

# Priorities of the Greek EU Presidency in the first half of 2014

*Dear Senators,*

First of all thank you for inviting me, thus giving me the opportunity to describe the main goals and priorities of the Greek EU Presidency in the first half of 2014.

I think, in order to better understand these priorities and the reasons for which they have been set as our main goals for this semester, it could be useful, if I could also describe the landscape, the political and institutional framework within which Greece is called to assume the Presidency.

First: the EU, as you know is in a deep crisis, and my country is in the middle of this. We speak about recession in most of our countries, we speak about unemployment. And of course, as long as there is prosperity, things are always easier, even among member states. On the contrary, economic problems often lead to intense internal division and conflicts and to the awakening of old perceptions and stereotypes. Instead of more integration and cohesion, you risk to have more distance among states and societies.

Second, we should not forget that, perhaps because of the crisis, but not just for that, EU is not as popular, among its own citizens, or as attractive for other countries, as it used to be. We have to deal with a huge wave of euroscepticism and we should try hard to convince that the solution lies on more, not on less Europe.

Third: the role of the Presidency has been changed since the Lisbon Treaty. A big part of the responsibilities that used to lie with the rotating Presidency now they are exercised by the External Service and the High Commissioner or the President of the European Council

And finally, we should not forget that 2014 will be first the year of the elections for the European Parliament, meaning that the period for deciding on new legislation will be limited and, second, the year for the decisions of Member States and the new Parliament for the composition of new European Commission.

It is against this background that the Greek but also the Italian Presidency will be exercised. And this is the other important element we should have in mind. The successive presidencies of two Mediterranean countries that encounter similar problems and have a like-minded approach, in a series of issues which can form to a certain degree an agenda shared by both.

As you can easily guess from the above, the main priorities of a Mediterranean country like Greece, which is the main victim of the actual crisis, but on the other hand is steadily and traditionally among those countries that are striving for more European integration and the promotion of European values, have been imposed by themselves. The reality within EU is such that practically could not allow to be ignored by any Presidency when fixing its priorities.

Having that in mind, let me now elaborate on the main Greek Presidency priorities for the next six months.

#### 1. Growth-Jobs-Cohesion

In a period when unemployment has reached record-high rates in most EU member-states, affecting especially the young, and when recession is a constant threat to European economies, growth cannot but figure as a matter of overriding importance for the Greek Presidency in our common goal to remove European economies from recession. From the Greek perspective, Jobs and Growth are structurally and inextricably connected.

The main objective is to balance the timetable of fiscal consolidation with the implementation of a substantially enhanced and realistic Compact for Growth and Jobs, that can be transformed into a diverse European investment program, modeled after the cohesion policy, with a focus on employment. The European Investment Bank (EIB) can have a strong role in relation to the labour-intensive projects (e.g. projects for SMEs, basic infrastructure, energy and climate) with the support and trust of the European Central Bank (ECB).

Initiatives and actions for halting unemployment and boosting job

creation are absolutely necessary in order to avert the danger of “jobless growth”.

## 2. Further integration of EU-Eurozone

Tackling the financial and economic crisis in the Eurozone and completing the new EMU architecture will certainly remain priorities for the EU rotating presidencies of the coming years, including the Greek one. 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.

In this framework, progress on the following building blocks will be emphasized:

- (a) The promotion of the banking union. This remains essential to the improved functioning of the EMU and a prerequisite for increased confidence in the European economy.
- (b) Agreement on the principles of the reinforced budgetary and economic integration frameworks. The aim is to ensure the effective implementation and further integration of the new EU/Eurozone economic governance mechanisms so as to enhance synergies between member-states in a growth- and jobs-friendly way.
- (c) 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 ensures enhanced transparency, accountability and representation for the whole exercise.

## 3. Migration-Borders-Mobility

Instability in the European periphery and the persistence of the causes that lead to immigration flows into Europe increase these

flows and place an extra burden on EU member states during a period of economic crisis when all forces and efforts should be focused on reforms aimed at safeguarding stability and revitalizing growth. This burden falls mainly on the EU member-states that are on Europe's external borders, as well as on those heavily affected by recession and unemployment.

In this context, the Greek Presidency will concentrate its efforts on highlighting the positive aspects of a comprehensive migration management to the benefit of boosting growth and will spare no efforts in promoting all dimensions of migration and mobility policies. At the same time, action is envisaged to tackle the problems arising from illegal migration in economy, social cohesion and political stability.

## Maritime Policies

Being a traditionally maritime country, Greece recognizes the great potential that marine and maritime activities have of benefitting the EU economy as a whole, in a sustainable way. At the same time, obvious strategic interests point up the urgency of bringing to the fore and dealing with security problems of sea border management.

In this context, Greece introduces a horizontal thematic that will run through all three of the presidency's priorities, namely the EU Maritime Policy. The main idea is to redefine and restart the EU Maritime Policy in all its aspects, not solely confined to issues of growth and development (Limassol declaration).

Our aim is to cooperate closely with all Partners that share the same strategic interests and to promote strategies and policies that will benefit all EU member states. The Sea is an area of privilege in terms of knowledge and action for Greece, and it is an inexhaustible source of growth and prosperity for the whole of Europe.

## Enlargement

Last but not least, I would like to clarify, with regard to the issue of the enlargement of the EU, that my country, like Italy, remains a staunch supporter of the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries and of Turkey. The “Thessaloniki Agenda” laid, back in 2003, the foundations for the admission of the Balkan countries to the EU. Nowadays, there is an explicit political will from all countries of the region to join the European family, despite the economic difficulties the EU is faced with. Of course there are problems with some countries where structural problems but to a certain degree lack of political will don't allow a high degree of optimism . On the other hand developments in Serbia, Montenegro , Albania as well as in Kosovo can be seen as positive, allowing them to move forward. The Greek presidency will try its best to facilitate their course towards the EU.

Dear Senators,

I can assure you that my country, that has already undertaken three times the rotating presidency is fully aware of the actual climate within EU and the relevant difficulties. But we see this actual 6months Presidency as one big challenge. Greece has the knowhow but also the sensitivities and the necessary perception of reality that can guarantee a successful Presidency that could serve the interest of all European citizens, facilitating also on the other hand the job of the next Italian Presidency, with which we are in constant contacts.