



## Recommendations from members of the TEPSA network

### Priorities and Challenges of the Irish EU Presidency

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#### 1. Facilitating economic growth and competitiveness

The European Commission's Autumn 2012 economic forecasts, published a few days ago, were more pessimistic than those published earlier in the year for growth in 2013, highlighting the imperative of action to boost economic growth across the EU. Although the June 2012 European Council agreed a Pact for Growth and identified a range of medium-term measures to be implemented, launching more immediate and effective initiatives should be a priority for the next semester, with the aim of a rapid return to growth, boosting employment and achieving a better balance between fiscal discipline and growth policies.

In parallel, more effort is needed on accelerating policy initiatives critical for long-term growth, especially the implementation of the Europe 2020 programme, further work on the Single Market Act I and II, the Digital agenda and other initiatives already presented by the European Commission, to deepen the single market and improve the competitiveness of the EU economy.

Similarly, the difficult issues around banking union need to be clarified and turned into an effective and credible policy agenda. There is a good opportunity for the Presidency to facilitate the construction of a new supervisory system, thereby demonstrating the value of a common approach, and to pave the way for adoption of the more contentious facets of banking union, including common deposit insurance. An effective banking union is a vital ingredient for a successful euro.

#### 2. Youth agenda

The alarming rise in youth unemployment and inactivity in many of the Member States worst hit by the crisis threatens to create enduring problems and needs much more effective policy responses. Possible solutions could include:

- Establishing an EU-wide framework to support funding for vocational training and apprenticeships for young unemployed persons;
- Better coordination across national borders of already established welfare, employment and training programmes, making use of the channels and mechanisms of the employment dimension of the Europe 2020 programme;
- Fostering exchange of experience between the Member States that have succeeded in minimising the problems facing youths and those searching for new solutions.

#### 3. The EU budgetary framework for 2014-20

Whether or not the European Council reaches a full agreement later this week on the Multiannual Financial Framework for the period 2014-20, it is vital that the process of completing the negotiations with the European Parliament and national parliaments, as

well as the drafting of the required secondary legislation, proceed without delay. If necessary, the Irish Presidency should call additional Council meetings to resolve any roadblocks.

#### **4. Advancing infrastructure interconnections**

Progress towards the goal of having a common market for utilities where "electricity and natural gas will flow freely" by 2014 has been slow and needs to be given greater urgency. The work will have to be continued on both internal energy market integration, and on forging a better coordinated external energy policy. Further steps should also be taken to integrate transport and telecommunications markets, and to ensuring that the 'Connecting Europe Facility' is implemented rapidly and is able to contribute to these goals as soon as possible.

#### **5. Enlargement**

The Irish Presidency should ensure that the timetable for ratification of the Coation Accession Treaty does not slip, subject to fulfillment of the remaining conditions. To maintain the momentum for political and economic reform in the Western Balkan countries, further enlargement should remain high on the agenda and not allowed to fade from view. It will also be important to pursue the negotiations with Iceland and Turkey, not least in view of the latter's key role in relations with its neighbours including Syria.

#### **6. European Neighbourhood Policy**

Building on the 2011 Warsaw Summit and with a view to the forthcoming Vilnius Summit, the Presidency should continue to collaborate closely with the European External Action Service (EEAS) to strengthen European Neighborhood policy, focusing on cooperation and support to the economic, social and political reforms in Eastern and Southern Neighborhood countries. It should seek to bring the Eastern Partnership countries closer to the EU, while strengthening political association and deepening economic integration, achieving further progress in visa liberalization processes as well as deepening sectorial and multilateral cooperation.

#### **7. External trade**

In these difficult economic times, it is incumbent on the EU to promote open trade and to strengthen economic and trade relations with its strategic partners. In particular, the Presidency should seek to develop closer and more comprehensive trade and investment frameworks with Japan, the US and the 'BRICS' countries. It should also seek substantial progress in the on-going DCFTA negotiations as well as opening of new trade negotiations with the EU's neighbouring countries.

#### **8. The EU's political future**

Several recent developments suggest that the political direction of European integration will remain high on the EU agenda, but the proposals currently on the table need to be framed into a more logical and consequential roadmap. They include the implementation of the Fiscal Compact, the four Presidents' report on the institutional agenda and the 11 Foreign Ministers political plan. Putting some order into these diverse and somewhat conflicting ideas should be an important duty – and opportunity – for the Irish Presidency. Launching a wide-ranging debate, engaging the European Parliament as well as citizens, could be a constructive way for the Irish Presidency to contribute to this issue.

