Austrian Presidency will be marked by intense legislative activity in the Council and between the Council and the European Parliament. Key areas of focus are the narrowing of positions in the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027 and finalising the Brexit negotiations. All of this is to be conducted within a climate of heightened political exposure and sensitivities, in light of the upcoming European election in 2019.

The Austrian Presidency will conclude the 18-month programme of the Estonian, Bulgarian and Austrian Presidencies, which is focused on common solutions for a common future and ultimately on meeting the expectations of citizens. The priorities for the Austrian Presidency strongly reflect these principles. The 2018 agenda further reinforces the need for common solutions, in particular when it comes to the MFF and Brexit negotiations. There is an absolute need to deliver solutions on these issues and others, most notably with regard to the management of refugee flows and migration.

Therefore, this is why our recommendations concentrate broadly on the areas of security, migration, the MFF and Brexit negotiations, taking into account the role of the rotating Presidency in the EU and the timing of the presentation of these recommendations.

Security

In the area of defence, the greatest challenge in 2018 lies with the Member States. They will have to maintain an adequate level of political engagement so that the commitment assumed under PESCO in November 2017 (a continuous increase in the ability to plan, invest and operate together) will be respected. In this regard, major efforts in the Council led by the Austrian Presidency should in particular be devoted to connect the implementation of PESCO with national and European planning processes. Specifically, the newly revised Capability Development Plan must be the basis of the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) with synergies developed between the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects and the new European Defence Fund.

In the civilian field, a Civilian Capabilities Development Plan is being established, with a view to adopt a Compact for Civilian CSDP (Common Security and Defence Policy) during 2018. The Compact will permit civilian CSDP to be adapted to the current security challenges including: organised crime, border management, terrorism and radicalisation, irregular migration, maritime security, hybrid threats and cyber security. The Austrian Presidency is well placed to promote efforts to achieve greater synergies between different instruments and sources of funding, as well as to establish a stronger link between training and recruitment, establishing shared training requirements. Within this context, appropriate incentives, such as financial support and promotion of career paths, should be offered to Member States and individual experts.

Migration

The Austrian Presidency is committed to keeping migration management high on the EU agenda. It is of particular importance that the Presidency coordinate efforts for a comprehensive management of migration. In this respect, third country cooperation for the management of migration flows (including cooperation on return and readmission) should be promoted in line with the priorities of the New Partnership Framework, focusing on the prevention of illegal border crossings together with support to persons in need of protection outside the EU. At the same time, efforts to improve border control would profit from information exchange and interoperability of existing IT systems. Furthermore, a coherent and effective approach to migration cannot overlook internal aspects and the need to promote greater solidarity among Member States, including the implementation of EU-wide quotas. Finally, security aspects should be balanced with the commitment to Sustainable Development Goals and within a human rights framework.

The negotiation of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021 – 2027

Given the sensitivity of budgetary matters and the polarised positions within the EU Council, the MFF negotiations constitute a major challenge for any rotating Presidency. Further to that, the MFF 2021-2027 negotiations are facing additional challenges. Considering the hole that Brexit will leave in the

budget, and the (still minor) structural adaptations suggested by the European Commission in its proposal, the neutrality of the Presidency is particularly called upon.

After the first discussion and analysis of the proposal submitted by the Commission during the Bulgarian Presidency, the Austrian Presidency should ensure a swift and effective management of the early stages in the negotiation process with a view to narrowing the gap between the Commission's proposal and Member States' positions on key issues. The European Parliament should be regularly informed about the course of negotiations and its members should be invited to the informal meetings of the Council on the MFF. This is of utmost importance if the Austrian Presidency aims at reaching the agreement on the next MFF still within the current legislative period.

The Commission proposal for the MFF 2021-2027 is a pragmatic starting point for the negotiations. Taking into account the growing common challenges of the EU, in particular the management of refugee flows and migration, border control, external action and security and defence, the commitment appropriations should not be reduced. Ultimately, the focus of the negotiations should be based on programmes delivering European added value (including in particular, well-funded spending programmes aimed at the integration of migrants within the future Cohesion policy).

The first proposal of the Commission links the post-2020 spending with respect for the rule of law and EU values. However, no clear criteria currently exist on how the budget can be used to leverage progress in these matters. The Austrian Presidency should chair a debate evolving from reducing financial support to the recalcitrant laggards towards adopting positive incentives for those countries above the benchmark.

Since the Austrian government is opposed to the increase in national contributions, the Presidency could concentrate on the modernisation of the revenue side of the budget rather than on the spending side. The new Own Resources proposal by the Commission could contribute to finance the new priorities as well as have regulatory effects.

Brexit negotiations

The Austrian Presidency should aim for an agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union regarding British withdrawal from the Union to be adopted at the European Council in October 2018. This agreement should respect the negotiating mandates of the European Council and reflect the expectations of the European Parliament, which will be invited to ratify the agreement. Most of the agreement should concern itself with the detailed organisation of Brexit, in which the rights and expectations of the UK's land neighbour, the Republic of Ireland, are of particular importance.

The interests of both the UK and the EU will be served by the inclusion in the agreement of a "standstill phase" until the end of 2020. In addition to its more detailed provisions the agreement should also contain a political declaration of the principles that will govern relations between the UK and the Union in the long term. This declaration should make unambiguously clear the difference between the UK's present position as a member of the EU and the less favourable arrangements it must expect as a third country. It should stress that the Union's commitment to the integrity of its own legal order is not a matter susceptible of negotiation or compromise in future dealings with the UK.