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REPORT
TEPSA Maltese Pre-Presidency Conference
10-11 November 2016

**“RESTORING FAITH IN THE EUROPEAN UNION:
STRENGTHEN SOLIDARITY, UNITY AND DETERMINATION”**

In anticipation of the first Maltese EU Council Presidency starting on 1 January 2017, TEPSA held its Pre-Presidency Conference (PPC) in Valletta on Thursday 10 and Friday 11 November 2016. The Conference, organised in cooperation with and hosted by the Institute for European Studies of the University of Malta, was part of the long-standing tradition of TEPSA's Pre-Presidency Conferences, which take place twice a year in the capital of the country holding the EU Council Presidency prior to the beginning of its mandate.

Day One

The Conference was inaugurated by the Hon. Louis Grech MP, Maltese Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for European Affairs and Implementation of the Electoral Manifesto, who presented the priorities of the Maltese Presidency. This was followed by TEPSA's recommendations to the Maltese presidency and a discussion involving TEPSA members, academics from the University of Malta, students and members of the public. The discussion involved the Hon. Dr Ian Borg, Maltese Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry for European Affairs responsible for the EU Presidency 2017 and EU Funds, who returned to the conference later on in the evening to deliver the closing speech of the day.

The first panel on Day One, chaired by Ms Moira Catania, Resident Academic Staff Member at the Institute for European Studies of the University of Malta, addressed the economic, environmental, energy and security challenges of the EU's Neighbourhood Policy. The panel consisted of Mr Stefano Mallia (European Economic and Social Committee), who spoke about the economic challenges facing the coastal states of the Mediterranean region, Prof Manfred Weissenbacher (University of Malta), who focused on the EU's energy security and the role of the Mediterranean region in energy issues, and Prof Hanna Ojanen (University of Tampere) who discussed the EU's Neighbourhood Policy.

Roderick Pace, Jean Monnet Chair at the Institute for European Studies, then gave a lecture in honour of John Pinder OBE, who passed away in 2015¹. The lecture, sponsored by the Federal Trust for Education and Research, was preceded by a brief introduction by its director Mr Brendan Donnelly. The lecture generated interest and a rich discussion with the audience. A *vin d'honneur* in honour of John Pinder, also sponsored by the Federal Trust, was held at the Excelsior Hotel in Floriana, just before the Conference Dinner.

¹ The lecture - « John Pinder : An Intellectual Leader in Politics » - is available online at www.fedtrust.co.uk/john-pinder-lecture-2016



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Day Two

The second day of the conference opened with a panel discussion on the migration challenge and the strengthening of internal solidarity in the Union, chaired by Prof Jaap de Zwaan, Secretary General of TEPSA. The panel members were the Hon. Carmelo Abela, Maltese Minister for Home Affairs and National Security, Ms Marlene Mizzi MEP, Dr Roberta Metsola MEP and Mrs Joanna Darmanin (European Asylum Support Office).

The second panel discussed the European Union and Brexit. This panel was chaired by Dr Mark Harwood, Director of the Institute for European Studies, University of Malta and composed of Brendan Donnelly (Director of the Federal Trust for Education & Research), Prof Wolfgang Wessels (Jean Monnet Chair ad personam at the University of Cologne and former Chairman of the TEPSA Board), Andrew Duff (European Policy Centre, former MEP), and Dr Alfred Sant MEP (former Maltese prime minister).

The conference came to an end with a closing address by Prof Michael Kaeding, Chairman of the TEPSA Board.

TEPSA's Pre-Presidency Conferences

The main aim of TEPSA's PPCs is to bring together academics and researchers from TEPSA's broad network, policy-makers, the media and civil society in order to discuss the agenda and challenges of upcoming Council presidencies. TEPSA's PPCs constitutes a major platform for communication and exchange between policy-makers and academia. Prior to the event, TEPSA's researchers formulate recommendations² to be presented to a high-ranking official of the government concerned in a plenary session. The conferences actively involve civil society and the media, who are able to interact with practitioners and academics. Finally, the insights gained during these conferences and seminars directly feed into future research on the EU and into EU policy-making. Thanks to their genuinely European and transnational nature and to the involvement of civil society, TEPSA's Pre-Presidency conferences actively contribute to shaping a European public sphere.

The November 2016 PPC was also an integral part of TEPSA's PONT project³, aimed at providing a bridge connecting young academics and EU practitioners, in order to improve the employability of young researchers.

The conference could not have been organised without the support of the European Commission's Office in Malta, the European Parliament's Office in Malta, the Federal Trust for Education and Research, and the PONT Project, co-financed by the Erasmus+ Programme of the EU.

² See the appendix

³ More information on PONT at www.tepsa.eu/category/projects/pont



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APPENDIX

TEPSA's recommendations to the Maltese Presidency

The Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) has, for many years, put forward recommendations to the incoming Council Presidency. These recommendations have been prepared by the following members of the TEPSA network: **Iain Begg** (TEPSA Board, LSE, London), **Michele Chang** (College of Europe, Bruges), **Brendan Donnelly** (Federal Trust, London), **Andres Kasekamp** (EVI, Tallinn) **Lucia Mokrá** (IESIR, Bratislava) and **Mark Rhinard** (UI, Stockholm). They do not necessarily represent the view of TEPSA or its member institutes.

Michele Chang will present the recommendations to the incoming Maltese Presidency at the occasion of the TEPSA Pre-Presidency Conference on 10 and 11 November 2016 in Valletta. The conference is organised by the Institute for European Studies of the University of Malta in cooperation with TEPSA and with the support of the European Parliament Information Office in Malta, the European Commission, the Maltese Ministry for European Affairs and Implementation of the Electoral Manifesto, the Federal Trust, and the PONT project co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the EU.

November 2016

Preamble

The Maltese Presidency comes at a time when the EU has to confront the reality of Brexit, yet also has unfinished business in many of the policy domains that have dominated the EU policy agenda in recent years. For example, even though migration flows into Europe have slowed slightly in recent months, this should not hide a series of blatant failures on the part of European Union member states. Similar difficulties continue to afflict the EU approach to ending the economic crisis, as well as its stance towards Russia. The informal European Council of the 27, held in September, in Bratislava was a first step towards defining a way forward, but also revealed deep divisions. The recommendations which follow are for specific initiatives the Maltese presidency might take to push the EU towards answering some of these challenges.

Follow-up to Bratislava

The Presidency will need to ensure that the ambitions set out in the Bratislava Declaration and Roadmap make tangible progress in the first semester of 2017. A key objective should be to implement the EU Global Strategy in the areas of security and defence, notably by strengthening FRONTEX competences and by accelerating progress on the proposed travel information and authorisation system (ETIAS).



While the economy section of the Bratislava Roadmap highlights initiatives on Capital Markets Union, Digital Union and Energy Union as vital to boost economic growth, the Maltese Presidency should not lose sight of the continued vulnerability of the European banking sector. The Presidency should do its utmost to strengthen the banking union by developing the resources of the Single Resolution Mechanism and securing a workable compromise on common deposit insurance.

Delivering on our promises, as stated in the declaration, must be shown to mean more than top-down measures. The Presidency should work towards more effective communication between EU institutions, governments and citizens by experimenting with new forms of dialogue and emphasising open communication.

Mediterranean cooperation and the refugee challenge

The refugee challenge facing Europe has yet to subside, despite nominal decreases in flows and declining public attention of late. Having failed to anticipate the upsurge in migration following years of tumult in the 'near abroad', member states were caught out by inadequately boosting administrative capacities for border control and proper asylum procedures – despite years of cajoling and financial support from EU institutions. When those weaknesses were starkly exposed, another failure arose: member states refused to work together to control internal flows, share responsibility and keep internal borders open. None of those failures seems to have been rectified, causing continued problems as migration reverts from the Syria-Turkey-Greece route to the central Mediterranean route. Malta is ideally placed to improve cooperation on all three fronts:

- First, the Presidency can work with non-EU Mediterranean countries to improve conditions abroad; this includes general EU efforts to disrupt people smuggling and specific measures to improve economic development, water sustainability and food production, building on the proposals for the PRIMA Initiative.
- Second, the Presidency can encourage further developments to improve safe and legal asylum procedures into the EU, which, despite growing anti-immigrant attitudes across Europe, can help to boost European economies.
- Third, improved care and support for migrants in Europe, including protection of human rights, must be a priority for the EU under the Malta Presidency.

Economy

In the light of the difficult, but ultimately successful conclusion of the CETA deal, the Maltese Presidency should seize the opportunity to work with the new US administration either to give a fresh impetus to the TTIP negotiations or to salvage whatever is possible from these negotiations.

Despite regular tweaking of the European semester as an instrument of economic governance, it continues to have only a limited impact. The Maltese Presidency should initiate a high-level review of the semester process with a remit to rethink the approach to economic policy



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coordination and, if necessary, to ask the Commission and the Council to go back to the drawing-board.

The UK

Assuming Article 50 is, as Theresa May has promised, triggered by the UK no later than the end of March, the Maltese Presidency will play a vital role in setting the tone for the ensuing negotiations. The Presidency should stress to both sides the importance of preventing “lose-lose” outcomes. It should remind the British government that the Union and its member states attach importance to the establishment and maintenance of good relations between the United Kingdom and the Union, if and when the United Kingdom leaves the Union. It should also stress to the British government that the Union and its member states other than the United Kingdom attach at least equal importance to the maintenance of their existing beneficial economic and institutional relations between themselves.

Russia

The Maltese Presidency should work to extend the deadline for reviewing sanctions against Russia from six months to one year or more. A longer timeframe would buttress European unity, which is prone to be eroded every six months by attempts to divide the EU, and demonstrate the EU’s stance that the rules-based international order is worth preserving. The issue of sanctions would also become less vulnerable to equivocation resulting from electioneering in member states. If Russia fulfils its Minsk commitments, sanctions can always be lifted earlier.