Emanuele Guicciardi provides an early outline of the upcoming Italian EU Council Presidency priorities.

When the Italian minister for European Affairs, Enzo Moavero Milanesi, presented his annual review of Italy's participation in EU matters earlier this year, he did so with a slight twist. In reference to the upcoming Italian presidency, he shed light on some of the priorities that Italy will engage in during its term due to run from July to December 2014.

The report, presented on 10 January to the Italian council of ministers and on 22 January to the Italian parliament, suggests that five areas will form the core of the Italian presidency's priorities. For all the non-Italian speakers out there, these areas are outlined below.

**General institutional set-up**

The first point of the report mentions that the Italian presidency will concentrate its efforts on enhancing the democratic components of Union decision-making procedures. Furthermore, the key focus of the presidency will be placed on growth and employment, especially in light of the Horizon 2020 priorities and with a special focus on the digital agenda.
Lastly, in terms of general institutional set-up, the presidency proposes to oversee the implementation of the single supervisory mechanism and the single resolution mechanism in order to guide the practical creation of the banking union. In that framework, it also proposes measures to incentivise structural reforms and bring about the mutualisation of debt among member states.

**External action and trade**

The report stresses the need for the EU to enhance its common defence policy. Furthermore, major progress on the enlargement process is envisaged during the presidency, with a particular focus on key advancements on Western Balkans accession talks.

In terms of trade, the presidency wishes to notably advance, and if possible sign, the transatlantic trade and investment partnership during its mandate.

**Industrial policy**

In terms of industrial policy, the first aspect stressed by the report is the elaboration of a plan for European SMEs. In particular, the presidency will concentrate its efforts on measures to enhance credit access and financing for SMEs.

This action will be enshrined in a broader policy of growth and innovation for the European industrial sector which will be devised in more detail following the publication of the conclusions reached by the European council of February 2014 on the theme.

**Migration**

In continuity with the priorities of the Greek presidency, the report stresses that the Italian presidency will strengthen the EU areas of freedom, security and justice, and the common migration policy.

The tools that will particularly constitute cause for discussion during the presidency will be the reinforcement of Frontex, enhanced cooperation with migration origin and transit countries, and the fight against illegal immigration by means of a more coherent policy on legal migration.

**Link to Expo 2015**

The fifth point mentioned in the report is a rather promotional one, and that is the creation of a direct link between the Italian presidency and the Milan 2015 expo. In particular, the presidency envisages hosting some of the high level meetings in Milan, including council meetings concerning agriculture, energy and the environment.

Considering the theme of the expo, "Feeding the planet, Energy for life", it is likely that one of the priority areas of the presidency will also be food policy in its broader sense. In particular, food labelling and origin labelling, as well as control of the food chain and nutrition, are likely to constitute key themes in legislative terms.

**Taxation**

The last theme mentioned in the report is that of financial and taxation matters. The report mentions that the presidency will consider the reform of the VAT system as a priority, along with the energy tax and the financial transaction tax.
In terms of tax evasion, the presidency will attempt to bring key advances, in particular by revising the legislation on administrative cooperation between fiscal agencies.

For the same purpose, traceability of payments will also be a core priority, especially through the legislation regarding the information accompanying the transfer of funds which is currently being debated in the European parliament's ECON and LIBE parliamentary committees.

The first outlook of the Italian presidency priorities reveals, therefore, a programme that takes after recent presidencies, in particular the Greek one, but also adds some elements of novelty - the link with expo 2015 above all but also the intention of a reform of the EU institutional and procedural set-up.

Whether these intentions will be confirmed will be revealed when a more detailed programme is published, likely to occur in late May.

About the author

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