

Introduction

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here today and to be given the opportunity to briefly outline to you the broad parameters of the priorities of the Greek Presidency of the Council of the European Union during the first semester of 2014.

I would like to thank, in this regard, the European Policy Center for organizing this Policy Breakfast and look forward to our continued constructive cooperation throughout our Presidency.

Greek Presidency Priorities

It is more than obvious that the priority areas of our presidency cannot escape the pressing needs of European citizens today. The speed of our reaction must match the seriousness and urgency of the problems.

In Europe today we are called upon to tackle the economic and financial crisis, by safeguarding our common currency through the deepening of the EMU and by dealing with recession and unemployment through boosting growth. At the same time, security challenges in our external borders are forcing us to deal immediately with immigration issues.

Bearing all this in mind, our efforts during the Greek Presidency will focus on the following key areas:

(A) Promoting growth, employment and cohesion. Full and effective implementation of the Compact for Growth and Jobs will be the core of our work. This includes inter alia:

- i. Dealing with pending legislative work to implement the growth oriented sector of the Multiannual Financial Framework.
- ii. Implement decisions made by the June 2013 European Council concerning increasing the lending capacity of SMEs - the key employers in the European economy - and creating a friendly environment for their growth.
- iii. Implement the Youth Initiative in order to create jobs for the most vulnerable part of our population.
- iv. Initiate talks on further promoting mobility in the job market.
- v. Taking action on external trade through further promoting ongoing talks on Trade Agreements with the US and other strategic partners.
- vi. The interim evaluation of the "Europe 2020 Strategy", at the Spring 2014 European Council, lends the context and offers the opportunity for more concrete initiatives on growth and jobs creation.
- vii. Promoting action on dealing with the social consequences of our decisions on EMU.

(B) Deepening the Union, especially the EMU, by introducing policies and actions to improve initial deficiencies in the Euro area architecture, which have been unveiled by the ongoing crisis.

The main objective is to safeguard the stability of the common currency, by advancing the deepening of the EMU and the ex ante coordination of national fiscal and economic policies.

On the Banking Union, the Greek Presidency will strive to reach agreement on the Commission's latest proposal on the Single Resolution Mechanism (SRM). Depending on progress to be made during the Lithuanian presidency, we might face other issues that seem ripe for agreement, such as the Banking Recovery and Resolution Directive and the Deposit Guarantee Directive. At the same time, there is special interest to promote, as a matter of urgency - given the small legislative period until the elections for the European Parliament - issues concerning tax fraud and tax evasion, as well as the Financial Transactions Tax.

On Deepening the EMU, we will strive to lay the foundations of an ever-prosperous, well-coordinated EMU, with the right balance between solidity and solidarity and the necessary institutional autonomy of its members. Our work will be guided by Herman Van Rompuy's Roadmap and the Commission's Blueprint. This new Eurozone should fully respect the Single Market and remain open to non euro-area member states. As I said before, special emphasis will be attached to the social dimension of the EMU, as one of the pillars for its further deepening. At the same time, we will need to lay the foundations for an institutional structure that would ensure enhanced transparency, accountability and representation for the whole exercise. This dimension entails particular importance as an answer to the demographic and fiscal crisis of the European welfare state.

(C) Migration, border management and mobility of Union citizens and European security, internal and external.

Developing an area of freedom, security and justice will be a major objective for the Greek Presidency. Today that Europe is being plagued by the economic crisis, it is more than necessary to reinforce the common European policy on the areas of Justice and Home Affairs. Our approach has 3 targets:

- (a) stopping/reducing illegal migration in an efficient way, while safeguarding respect for human rights,
- (b) improving and better organizing legal migration and facilitated mobility,
- (c) enhancing synergies between migration and growth,

In view of the fast approaching end of the "Stockholm Program 2010-2014", the Greek Presidency will work on formulating the strategic vision and laying the priorities of EU relevant policies covering the years 2014-2018, founded on solidarity, joint responsibility and cooperation between member states.

More specifically, we believe that when dealing with illegal migration, we must:

- i) link financial assistance to third countries with their progress on fighting illegal migration and cooperating on issues such as asylum, readmission and returns,
- ii) increase European funding to countries bearing the biggest share of the burden of illegal migration,
- iii) proceed with deepening our Common Asylum Policy through implementing the very meaning of the principle of solidarity and equal sharing of burden. In the long run, it is essential to build a permanent mechanism on asylum, which will distribute people seeking asylum to EU member states, according to a series of criteria, such as population and GDP.

The **“Task Force for the Mediterranean”** that we decided to form at the European Council in October is an important first step in the right direction. The conclusions of that meeting reflected the determination of all of us to address a particularly difficult and multi-faceted problem in a European way. It was a basic first step in the right direction to agree that the problem should be addressed, to the extent possible, at the place of origin. At the same time we must take action to stop human trafficking criminal networks.

The Task Force should present results before the end of the year. The work on post-Stockholm strategic guidelines will offer the opportunity to elaborate on a long term approach to the problem.

EU Sea Policies-Horizontal Thematic

Apart from the priority areas our Presidency has set, Greece will introduce a horizontal thematic that will run across all three priority areas, namely EU Sea policies.

The Sea is an area of privilege in terms of knowledge and action for Greece and an inexhaustible source of growth and prosperity for the whole of Europe. Being a traditionally maritime country, Greece acknowledges the great potential and opportunity that marine and maritime activities hold for the EU economy as a whole, provided that they are sustainable. At the same time, Europe has obvious strategic interests that justify the urge to bring to the fore and deal with security problems of sea borders management.

The main idea of this thematic is to redefine and re-launch the EU Maritime Policy in all its aspects, not being confined to issues of growth and development (as did the Limassol declaration during the Cypriot Presidency). The objective will be the adoption of a text on Maritime Policy/Strategy at the June 2014 European Council, highlighting 2 dimensions: security and growth.

In this context, the Greek Presidency will strive to:

- Build on the Integrated Maritime Policy in the Marine and Maritime Agenda for Growth and Jobs, including seabed mapping and blue energy, as well as developing the indigenous energy resources of the European Union as an additional factor of limiting energy dependence of Europe.

- Promote cooperation and synergies of Coast Guard Services.
- Push for implementation of Maritime Spatial Planning
- Update EU maritime strategy in the area of transport.
- Adopt EU strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas (EUSAIR)
- Promote Nautical and Coastal Tourism
- Shape a European Maritime Security Strategy.

Conclusion

As you can see, this is going to be a particularly busy and hopefully very productive semester. While the dissolution of the European Parliament in May means that we have a tight schedule to keep during the first trimester of our Presidency, as far as legislative work is concerned, the second trimester is going to be equally busy, as it provides a good opportunity to have political/strategic debates on the most pressing issues and give political guidance and direction for the next trio Presidency. Already, we are working very closely with the Italians who will succeed us in July in order to have as smooth a transition as possible from one trio Presidency to another and ensure that the necessary follow-up work will be taken forward.

I thank you for your attention.