



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

The Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) has a tradition of formulating recommendations to the incoming Council Presidency. Mario Kölling and Ignacio Molina (Elcano Royal Institute, Madrid), Lucia Mokrá (Comenius University, Bratislava, and TEPSA Board member), Pol Morillas (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs - CIDOB) and Martin Unfried (Maastricht University) contributed to the recommendations. Sabina Lange (European Institute of Public Administration, Maastricht, and TEPSA Board member) 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 Finnish Presidency by Sabina Lange on the occasion of the TEPSA Pre-Presidency Conference on 6-7 June 2019 in Helsinki. The conference is organised by the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA) and TEPSA, with support from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the European Commission – Europe for Citizens and Horizon 2020 programmes (in the framework of the SEnECA and InDivEu projects).

June 2019

Preamble

Finland will take over the six-month rotating Presidency of the Council following the EU parliamentary elections in May 2019. Finland's Presidency will coincide with the start of the European Parliament's 9th legislative term. This timeframe will also see the election of a new Commission President alongside the appointments of a new President of the European Council, High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy, and College of Commissioners. Finland will be facilitating these processes with European citizens' eyes on Brussels in expectation of delivery on the election promises.

At the same time, this will be the period of lower legislative activity in the EP, allowing Finland to focus comparatively more on the work in the Council, which will allow for the legislative work with the EP to resume without delay. While finalising the negotiations on the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2021-2027, there will nevertheless be more space for policy debates.

The Finnish Presidency takes place in the middle of the 18-month programme of the Romanian, Finnish and Croatian Presidencies, which emphasises common values, commitment to the European project, proximity to citizens, unity and consensus, as well as support for the multilateral system. The priorities for the Finnish Presidency emanate from these principles.

Therefore, our recommendations concentrate broadly on the MFF negotiations as decisive for growth, on rule of law as essential to Europe's values and unity, and on Europe's global role, with particular focus on the EU's relations with Africa and the debate surrounding the Union's strategic autonomy. These recommendations take into account the timing of their presentation and the role of the rotating Presidency in the EU.

Growth and conclusion of the negotiation on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027

The negotiation of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027 is one of the most decisive topics on the EU agenda for the months to come. An agreement on the MFF before the end of 2019 is

essential for the work on regulations on specific spending headings to be completed in time for the programmes to be initiated in 2021. Despite the progress made during the Austrian and Romanian Presidencies, contending views persist on a number of issues, including the overall size of the MFF, funding of the Common Agricultural Policy and the Cohesion Policy, climate mainstreaming, links with the European Semester, and the new instrument supporting the Economic and Monetary Union. Therefore, mediating activities of the Presidency in the Council will be essential. The Presidency has powers to concentrate the meetings on open issues, to structure the deliberations, and to convoke ‘confessionals’ during which other member states reveal their interests and ‘red lines’, allowing the Presidency to formulate a common ground which may lead to a unified position.

At the same time, the Presidency will have to work closely with other actors to ensure that an absolute majority of the newly elected European Parliament supports the MFF agreement. Transparency and inclusiveness should govern relations with the EP. Since the preferences of the Finnish Presidency are in line with the MFF proposed by the European Commission, the Presidency is well placed to support the MFF as a strong instrument for promoting economic growth. It can use this as a platform for winning the support among the member states and in the EP for the finalisation of the Digital Single Market and a strengthened focus on the EU’s social responsibility to its citizens, especially regarding education and youth unemployment.

Rule of Law

The rule of law is one of the fundamental values of the European Union. It is a value that allows member states and EU institutions to work together and trust each other. The rule of law forms the basis of democratic systems in all member states, is central to the functioning of the internal market and is vital for making the European Union work as an area of freedom, security and justice. Confronted with situations which revealed systemic threats to the rule of law, the Commission reacted in 2014 by adopting the Rule of Law Framework to address such threats. In April 2019 the Commission laid down possible avenues for further strengthening the Rule of Law Framework and called for other parties, including the Council and member states, to reflect on its proposals.

Finland expressed its support for the connection between the MFF and respect for the rule of law by the member states. According to the EU JUSTICE scoreboard 2019, Finland is the country with the highest level of evaluated independence. From its Presidency seat, it is therefore best placed to steer the response to the Commission’s invitation to reflect on the strengthening of the rule of law framework with a view to preparing Council Conclusions.

Reflection on the Rule of Law framework in the Council should consider the application of this framework across EU programmes and policies, also by linking it to the European Semester. It should also aim to communicate the potential threat to the rule of law with member states institutions early on and to make the rule of law toolkit an effective instrument in strengthening this fundamental value. The Presidency also has a chance to raise awareness of the need to respect the rule of law in order to protect our democracies, safeguard fundamental rights and maintain a cooperation among the member states that is based on solidarity and trust. In formal, informal and outreach meetings the Presidency should highlight the importance of the rule of law in every area of cooperation to ensure that work within and between member states and citizens is conducted in a spirit of trust. Trust in public institutions and the justice system is imperative for an effective and democratic European Union.

Climate change and environment

The 2015 Paris Agreement on climate set out the goal to contain the rise in average global temperatures to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5°C. However, without

additional efforts by the EU and others, these targets are unlikely to be met, resulting in serious consequences for member states and third countries alike. The 9 May Sibiu meeting of EU Heads of State and Government displayed challenges ahead of the EU in combining high-level ambition and unity in climate policy.

Finland has proven itself to be well placed to address the challenges posed by climate change. Accordingly, several climate actions have been scheduled during the Finnish Presidential term. These include the EU-wide adoption of a forward-thinking emissions strategy, with the EU to submit the details of the strategy to the United Nations by early 2020. Finland's Presidency will also be the first to operate under the European Commission's long-term climate strategy, which calls for a carbon neutral economy by 2050 and reemphasises the importance of abiding by the terms of the Paris Agreement.

The Finnish Government has yet to join the member states pledging for carbon neutrality by 2050. While Finland has created a strategy that outlines the steps necessary for it to meet and surpass the EU's targets, Finland's decision not to join the above-mentioned pledge should help it secure a neutral, more persuasive position during its Presidency. As Germany's reticence towards the 2050 target appears to be softening, the Finnish approach should prove instrumental in Germany's eventual decision. In parallel to the debate on the 2050 target, the member states must also prepare their ten-year (2020-2030) national energy and climate plans by the end of 2019 to abide by the EU's Governance Regulation. The Finnish Presidency should make the most of this opportunity and talk to member states to determine how their plans align with the 2050 long-term strategy.

Global role and Europe's security: relations with Africa

The Arab Spring of 2011 and the migration wave of 2015-2016 showed not only how close Africa is to Europe, but also that Africa is a continent connected by the Sahara rather than divided by it. This recognition leads to the understanding that the EU must look at Africa through a continent-to-continent perspective. Issues such as the internal-external security nexus, movements of people, socio-economic trends and demography stretch from northern Europe to Sub-Saharan Africa and pass through the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean Sea, however, has become more of a lake, and it is through this lesser size in the face of today's transport and communication technologies that the Mediterranean defines the shape and future of EU-Africa relations.

The renewal of EU-ACP partnerships/Cotonou agreement after 2020 presents an opportunity to strategically rethink the EU-Africa relationship. The gradual gravitational shift from North Africa and the Middle East towards the Gulf and sub-Saharan Africa also calls for a rethinking of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Upgrading the Cotonou agreement to a more ambitious partnership goes hand in hand with the revision of the ENP to further incorporate the challenges and strategic approaches to the neighbours of the neighbours and to gradually move to a continent-based relationship instead of a neighbourhood-based one. This would also enable the EU to have a more global approach to international politics, taking into account the increasing influence of world powers such as Russia or China in the developments within territories closer to the EU. This is why Finland is well placed to facilitate the ripening of such a vision of EU-Africa relations during its term in office. Finnish Presidency events in Finland in the area of the EU's external action, including informal ministerial meetings, should be dedicated to finding common ground for member states. This common understanding and support from members should focus on the operationalisation and application of the EU Global Strategy's principles and objectives in Africa.