

# CEPLIS TELEGRAM



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## *CEPLIS joins Confprofessioni to visit officials and professional representatives in Sofia at the occasion of the Bulgarian EU Council presidency*

At the kind invitation of the President of our active member Confprofessioni who is also our First Vice-president, Gaetano Stella, CEPLIS has participated in a series of very constructing and fruitful meetings between a delegation of Confprofessioni and several high level representatives of the government and the professional sector of Bulgaria.

Headed by Gaetano Stella, our delegation arrived in Sofia the 8<sup>th</sup> of May and had its first meeting with the Deputy Minister in charge of the Bulgarian EU Council Presidency, Ms Monika Panayotova.

The meeting was the opportunity for CEPLIS' Director General to present the Minister with our booklet on the Common Values of the professions at the EU level and to underline the wish of our professions to see their specificities better integrated in the European Union's policies on entrepreneurship. President Stella and Professor Koutroubas had afterwards a meeting with Ms Kalina Petkova, officer of the Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies in charge of Labor Law and Social Security. Once more, our First Vice-president insisted on the need to continue the work initiated by former Commissioner Tajani regarding Liberal Professions and entrepreneurship and put emphasis on the role of the professions for a Single Market based on knowledge, quality and ethics.



Confprofessioni President and CEPLIS Vice-president, Mr. Gaetano Stella with Ms. Monika Panayotova, Deputy Minister in charge of the Bulgarian Presidency of the EU Council

The delegation met afterwards with representations of several professions, such as the Lawyers, the Engineers, the Notaries, the Physicians, etc as well as with the Chair of the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria. Our Bulgarian colleagues manifested great interest in the works of CEPLIS and several of them have requested information about joining.



Our joint delegation with Minister Panayotova

We feel that all meetings were very successful and that both parties have learned very much from a frank exchange of experience and comparison of priorities. It is now our duty to follow up these contacts and work together with our Bulgarian colleagues.

First Vice-president Gaetano Stella and Prof. Dr. Theodoros Koutroubas Director General of CEPLIS

For further information on this visit and on our contacts in Bulgaria, please address yourself to our Secretariat.



## *And after Bulgaria it is Austria's turn!*

As you have read in our first article, CEPLIS has participated in the delegation of our Italian colleagues (Conprofessioni) who meet the high-level representatives of the Bulgarian rotating Presidency of the EU council of the beginning of this month.

Austria is going to take the torch from Bulgaria the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018 and chairing the EU Council till 31<sup>st</sup> of this coming December.

The following article comes from the official website of the Austrian government and reports on the wider context of the Council's policies and on the current status of preparations in Austria.

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### **The wider context**

The framework for the substantial work of the Council Presidency depends on a number of elements. Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, groups of three member states (the “trio presidency”) develop a common work programme for a period of 18 months. This mechanism of coordination over a longer period of time aims at increasing the continuity of the Council's work. Austria is part of a trio presidency together with Estonia (Presidency of the Council in the second half of 2017) and Bulgaria (Presidency in the first half of 2018). The trio programme, adopted by the Council on 20 June 2017, is based on the European Council's “Strategic Agenda for the Union in Times of Change” of June 2014. Further guiding documents are the Commission's annual work programme as well as the Joint Declaration of the Institutions on the EU's legislative priorities until the elections to the European Parliament in 2019, which was adopted in December 2017.

The trio programme comprises five thematic areas:

- A Union for jobs, growth and competitiveness
- A Union that empowers and protects all its citizens
- Towards an energy Union with a forward-looking climate policy
- A Union of freedom, security and justice
- The Union as a strong global actor

The most important points of the trio programme are: implementation of the European Agenda on Security and the European Agenda on Migration; fight against radicalisation and violent extremism; implementation of the EU Global Strategy; enlargement as regards the Western Balkans; cooperation with partners in the Mediterranean region in order to tackle root causes of flight and irregular migration; continuation and finalisation of Digital Single Market proposals; efficient taxation, fight against tax fraud; support for young people (education and training); further implementation of the United Nations “Agenda 2030” for sustainable development; investment in growth and jobs, including research and innovation; fight against poverty and social exclusion; continuation of the work on a sustainable, resilient and effective energy union; implementation of the Paris climate agreement and the EU's 2030 targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

The Austrian Presidency of the Council in the second half of 2018 will have to work on a large number of complex and challenging dossiers. In this period, the EU will be particularly confronted with two challenges: Negotiations regarding the United Kingdom's exit from the EU (Brexit) and regarding the Multi-Annual Financial Framework post-2020.

The motto Austria has chosen for the EU Presidency is "A Europe that protects". In order to attain this objective, the overarching principle of subsidiarity should be strengthened: The EU should concentrate its efforts on issues that need a common solution, while withdrawing from smaller issues that could better be dealt on national or regional level.

Against this backdrop, the Austrian Presidency will put emphasis on three areas where the EU has a particular protective role: Security and fight against illegal migration; securing prosperity and competitiveness through digitalisation and stability in the neighbourhood – rapprochement of the Western Balkans/South-Eastern Europe to the EU. Austria's national programme, including the priorities in individual Council formations, will be available in due time before the start of the Council Presidency.

An important aspect for the work of the Austrian Council Presidency concerns the elections to the European Parliament, that will take place between 23-26 May 2019. As the Parliament's legislative period is coming to a close, it will be crucial to prepare the finalisation or reach agreements on as many open legislative proposals as possible. Thus, one of the main tasks of the Austrian Council Presidency will be to reach common positions of the Council on individual proposals. These common Council positions are a precondition for negotiations with the European Parliament. These negotiations, also known as "trilogues", are usually very intensive and present a particular challenge for the Presidency.

After Austria, the next trio presidency will take over: Romania (first half of 2019), Finland (second half of 2019) and Croatia (first half of 2020).

### **Current status of preparations in Austria**

The Austrian Council Presidency is a common endeavour of the entire Federal Government. In June 2016, an inter-ministerial steering committee was created, jointly chaired by the Federal Chancellery and the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs and including representatives of all federal ministries as well as of the Parliament, the Federal States, the Office of the Federal President and the social partners. The main tasks of the steering committee are the preparation of the national programme as well as the planning of the political meetings and other events during the Council Presidency. With the change of ministerial responsibilities in the context of the new "Amended Ministerial Law" (in German: Bundesministeriengesetz) of 8 January 2018 the coordination of preparations for Austria's EU-Council Presidency is now an exclusive responsibility of the Federal Chancellery.

Furthermore, in December 2016 an Executive Secretariat in charge of organisational and logistical issues was established. The tasks of the Executive Secretariat include practical planning and realisation of meetings, accreditation of participants, website, logistics etc. The Executive Secretariat is the central contact point for all ministries for the above mentioned tasks in order to create synergies and work as cost-efficiently as possible. Responsibility for the Executive Secretariat

changed on 8 January 2018 from the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs to the Federal Chancellery, where the Executive Secretariat is now located.

This article was published last week in *The Guardian*. We feel it is interesting to share it with you in the context of our ongoing monitoring of Brexit.

## ***Brexit: Irish PM warns UK could crash out of EU without Brexit deal if no progress soon: an article from “The Guardian”***

### **EU ‘yet to see anything that remotely approaches’ a solution to Irish border issue, taoiseach says**

The Irish taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, has raised the prospect of the UK crashing out of the EU without a deal if UK government infighting continues over the next few weeks.

With the Brexit negotiations stalling and Theresa May failing to offer any further solutions to avoid a hard border between Northern Ireland and the republic, Varadkar made his growing concern clear before meeting the UK prime minister at an EU summit in the Bulgarian capital, Sofia.

The taoiseach said next month’s European council summit would be a key moment for the talks, despite attempts by the Brexit secretary, David Davis, and others in the UK government to play down suggestions of a “deadline”.

The European council president, Donald Tusk, is also due to meet the prime minister in Sofia.

The disagreements within May’s cabinet at this late stage of negotiations have been described by sources as “shocking”.



[Leo Varadkar before meeting the EU leaders in Sofia](#)

Varadkar said that the EU and Dublin had “yet to see anything that remotely approaches” a way out of the current impasse.

“By June we need to see substantial progress as the tánaiste [Varadkar’s deputy, Simon Coveney] and I have said on many occasions. The European council will review progress in June. The deadline of course for the withdrawal agreement is October, but if we are not making real and substantial progress by June then we need to seriously question whether we’re going to have a withdrawal agreement at all.”

The UK government has vowed to find an arrangement that will avoid the need for border checks between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, and to table a “backstop” solution involving regulatory alignment with the EU.

Varadkar said: “We need to have that backstop because that gives us the assurance that there will be no hard border on our island. So we stand by our position that there can be no withdrawal agreement without that backstop.”

“If the UK wants to put forward alternatives ... we’re willing to examine that. But we need to see it written down in black and white and know that its workable and legally operable. And we’ve yet to see anything that remotely approaches that.”

EU leaders are due to meet on 29 June, after which it is hoped in London that Brussels will start drafting a political declaration on a future trade deal. The UK government this week promised to produce a 100-page white paper on the future trading relationship. But the paper could be largely ignored at the summit unless the Irish question is solved to the satisfaction of Dublin and Brussels.

Last month, Davis dismissed the June deadline as a negotiating tactic. “One of the things that happens in negotiations is people try to set up deadlines, sometimes artificial deadlines, to put pressure on one element of the negotiation which they think is in their favour,” he said.

### ***Why is the Irish border a stumbling block for Brexit?***

#### **Counties and customs**

Inside the EU, both Ireland and Northern Ireland are part of the single market and customs union so share the same regulations and standards, allowing a soft or invisible border between the two.

Britain’s exit from the EU – taking Northern Ireland with it – risks a return to a hard or policed border. The only way to avoid this post-Brexit is for regulations on both sides to remain more or less the same in key areas including food, animal welfare, medicines and product safety.

Early drafts of the agreement Britain hoped to get signed off on Monday said there would be “no divergence” from EU rules that “support north-south cooperation”, later changed to “continued alignment” in a formulation that appeared to allow for subtle divergences.

But it raised new questions about who would oversee it and how disputes might be resolved. It was also clearly still a step too far for the DUP.

A very interesting article about the dilemma that Theresa May is facing. She has to take in consideration inside and outside issues before making big decisions. This article details very well the two-level game that is currently being played and the potential consequences for her party and herself. We thought it would be interesting for you to read about this complex situation.

### ***Brexit: Brexit is fast becoming a Tory no-win: an article from “The Spectator”***

Theresa May’s Brexit dilemma is becoming more acute. Last week, she failed to garner the support of the Brexit inner cabinet for a so-called ‘new customs partnership’ with the European Union. Even so, May can’t and won’t drop the idea. She’s convinced that it is critical for solving the Irish border issue, and thus unlocking a deal.

But the bad news for Mrs May is that opinion has hardened against her scheme (which would see the UK collecting tariff revenue for the EU even after Brexit). Boris Johnson has publicly attacked it as ‘crazy’ and in no way ‘taking back control’. Tellingly, Downing Street didn’t feel it could slap him down for this. Even those Eurosceptics with good personal relations with May, such as Iain Duncan Smith, are making it clear that they feel the new customs partnership would be a compromise too far. None of the six members of the Brexit inner cabinet who refused to back the scheme last week are likely to flip now — and anyway, No. 10 is keen to stress that this committee works by consensus, rather than by a simple majority.



Theresa May facing big dilemma

Such is Mrs May’s predicament right now that even good news brings her problems. So, last week’s local election results — which were thoroughly respectable for a governing party — are now being adduced by Brexiteers as a reason for May to abandon her new customs partnership plan. Why, because, in crude terms, the elections confirmed that the Tory vote is increasingly a Brexit one.

It’s easy to mock the idea that the details of the UK’s future customs arrangements with the EU were uppermost in the minds of voters in, say, Pendle, when they went to vote last week. But there is a serious political point here. The Tory vote is increasingly in favour of Brexit. As the psephologist John Curtice has pointed out, compared with 2014, when these seats were last contested, the Tory vote was up by almost double digits in areas that had voted Leave by a margin of 55/45 or greater. By contrast, in heavily Remain places, the Tories made no progress.

These Leavers who have turned Tory might not be following every twist of the Brexit negotiations, but their support for the Tories is predicated on the government delivering something that looks and feels like Brexit. If May were to lose either David Davis or Boris Johnson over the deal, these voters would feel short-changed and the Tories would then be caught between two stools. They would have taken a hit among Remainers without firming up their support among Leave voters. This would, almost certainly, result in them losing power at the next election.

Theresa May's closest advisers have a different view of where the risks lie. They are convinced that they don't have the votes in parliament for 'no deal' — and they fear that Brussels knows that, too. They feel that they have to come up with solutions that the EU will accept. If they don't, and it is 'no deal', they fear that parliament would park Britain in the European Economic Area and keep us in a customs union with the EU, so the UK would still be in the single market, free movement would continue and there would be very little taking back control at all.

*No one should want “no deal” but you need the other side to know that you're prepared to walk away*

Cue: electoral disaster for the Tories. Leave voters would feel cheated and the government wouldn't be able to escape its share of the blame. Remain voters, for their part, might quite reasonably wonder why we had chosen to stay in so much of the EU but given up our say over the rules.

Wavering cabinet ministers can expect to hear a lot of this argument in the coming days: for Brexit's sake, you have to agree to the new customs partnership. It might not be perfect, but it is better than the alternative.

There are several reasons to doubt this analysis. First of all, the new customs partnership has already been rejected by the EU. As one senior figure at the Department for Exiting the European Union tells me, 'They are offended by it. They think, “you are a third country why should we trust you with our external border?”' Indeed, one of the lessons of these negotiations is that whenever Britain looks as if it is trying to carry on behaving as if it is an EU member after Brexit, Brussels reacts particularly badly.

The second issue is that the British government has a deeply ambivalent attitude to 'no deal' planning. No one should want 'no deal'; it is clearly not the best outcome, but to conduct any negotiation seriously you need the other side to know that you're prepared to walk away.

Our 'no deal' preparations are pitiful. The government, though, shows no sign of wanting to inject any urgency into the process. In a testament to just how inadequate the plans are, a good number of people in Whitehall are making sure that their concerns are down on paper, just in case there is ever a Chilcot-style inquiry into what went wrong.

This lack of preparation is encouraging those in the EU who think that the bloc's approach should be to issue Britain with a choice between staying in a customs union or 'no deal'. Mrs May must find a way to break this cycle. Visibly stepping up 'no deal' planning — as a negotiating tactic rather than because it is what she wants — is the most obvious way to do that.

The political challenge for the Tories on Europe is to deliver something that is clearly, recognisably Brexit but at the same time to avoid a level of economic disruption that would make it impossible for them to run a 'don't risk it' campaign against Jeremy Corbyn in 2022. Achieving this will require both the UK knowing what it wants and persuading the EU to engage in constructive negotiation. Mrs May has an awful lot to do before next month's European Council.

**SOURCES:**

- Federal Ministry, Republic of Austria. European integration foreign affairs
- The Guardian 17<sup>th</sup> May 2018
- The Spectator 12<sup>th</sup> May 2018