



# Informal Meeting of Ministers and State Secretaries for European Affairs

## 23-24 January 2017

### Presidency Paper for Session II: Our European Future Together

#### State of Play

In a few weeks, we will be getting together to mark the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. Next week, our leaders will be meeting in Malta to discuss one of our common challenges as well as to reflect further on our common future together.

In these sixty years, the European Union has progressed on its integration path bringing peace, economic well-being and progress to its Members. Its attraction over these six decades has been the commitment to pool political, economic, social and cultural resources to achieve goals that are otherwise unachievable through isolated initiatives of the individual Member States. In the first 50 years, despite the difficulties of re-building the entire Continent, the parallel gradual building of trust amongst the nations of Europe manifested itself in a phased integration process accompanied by an ever more sophisticated enlargement process designed to make this club amongst the most prosperous and progressive in the world.

This model is being put to the test and the objective of this discussion is to reflect on our future together.

The crises and challenges that the European Union has been facing in these last years need no introduction. The **'euro area crisis'**, the **refugee and migration crisis**; the **geopolitical crisis**; **the threats to security**; the unprecedented intended exit of a Member State, compounded by additional sources of **geopolitical insecurity** and potential **threats to the global economic order**, are a mix of challenges that individually have the potential to challenge the foundations on which the Union is based. These crises have resulted in: (i) a growing lack of trust between Member States and national societies in the European project; (ii) a need to balance national interests against the collective European interest at time resulting in difficulties in reaching an agreement at EU level; (iii) widespread frustration among citizens perceiving the EU as unable to tackle these crises; (iv) an erosion of wealth and the social safety net; and (v) external reputational damage.

To date, the Union has been able to respond to each individual crisis in a way which ensures the sustainability of the Union. Yet the coming together and overlap of the different crises, especially the financial and migration crises, together with the fact that for the first time since its establishment, the EU has to deal with one of its Members wanting to leave, have brought to the fore the fact that the achievements of the EU of the last 60 years alone are not providing the answers to citizens' expectations.

## A realistic agenda for 2017


The effects of the crises and the fact that EU responses were deemed to be structurally incomplete make it increasingly difficult for Member States to act cooperatively at EU level. The mainstream has struggled to provide an effective response to these underlying causes, resulting in the emergence of populism, simplistic rhetoric and radicalism. The influence of populist movements on EU policy will play an important role in 2017 with a number of elections coming up.

There is a need for a realistic agenda that does not promise too much and then delivers too little. There is a need to regain trust in the European project by focusing on concrete steps aiming to build the basis for more reforms in the future.

In this regard, while the beginning of negotiations of the withdrawal of one of its Member States is an important item on the 2017 agenda, it should not derail European decision-making. Progress is needed in a number of policy fields and there is a need to make forward-looking decisions and to operationalise these decisions.

There should be a focus on delivering 'real results' for the citizens. The EU has to "use" this period to go back to its fundamentals in order to re-build the trust of its citizens and bring the citizens back to the core of its decision making. Citizen value added should be the driving force of this energy that needs to be re-injected into the European project. Delivering real results means addressing critical matters that affect our citizens. For 2017, these include a number of key elements:

- a. Managing the migration issue by re-positioning response in a broader context and focusing energies on the external dimension; increasing border protection capacities while at the same time ensuring that our migration and asylum systems are sufficiently robust to withstand future crises. The measures put in place for the Central Mediterranean route are not having the desired effects. While the difficulties in this regard are not to be underestimated, no effort must be spared and in 2017 the EU has to resolve to put its collective weight behind efforts to install the elements that will deal with this route effectively. The Malta Summit in February will put this issue at the heart of its agenda.
- b. Delivering on the digital and energy Single Market agendas and targets, while ensuring that the Single Market is beneficial for consumers and businesses.
- c. Encouraging investment, not only private sector investment but also public and social investment. In this regard, we also have to think about the next MFF and the focus of our resources - whether we are going to do things differently or do different things with the resources at hand.
- d. The EU is meant to deliver an area of freedom, security and justice for its citizens. Our experience has shown that if we are not together, we are vulnerable and therefore our focus in 2017 should be to strengthen our resilience to deliver a safe Europe for



our citizens. We also need to take our cooperation and intelligence sharing in this area onto the next level.

- e. We need to bring back confidence in trade. We need to rethink how we handle bilateral and multilateral trade to guarantee that the EU can protect its interests, the interests of its citizens and the competitiveness of its businesses and industries without sacrificing openness and becoming protectionist.

In view of the inequalities, arising primarily from the financial crisis and its aftermath, the social dimension of our Union needs to be reinforced. Citizens should share in our prosperity. Member States are very protective of their social systems and hence efforts on the social dimension should not be wasted on direct or indirect attempts at harmonisation. Coupling this dimension with growth-conducive policies will bring about the right balance for the creation of better jobs and a decent quality of life.

- f. We need to function as one diplomatic machinery (within the existing competences) when it comes to implementing our joint strategy in our neighbourhood.
- g. The continued defence of our values. Europe should continue to be the leader of those that believe and share in our values. The message coming from the Rome event should commemorate and celebrate the values we hold dear. These are as relevant today as they were 60 years ago and are the basis of our Union.
- h. Finally, in terms of process in implementing our agenda, we need to be mindful of the principle of subsidiarity and respect the competences enshrined in the Treaty - both institutionally and also those of the EU and the Member States.

For 2017, the EU needs to deliver real results while being realistic about what can be achieved. It is time to reflect on our 60 years of "togetherness" - a period that has been defined by peace, economic well-being and progress - to mobilise an ambitious European agenda which is relevant to the citizen. Re-gaining credibility and trust - is crucial in this respect - as is reducing tensions and divisions between Institutions and Member States and amongst the same Member States. This is about the viable and sustainable existence of our Union. This is at the core of the message of rEUnion.

#### **Key Questions:**

1. Do you agree with the diagnosis as stated above? Do you consider other elements that are relevant?
2. Can the EU mobilise an agenda of real results, including making progress on the EU's unfinished business? What do we need to do differently?
3. Can we translate EU value added into citizen value added?
4. How do you think this reflection on the future of Europe should be taken forward? Do you favour a structured approach?