



Weekly Briefing

Romania External Relations briefing:
Romania prepares for taking over the Presidency of the EU Council
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Romania is increasing cooperation with EU Member States in preparing for taking over the Presidency of the EU Council

As the date for the taking over of the six-month Presidency of the Council of the European Union is approaching, Romania is increasingly involved in external activities with the European partners for preparing its mandate related to the current EU agenda and the main negotiating subjects. In this regard, Romania also made preparations for being involved in the shadow presidency during the mandate to be held by Austria starting with the 1st of July. In addition, the Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă made several visits in Portugal, Lithuania and Estonia in the last months, while presenting the priorities Romania will pursue in the external field in front of the Parliament.

In January 2019, Romania will take over for the first time the six-month Presidency of the Council of the European Union. This means that Romania will be at the centre of European decision-making, with an important role in the development and consolidation of the European project, in the negotiation process for the development of the *acquis communautaire* and, implicitly, in increasing the cooperation between the Member States.

In this respect, Romania has to demonstrate a strong political vision related to strengthening and advancing the EU, as well as a solid administrative capacity able to integrate the vast amount of information¹. In this context, establishing the priorities for the Presidency was a complex process that had to take into account the current EU agenda and the currently negotiating subjects. In addition, Romania had to propose several themes for the European debate that are of primary interest in the country. Romania will have to prepare

¹ According to the Government Memorandum on the Plan to prepare the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, http://gov.ro/fisiere/stiri_fisiere/Memorandum_cu_tema_Planul_de_ac%C8%9Biune_pentru_preg%C4%83tirea_Pre%C8%99edin%C8%9Biei_Rom%C3%A2niei_la_Consiliul_UE_%C3%AEn_primul_semestru2019.pdf

approximately 1,400 meetings to be held outside the country and will organize another 300 events and meetings of the working groups at national level.

Starting with the middle of this year, Romania entered a period mainly focused on presenting its priorities and promoting its vision at the European level. Therefore, several steps in this direction have been made. This month, the head of the Government was invited in front of the Romanian Parliament to present the stage of the preparations for the six-month presidency of the EU Council. Several directions and priorities that Romania will follow could be identified as regards the interests in the external field:

- The consolidation of the Eastern Partnership, with a special focus on the aspirations of the Republic of Moldova for joining the EU. The Romania's plan is to ensure the consistency of the EU's policy in the neighbourhood, especially that during the Romanian mandate it will be 10 years since the launch of the Partnership. The Romanian Presidency will pay attention to extending the benefits of the Free Trade Agreements in force and to increase the interconnectivity with the most advanced countries of the Eastern Partnership. A particular emphasis will be placed on providing concrete responses related to the accession of the Republic of Moldova in the EU.

- The importance of the Black Sea on the EU agenda should be restated.

- A special attention will be oriented towards supporting the European perspective of the Western Balkans. The Romanian Prime-Minister hopes that, by backing the efforts to reform, increasing the level of democracy and reconciling the society in the region, a new dynamism of the enlargement policy could be impelled. In this way, the regional stability and prosperity is to be ensured, which represents a strategic interest for both the EU and Romania.

- The Transatlantic partnership will also be supported, due to its positive impact in maintaining the global multilateral order and strengthening the international law. In addition, EU has an important role in supporting effective multilateralism at regional level and is prone to further propagate its influence, while there are several common priorities shared with the United Nations (UN),

such as global governance, the sustainable development and peace-building, that will further enhance the EU-UN relationship.

In addition, exercising the Presidency of the EU Council is a way of demonstrating the capacity for generating consensus at EU level on active files under negotiation. In this respect, Romania will have to assume the finalization of the legislative negotiations for the files that will be taken over from the Austrian Presidency that is unfolding in the second semester of 2018. This is why Romania will be involved in the “shadow presidency” during the mandate to be held by Austria, starting with the 1st of July 2018, and will work closely with Austria in order to be able to take over the negotiation processes at the European level in an efficient manner from the 1st of January. This implies more accountability and pragmatism in the follow-up of the negotiation process for the active files, including the dialogues with the European Parliament and the European Commission. In addition, Romania is already involved in the entire negotiation process on the future Multiannual Financial Framework, with the aim of ensuring a budget accepted by the Member States with a positive impact for the European citizens.

The Prime-Minister made several visits in the European countries in the perspective of the future Presidency, due to the fact that there are various files on the European agenda with major interest for all the Member States, and the common issues should be identified in order to acknowledge the challenges and the way in which the EU countries understand how to respond to them. A major objective of these visits was, therefore, that of promoting the European agenda in the view of the preparations for the rotating Presidency of Romania at the Council of the EU, as well as the harmonization of the positions on the files negotiated at European level.

In Portugal, the visit aimed to strengthen the bilateral cooperation between the two countries, with an emphasis on economic relations for exploiting the commercial and investment potential as well as the defence and security policies. In this context, new cooperation frameworks in areas of fundamental research

and innovation, public health and medicine, academic cooperation were inaugurated. Not least, a significant part of the visit was oriented towards the cooperation at the European level, in the perspective of the future Presidency of the Council of the EU.

The visits in Lithuania and Estonia had two major focuses: reconfirming the close bilateral relations based on a similar pathway and on common interests related to European issues and on securing the security of the Eastern Flank.

In Lithuania, the talks were focused on the possibilities of increasing bilateral trade and identifying new platforms for sectoral cooperation. There are several areas that were pinpointed to have potential for deepening the bilateral sectoral cooperation, such as IT, energy, chemicals, food, agriculture, infrastructure, energy security, etc.

In addition, another part of the visit was oriented towards ways of strengthening the coordination on European files of common interest for both countries, like supporting the Eastern Partnership, ensuring energy security, expressing the agreement towards the importance of coordination for the cohesion policy and the common agricultural policy. In this context, the two parties identified the common goal of strengthening the stability and security in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Another subject on the discussions' list was related to the North Atlantic Alliance, taking into account the risks and threats faced by the organization, identifying ways to strengthen the cooperation between Allied states, especially those in the Eastern Front of NATO. In fact, one of the points on which both countries agreed was on securing NATO's Eastern Flank security - due to the interests manifested by both countries in this area.

The visit in Estonia was a special one, as it was the first visit of a Romanian Prime-Minister after the restoration of Romania's diplomatic relations with the Baltic state in 1991. As in Lithuania, the subject of the visit focused on the area of security, as the programme contained a visit at the NATO Civic Defense Excellence Cooperative Center, and on the bilateral relations. It was

inaugurated an air flight between Tallinn and Constanța and an Honorary Consulate of the Republic of Estonia in Constanta.

In the same period, Romania was the host of the US-Romania Strategic Partnership Dialogue, in its sixth plenary meeting. The themes of discussions were also related to the same major axes on which the visits in Europe of the Prime Minister were centred: the regional security and the economic cooperation. Romania has an important role in the area of defence for the Transatlantic partnership, therefore its efforts for increasing the capabilities of the armed forces was appreciated. Further enhancement of cooperation in the area of security was emphasized, also following the preparations for two other major events covering this area that will take place in the near future, namely the Brussels NATO Summit and the Bucharest “Three Seas Initiative” Summit.

On the economic side, the major areas of discussions covered the bilateral trade exchanges, increasing investments in energy in order to diversify the energy routes and sources and to contribute to a single European energy market, developing infrastructure and the digital fields. The meeting also took into account the opportunities for developing the Transatlantic partnership, especially in the view of the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU.