

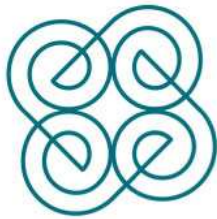
IKV BRIEF

IRISH PRESIDENCY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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IRISH PRESIDENCY OF THE EU



Uachtaránacht na hÉireann ar
Chomhairle an Aontais Eorpaigh
Irish Presidency of the Council
of the European Union
eu2013.ie

As of 1 January 2013, Ireland is assuming the rotating presidency of the EU Council for a six-month period. The Irish presidency is significant for a number of reasons.

Firstly, 1 January 2013 has a symbolic meaning for Ireland, as it coincides with **the 40th anniversary of Ireland's accession to the then EEC (EU).**

Secondly, Ireland which is to assume the EU term presidency for the **7th time** will be **the first state that received a bail-out to assume the term presidency.** Thirdly, as the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus (GASC)'s unilateral presidency comes to an end on 31 December 2012; it will mark the end of an uneasy period in Turkey-EU relations. As may be known, Ankara declared that it will not establish any contacts with the outgoing presidency which it does not recognize. These statements have not caused any serious disruption in Turkey's relations with the EU during GASC's unilateral EU Council presidency. In other words, Turkey's relations with member states and EU institutions other than the Council presidency have continued and the working groups established in the framework of the "Positive Agenda" have continued their work. Nonetheless, the GASC's stance towards Turkey has been reflected in the wording of some Turkey-related EU documents and Turkey's non-recognition of the Council presidency has been criticized on various occasions. In that respect, **the Irish presidency commencing on 1 January 2013 is likely to bring Turkey back to the EU debate.** In addition, **the fact that a relatively "Turco-phile" country is assuming the Council presidency presents a window of opportunity for overcoming the current impasse in Turkey's EU membership process.**

Priorities of the Irish EU Presidency: stability, growth and jobs

The theme of the Irish EU presidency is **stability, growth and jobs.** Dublin has identified its key priority as "**securing stability and ensuring that this leads to growth and jobs**"¹. Ireland, which was among the hardest hit countries from the global financial crisis and received a € 85bn bail-out in December 2010, will reflect its own experience of dealing with the crisis to its presidency. During the first half of 2013, Ireland is expected to focus on the lessons learnt from the crisis and on boosting competitiveness, countering unemployment which has reached critical levels in the EU and leading with proposals to generate sustainable growth and jobs. To this end three headings will be significant:

¹ "Ireland's EU Presidency priorities announced, dedicated website eu2013.ie goes live", 17.12.2012, <http://www.eu2013.ie/news/news-items/irelandseupresidencyprioritiesannounceddedicatedwebsiteeu2013iegoeslive/>, Accessed on the 18th December 2012

- ***People-centered recovery, designed to last***

According to Dublin, the most urgent priority to be addressed at the EU level concerns stimulation of growth that would result in job creation which will only be possible on the basis of economic stability. By this token, the Irish presidency will focus on implementing EU's new economic governance measures especially the European Semester. Under this priority, the Irish Presidency aiming at restoring trust to the financial sector, will focus on making progress on the Banking Union proposals and financial services reform.

Ireland will seek to address the high-level of unemployment among the young population by improving the Youth Employment and Youth Guarantee proposals. 2013 will be celebrated as "European Year of Citizens". The Irish presidency -suitable to the theme of the year- will try to promote initiatives aimed at free-movement of people in the EU and protecting workers' rights.

- ***Investment in job-friendly growth and in Europe's resources***

In the scope of this heading Dublin commits to prioritize measures remaining under **Single Market Act I and to move forward with the proposals on Single Market II**. Ireland, host to many of the world's largest internet companies such as Facebook and Google, will also prioritize **strengthening EU's digital economy** by advancing measures regarding cyber security, e-signatures and e-identification, data protection and web accessibility.

SMEs which constitute the backbone of the European economy will be in the spotlight during the Irish EU presidency. Dublin will pursue initiatives aimed at improving SMEs' access to financing, public procurement opportunities and research funding.

Reaching a compromise on the **seven-year budget for the EU's next programming period** will be another key dossier which the Irish presidency will seek to achieve early next year. Moreover, the presidency is determined to collaborate with the member states and the parliament for reaching an agreement on the reform of the common agricultural policy, Horizon 2020 and cohesion funding. Another key priority for the Irish presidency will be to **realize the full potential of EU's natural resources** in that context particular focus will be placed on "Blue Growth" for sea resources and resuming work on Green Economy for smart and sustainable growth.

- ***Europe and the world: a win-win engagement with our partners***

The Irish presidency aims at **pushing forward with the enlargement agenda**. Progress in Turkey's accession talks which have stagnated in the past couple of years during several political reasons and advancing the Western Balkan states' integration with the EU, as well as further progress in Iceland's accession negotiations are key priorities in the enlargement dossier. **Strengthening relations with EU's neighbors** also ranks high among Ireland's priorities. Dublin will also focus on **development, humanitarian policy** in particular on the fight against famine and climate change. **Forging stronger ties between the United Nations and the EU** especially in the realm

of crisis management and peace support operations will also be of key importance to Ireland.

Dublin will focus on **going through with free trade agreements** (FTAs) with third countries. Dublin argues that FTAs with Japan, Singapore, Canada and the USA could boost EU-wide economic growth by 2 percent. Therefore, advancing the FTAs with third countries in particular with the USA constitutes a key priority for Dublin.

What could Turkey expect from the Irish EU Presidency?

Currently, more than half of the 35 negotiating chapters remain blocked by the Council and the unilateral vetoes of some member states such as France and GASC. Since the Spanish EU Presidency when the chapter on “Food Safety, Veterinary and Phytosanitary” was opened on the 30th June 2010, not a single chapter has been opened in Turkey’s accession negotiations. In other words, five EU term presidencies have passed without any real progress in Turkey’s EU accession process. To date, 13 chapters have been opened and only one chapter has been provisionally closed. There are three chapters that remain unblocked namely; “Competition Policy”, “Public Procurement” and “Social Policy and Employment” which are among the costliest chapters that aspirant states leave until the very last stages of the negotiation process.

Against this background, change of leadership in France presents a window opportunity which combined with a Turkey-friendly country assuming the EU term presidency could create the necessary incentives for a breakthrough to realize.

Dublin regards itself an “**enlargement-enthusiast**”². It was during the previous Irish EU Presidency, when the EU expanded from 15 members to 25 with the accession of 10 new members on the 1st May 2004. **Irish officials have expressed their determination to open at least one negotiating chapter with Turkey during Ireland’s term presidency in the first half of 2013**³.

Hope is high in Ankara that France which under the leadership of Sarkozy was a key veto-player in Turkey’s integration with the EU, will divert from this role under the leadership of François Hollande. There are some signs to validate this change. As the 6th May presidential elections resulted in the Socialist candidate François Hollande’s triumph, it marked the end of an era of unease in Turkey-EU relations. As is known, Turkey’s relations with France hit a new low under the leadership of Sarkozy who instrumentalized opposition to Turkey’s eventual membership to score points in domestic politics and blocked five negotiating chapters on the grounds that “they were directly linked to full membership”. President Hollande, in contrast to his predecessor who was staunchly opposed to Turkey’s prospective membership to the EU, holds the

² Europolitics, “Ireland to push for trade agreements and enlargement”, Ophélie Spanneut, 17 December 2012, <http://www.europolitics.info/ireland-to-push-for-trade-agreements-and-enlargement-artr346458-32.html>, Accessed on the 18th December 2012.

³ Today’s Zaman, “Upcoming EU president: At least one chapter in Turkey’s bid to be opened”, 10 December 2012, <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-300722-upcoming-eu-president-ireland-says-will-open-at-least-one-chapter-in-turkeys-eu-bid.html>, Accessed on the 16th December 2012.

view that Turkey's membership prospects should be judged based on its fulfillment of the EU criteria. With change of leadership in France the highly strained relations between Turkey and France entered a period of rapprochement. In this context hope is high in Ankara that Paris could lift the veto on five negotiating chapters⁴ which it imposed during Sarkozy's presidency. This implies that, aside from the chapter "Agriculture" which is also suspended by the Council due to the ports issue, the remaining chapters could be opened. Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator for Turkey Mr. Egemen Bağış recently noted that possible chapters that could be opened depending on the lifting of the French veto, could be regional policy and fiscal and budgetary provisions⁵.

⁴ These chapters are "Agriculture" (Chapter 13), "Economic and Monetary Policy" (Chapter 17), "Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments" (Chapter 22), "Fiscal and Budgetary Provisions" (Chapter 33) and "Institutions" (Chapter 34).

⁵ "Bağış: İrlanda güvendiğimiz bir ülke (Bağış: Ireland is a country we trust)", Hürriyet Daily, 2 January 2013, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/printnews.aspx?DocID=22270684> accessed on the 3rd January, 2013.