



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

The Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) has a tradition of formulating recommendations to the incoming Council Presidency. Katrin Böttger (Institut für Europäische Politik), Juha Jokela (Finnish Institute of International Affairs), Kristi Raik (Estonian Foreign Policy Institute at the International Centre for Defence and Security), and Bianca Toma (Romanian Center for European Policies) contributed to the recommendations. Funda Tekin (Institut für Europäische Politik) 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 Romanian Presidency by Lucia Mokrá (Comenius University Bratislava) on the occasion of the TEPSA Pre-Presidency Conference on 22 and 23 November 2018 in Bucharest. The conference is organised by the Romanian Center for European Policies (CRPE) and TEPSA, with the support of: the Europe for Citizens Programme of the European Union, the National Bank of Romania, the European Institute of Romania, Enel, and Tarom.

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Preamble

Romania will take over the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first time on 1 January 2019. The administrative and political challenges that this implies are even reinforced by the expected developments and events within the European Union calendar during the first semester of 2019:

On 29 March 2019 the United Kingdom – according to the Article 50 TEU procedure – will leave the European Union regardless whether the UK and the EU-27 have been able to struck a withdrawal agreement. This will require continued sensitive and intense political negotiations and decisions. In May 2019 European citizens are called to the polls for voting a new European Parliament. We can expect the rising Euroscepticism, populism and nationalism across all EU member states to affect the composition of the Members of European Parliament. On 9 May 2019 EU leaders will meet at the so-called Sibiu Summit to check on the implementation of the Leader’s Agenda agreed in 2017 and to renew the commitment to an EU that delivers on the issues that really matter to people.

The Romanian presidency falls in a period in which geostrategic competition among major regional players over influence in the EU’s neighbourhood has increased. The US, Russia, China, Turkey and other actors each pursue their different agendas in different countries. The EU is traditionally not good at operating in this type of competition. However, it needs to design its policies, taking into account the goals of other actors and their possible influence on/interference with the EU agenda. In other words,

EU policies cannot be pursued in isolation from the broader geostrategic context. This is particularly relevant with regard to conflicts such as Syria and Ukraine.

The Romanian presidency opens the Trio-Presidency with Finland and Croatia. The topics of interests in the first semester are Europe of common values, converging Europe, a safer Europe, and Europe as a stronger global actor. The following recommendations have been drafted in view of these interests taking into account the growing demand to enhance the EU's resilience within the democratic, (cyber)security, economic and neighbourhood realm.

Europe of Common Values

The area of a Europe of common values is especially important with regard to the elections of the European Parliament, which will take place during the Romanian Presidency. Never before have the polls shown such a potentially large number of Eurosceptic members to be present in the EP. Therefore, it is imperative to underline the fact that Europe is founded on the basis of these common values and that combating racism, xenophobia, antisemitism, intolerance and populism are all issues which are even more important in the run-up to the EP elections than they are at all times.

With regard to solidarity, cohesion, equal opportunities and social justice, the inclusion of the European Pillar of Social Rights in the European Semester 2017/2018 by the means of the Social Scoreboard was supposed to bring Europe forward in achieving a social rating of "triple A", the goal set by the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, at the beginning of his term. However, the complementary Social Scoreboard's potential to highlight social problems has not been fully exploited. The member states are reluctant in using the instrument. Objectives in the areas of budgetary and competitiveness policies are still superior to social policy objectives. The latter ones are likely to be included in the country specific recommendations only if they are compatible with the principles of economic coordination. Therefore, the upcoming presidency could push for a more comprehensive implementation of all elements of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Regarding democracy, freedom and respect for human dignity, Art. 7 TEU procedures have been invoked for Poland, demanded by the European Parliament for Hungary and also discussed for Romania itself. Therefore, it is high time to remind all member states' representatives of their responsibility to uphold democratic principles in their own right and not only to avoid further Art. 7 procedures.

Future Budget Negotiations – Vulnerabilities and Arguments for Romania

The European Commission has tabled its proposal for the future EU budget post 2020 earlier this year giving both net contributors and net beneficiaries the time to share their intentions on the negotiations agenda. The conditions and the conditionality in accessing the future funds will further increase as the EU has to respond to more challenges with a more limited budget. The post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework will count for at least 10 to 12 billion Euros less, following Brexit.

These negotiations will become increasingly difficult during Romania's Presidency, a country that belongs to the net beneficiaries' platoon of the EU's budget, and has put "cohesion" as a core priority of its mandate. Romania will find itself in a more complicated position as it has two major vulnerabilities

in these negotiations: a low absorption rate and a number of harsh criticisms by the European Commission regarding the reduced capacity of the Romanian public administration in accessing European funds and the recent worrying challenges related to respect for the principles of the rule of law.

However, Romania can find arguments in convincing and counting for the solidarity of the EU's cohesion policy: European funds and their transforming power have significantly contributed, where effectively used, to consistently reduce disparities. Romania still needs to recover in this area as it ranks on the EU's top with the largest share of poor people.

The proposal of linking the structural funds payments to the state of the rule of law in EU member states – most likely on the agenda of the EU Budget negotiations – coincides with the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism report in which the European Commission assesses the judicial reforms and fight against corruption in Romania in an unprecedented bad way. Romania's leverage within the budget negotiations might be further limited by the fact that the Commission has not granted Romania a fade out phase on these mechanisms until 2019.

A Safer Europe - Cybersecurity

Security and safety are high on the political agenda of the EU and a notable concern for citizens. Terrorism, cyber attacks and different sort of hybrid issues such as election meddling and (dis-)information campaigns have underlined the nexus between external and internal security.

In light of the recent cyber attacks against the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague, EU leaders have called for further strengthening the EU's deterrence, resilience and response to hybrid, cyber as well as chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) threats.

In this context, the EU is now working on a sanctions regime that will be specific to cyber attacks. The European Council conclusions also provide a sound political basis to move swiftly on the implementation of the reform package on cybersecurity presented by the European Commission in 2017. Key reforms include building a stronger EU cybersecurity agency, introducing an EU-wide cybersecurity certification scheme and implementation of network and information systems directive (NIS).

The Romanian presidency should highlight the urgency of, and provide smooth political coordination over, these matters in the EU Council. Swift action in cyberspace is also called for due to security of the approaching EU elections.

Consistency of EU Policy in its Neighbourhood

Diversity among the EU's neighbouring countries has grown, and hence it is increasingly hard to identify common denominators for a successful neighbourhood policy. Not only are the Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods vastly different, but there is also growing variation within both the East and South when it comes to the security situation, governance capabilities, socioeconomic challenges and aspirations regarding their relationship with the EU.

Although the geostrategic environment has become less favorable, the EU should build on its earlier experience and consistently support good governance wherever possible. Such possibilities depend on political commitment in the neighbouring countries and security situation among others. Good governance, rule of law and respect for human rights are essential for long-term stability in the neighbourhood.

As the security situation in many parts of the neighbourhood remains fragile, the EU should further develop policies to strengthen the resilience of neighbouring countries, improving their ability to withstand crises and shocks and recover. This includes work on security sector reform, counter-terrorism and preventing violent extremism. Resilience is closely connected to good governance: states with well-functioning institutions and rule of law are better at coping with internal as well as external shocks. The needs of neighbours vary, e.g. Ukraine needs help with rehabilitation of soldiers returning from the front, while Tunisia continues to need support to tackling youth unemployment.

The EU needs to pursue its goals in cooperation with like-minded actors at both state and non-state level. Power diffusion among a variety of actors is a global trend that calls for flexible policy approaches. The EU can advance good governance and resilience in the neighbourhood by networking and cooperating not just with governments and international organizations, but also transnational and local organizations, private companies and other actors.