

## **GREEK PRESIDENCY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Greece assumed the Presidency of the Council of the European Union on 1 January 2014 and will hold the position for six months until the end of June.

The six month Greek Presidency will be the final Presidency under the current European Parliament with elections set to take place in May 2014. Italy will take over the Presidency on 1 July 2014.

### **The Presidency Trio**

Greece's Presidency was preceded by those of Ireland in the first half of 2013 and Lithuania in the second half. The Trio programme is an 18-month plan of work prepared by an incoming group of three EU Council Presidencies and the Council Secretariat which sets out key objectives to drive forward the EU agenda.

The main aims of the Ireland-Lithuania-Greece Trio programme are to stimulate growth, create jobs and boost EU competitiveness.

### **The Context**

The Greek programme for the presidency outlines the context within which the Greek presidency is taking place;

“First of all, 2014 will witness the start of a new 7-year macroeconomic programming period, under the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2014-2020; secondly, it will witness the holding of elections for a new European Parliament, in May 2014; finally, as the year drives to its close, the appointment of a new European Commission will take place, in October 2014, followed by the appointment of a new European Council President, in November 2014.

2014 will also be marked by the midterm review of the Europe 2020 Strategy, as well as the continuation of the work to complete and deepen the EMU.”<sup>1</sup>

The European Parliament's last sitting is scheduled for 17 April ahead of the May election. Any legislation not agreed by then will be deferred until the newly elected Parliament is convened.

The Greek Presidency has arranged three European Council Summits for its presidency period rather than the usual two. The first one will be held in March and will focus on the 2030 Climate and Energy Framework.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://gr2014.eu/sites/default/files/PROGRAMME%28EN%2928012014.pdf>

Given the on-going economic crisis in Greece, the Greek Government has pledged to undertake the Presidency with a budget of just €50 million<sup>2</sup>. According to Scotland Europa:

“The Presidency will operate with a relatively small team of 156 staff in Brussels, previous Presidencies have used 250 or more, and will minimise expenditure. For this reason meetings will be held in Athens rather than diffused across the country.”<sup>3</sup>

In his speech to the European Parliament on 15 January 2014, the Greek Prime Minister acknowledged the difficulties that Greece had gone through but expressed confidence that with the support of the European Union the situation was improving.

“A year and a half ago, my country was on the verge of destruction, and many speculated - while many felt sure - that it would exit the Eurozone. Some even anticipated that this would lead to the breakup of the Eurozone. Others even proclaimed that the European Union would fall apart! We have proven all doomsayers wrong!”

Today the picture is quite different. Greece has proven that Europe works, that Europe can do it, that our union is strong. And we have proven this in the most convincing way, by overcoming the crisis and rising stronger than ever.

A year and a half ago, we were the weakest link in the Union. Today we are assuming the EU Presidency and I believe that Greece thus becomes the symbol that Europe can survive the crisis, Europe can go forward, that Europe works and it can make it.”<sup>4</sup>

## Priority Areas

The Greek Presidency has highlighted three policy areas as priorities. These are:

- 1) Growth-Jobs-Cohesion,
- 2) Integration of the EU and the Eurozone, and
- 3) Migration-Borders-Mobility.

In addition, maritime policies will constitute a theme that will run horizontally through the Presidency's Priorities. According to the Presidency “the main idea of this theme is to redefine and re-launch the EU Maritime Policy in all its aspects” by building upon the work of previous Presidencies and combining it with the security dimension tackled in the forthcoming Commission-EEAS Communication on a European Maritime Security Strategy. The ultimate objective is the adoption of a text on Maritime Policies at the June 2014 European Council, highlighting the two dimensions: security and growth, including energy<sup>5</sup>.

According to the Presidency Programme:

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.euractiv.com/video/greece-assumes-eu-rotating-presi-532675>

<sup>3</sup> Scotland Europa Guide to the Greek EU Presidency

<sup>4</sup> [http://gr2014.eu/sites/default/files/Samaras%20EP\\_en.pdf](http://gr2014.eu/sites/default/files/Samaras%20EP_en.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <http://gr2014.eu/sites/default/files/PROGRAMME%28EN%2928012014.pdf>

“The Hellenic Presidency comes at a time when Europe is going through a crucial transitional phase. The financial crisis imposed the implementation of restrictive fiscal policies in order to overcome initial deficiencies in the architecture of the EMU, safeguard financial stability and gradually return to sustainable public finances. However, the extent and intensity of the crisis, as well as the level of recession and unemployment that have ensued, have shaken the confidence of an important segment of European citizens in EU institutions and their ability to design and implement reliable, sound and growth-enhancing economic policies aiming at recovery, prosperity and high levels of employment. At the same time, austere fiscal policies had a great effect on social cohesion, particularly in countries directly affected by the crisis.

At this important juncture, the EU's biggest challenge is to foster growth, competitiveness and jobs and to ensure stability and prosperity for all; for this the EU has to reaffirm its mission at the hearts and minds of its citizens. In this context, the EU is called upon today to safeguard financial stability through the deepening of the EMU, to boost growth-enhancing economic policies aiming to fight unemployment by, and inter alia, enhancing synergies between migration and growth and to restore lending to the economy, in particular to SMEs.”<sup>6</sup>

The Presidency has set out three principles which will guide its work. These are:

- Enhancing civic and society engagement in the EU, through policies and initiatives in response to the citizens' everyday problems, concerns and insecurities. Our efforts will focus on the areas of economic recovery, employment, cohesion, mobility of EU citizens and European security, both internal and external. The ultimate goal is the evolution of the EU into a community of shared values and "common destiny" for all its peoples, while preserving and strengthening the European social and economic model.
- Deepening the Union, especially the EMU, by promoting policies and actions to remedy and restore initial deficiencies in the Euro area architecture, which have been unveiled by the recent crisis. In this context, the aim remains to preserve the integrity of the common currency, on a solid and sustainable basis, and to ensure financial stability. EMU deepening will take place fully respecting the Single Market, through a procedure open to non-Eurozone member-states.
- Reinforcing EU democratic legitimacy and accountability, along with building up the collectivity and solidarity links among Member States, as well as incrementally constructing European democracy and expanding civil rights.

More specific detail about various dossiers which will be of interest to Scotland is provided below and the Greek Presidency Programme which can be found at the following link—

[http://issuu.com/gr2014eu/docs/programme\\_en\\_28012014](http://issuu.com/gr2014eu/docs/programme_en_28012014)

---

<sup>6</sup> <http://gr2014.eu/sites/default/files/PROGRAMME%28EN%2928012014.pdf>

## Growth and Jobs

The priority of the Presidency is to return to sustainable public finances while promoting jobs-creating growth policies. The Greek Presidency has stated that it will explore all possible ways to increase funding for the real economy, and particularly for SMEs, by promoting the discussion on the financing of growth, including long-term alternative sources of funding. This will be done in close cooperation with the European Commission and the European Investment Bank.

The Greek Presidency will oversee the interim evaluation of the "Europe 2020 Strategy", which will begin at the spring 2014 European Council<sup>7</sup>. This will be done as part of actions during the 4<sup>th</sup> European Semester. In particular the Presidency will:

“ensure that the Annual Growth Survey’s priorities and guidance will be discussed extensively in the Council formations during January and February, and will prepare, in cooperation with the Commission, a Synthesis Report to be submitted to the March European Council...

...In April, the discussion will focus on the Stability or Convergence Programmes (under the Stability and Growth Pact) and the National Reform Programmes (in the context of the Integrated Guidelines for the implementation of the "Europe 2020" Strategy).”<sup>8</sup>

## SMEs and Horizon 2020

Ensuring the effective implementation of the COSME Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs, and the HORIZON 2020 Programme that will allocate funds to innovative SMEs will be a top priority for the Greek Presidency.

The Presidency will also contribute to the discussion that has already been opened on a renewed SME policy following the five-year anniversary from the adoption of the Small Business Act (SBA), focusing on access to finance – including through alternative sources – reduction of administrative burden and fostering innovative entrepreneurship.

## European Funding Programmes

The Greek Presidency has also committed to making the implementation of the legislative package for the Cohesion and Structural Funds as effective as possible.

An indication of this commitment is provided by the decision to hold an Informal Meeting with the participation of Ministers in charge of the Cohesion Policy (April 2014) with the Presidency suggesting this is a key priority because of the contribution of the policy to fighting recession and unemployment.

## Telecommunications

The Greek Presidency intends to help create an integrated cross-border and cross-section EU legal framework ensuring safe, reliable and user-friendly electronic transactions among businesses, citizens and public services, that will be covering electronic identification,

---

<sup>7</sup> <http://gr2014.eu/eu-presidency/the-greek-presidency/programme-and-priorities>

<sup>8</sup> <http://gr2014.eu/sites/default/files/PROGRAMME%28EN%2928012014.pdf>

electronic identity verification and electronic signatures, thus increasing public and private online services, e-business and e-commerce in the EU.

The Presidency will also seek to promote the Directive on measures to reduce the cost of deploying high-speed electronic communications networks. Following the reduction of the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), this proposal is an important initiative for promoting investment in next generation networks, so as to accelerate the deployment of high speed broadband networks and significantly decrease its cost.

### Youth Employment

The Greek Presidency will focus on promoting initiatives to enhance employment. In particular, priority will be given to speeding up the implementation of the Initiative for Youth Employment, as well as monitoring the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. Progress in this field will be reviewed by the June Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO).

### Justice and Home Affairs

One of the Greek Presidency's main priorities will be concentrating on future developments in the area of freedom, security and justice. The Presidency intends to work intensively, in cooperation with the European Commission and in consultation with the European Parliament, towards shaping the strategic objectives and general EU policy guidelines for legislative and operational planning for the period succeeding the Stockholm Programme. The Presidency is aiming to have these post-Stockholm Strategic Guidelines adopted at the June 2014 European Council.

In the area of home affairs, the Presidency will focus on the issues of migration, both legal and illegal, border surveillance, as well as visa and asylum policies. Attention will also be paid to police and customs cooperation among Member States.

The proposed Regulations on the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office and the reform of the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust) will be prioritised.

### Equality

The Greek Presidency will continue the examination of the Proposal for a Directive on equal treatment, irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, and the Proposal for a Directive on improving the gender balance of the Boards of companies listed on stock exchanges.

### Agriculture and Fisheries

The Greek Presidency will be guided by the key goal of sustainable rural development, promoting the quality, the diversity and the innovation in European agriculture, as well as the smooth transition to the new environment created by the reformed common agricultural policy and the appropriate implementation of the rural development tools.

The Presidency will be focusing on the new Common Agricultural Policy, through the completion and the simplification of the legislative framework. This simplification will help improve the competitiveness of European agriculture.

In the fisheries sector, the Greek Presidency will seek to ensure a more sustainable management of EU fishing and fisheries. The Presidency will continue the work of the Lithuanian Presidency in attempting to secure the conclusion of negotiations on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and will then look to begin implementation of the EMFF.

### Environment and Climate Change

The Greek Presidency will try to finalize the file on the EU Emissions Trading Scheme for Aviation in view of the implementation, by 2020, of an international agreement applying a single global market-based measure to international aviation emissions.

The Presidency also intends to raise the profile of the Climate-Energy 2030 Package. The 2030 policy framework for climate and energy proposed by the European Commission aims to make the European Union's economy and energy system more competitive, secure and sustainable<sup>9</sup>.

The framework presented by the European Commission on 22 January 2014 seeks to drive continued progress towards a low-carbon economy. It aims to build a competitive and secure energy system that ensures affordable energy for all consumers, increases the security of the EU's energy supplies, reduces our dependence on energy imports and creates new opportunities for growth and jobs.

A centre piece of the framework is the target to reduce EU domestic greenhouse gas emissions by 40% below the 1990 level by 2030. The Commission proposes an objective of increasing the share of renewable energy to at least 27% of the EU's energy consumption by 2030. Progress towards the 2020 target of improving energy efficiency by 20% is being delivered by policy measures at the EU and national levels.

The role of energy efficiency in the 2030 framework will be further considered in a review of the Energy Efficiency Directive due to be concluded later in 2014. The European Council is expected to consider the Climate Energy 2030 package at its spring meeting on 20-21 March 2014.

### Enlargement

The Presidency will ensure that the enlargement agenda in the Western Balkans remains high among its priorities.

This will include attempting to make significant progress in Montenegro's accession negotiations, provided that all necessary conditions have been met and taking forward Serbia's application now that accession negotiations have begun.

### External Affairs

The Greek Presidency will place a special focus on the EU-US trade relationship, with the aim of advancing the negotiations on the new Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) Agreement. The Presidency will also place special focus on the finalization of the conclusion of the negotiations on the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement with Canada.

---

<sup>9</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/2030/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/2030/index_en.htm)

During the Greek Presidency, the EU will seek to advance the EU-China relationship, in view of the EU-China 2020 Strategic Plan for Cooperation, with a focus on achieving progress in the Geographical Indications Agreement, investment protection and market access. Greece will also seek to advance the Free Trade Agreement negotiations with Japan, especially in light of the review clause in the negotiations, which is to be assessed during the first semester of 2014<sup>10</sup>.

---

<sup>10</sup> <http://gr2014.eu/sites/default/files/PROGRAMME%28EN%2928012014.pdf>