

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Venizelos' intervention at the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET), regarding the achievements to date of the Hellenic Presidency of the Council of the EU (Strasbourg, 14 April 2014)

Ladies and Gentlemen MEPs, Dear Friends,

We are in the middle of the Presidency, which is unique in that our semester, in reality, is coming to completion prematurely. It is much shorter parliamentarily, but it is also much denser politically, because it coincides with the run-up to the elections for the new European Parliament and, through that, the election of the new institutional organs of the European Union and, mainly, the President of the European Commission. Consequently, the Hellenic Presidency, presenting its achievements, is contributing to the new European narrative, to the new proposal for a Europe that is not a Europe of austerity and unemployment, but can be a Europe of growth, of employment; a Europe that gives prospects to its citizens. This has been our pursuit from the very outset. So you will allow me to point out the basic legislative successes of the Presidency, which are successes, in the final analysis, of the European Parliament, as co-legislator, given that all of this legislation was the subject of important Trilogues.

So I must thank the European Parliament and the European Commission for their participation in these trilogues, and particularly the two legislative bodies, the Parliament and the Council, who worked together very quickly and effectively. For us, perhaps the most important result was the completion of the Single Resolution Mechanism, as a major step towards completing the Banking Union. The fact that the European Parliament will make its decision at this sitting is very important, and tomorrow I will have the opportunity to talk about this at the plenary.

In the major sector of promoting growth, employment and social cohesion, we can present the completion of the pending legislation as regards the Multiannual Financial Framework. The own resources legislative package was unanimously approved; it will ensure the timely and steady financing of EU policies. The EU High Level Working Group on Own Resources was also created with the participation of Mario Monti, who will preside over the Group. New rules for European Union Solidarity Fund were also agreed, which will enable the Fund to react much quicker in the event of natural disasters.

In the field of agricultural and fisheries policy, the funding of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund was agreed, thus ensuring the unimpeded funding of the Union's new Common Fisheries Policy.

With regard to the promotion of the completion of Single Market Act I and II, the Directive on electronic invoicing in public procurement was adopted, that will reduce the obstacles to entering the market, especially for SMEs, and the Regulation on the electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the internal market (e-idas) was also adopted, that will ensure safe, reliable and user-friendly electronic transactions among businesses, citizens and public services (e-business and e-commerce).

Another important development was the adoption of the Directive and regulations governing claims for compensation based on national law for violations of the legislative provisions on competition of the member states and the EU. An agreement was reached on the Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the participation of the European Union in the capital increase of the European Investment Fund (EIF), that will further enhance the EIF capacity of restoring normal lending to the economy, and in particular to SMEs.

With regard, more specifically, to long-term financing of the economy (infrastructure and SMEs), the Regulation on the innovation investment package was adopted. In the field of telecommunications, the Directive establishing measures to reduce the cost of deploying high-level electronic communications networks was adopted. The Regulation on guidelines for the deployment and interoperability of trans-European telecommunications networks (TEN-Tele) was formally adopted and published.

We also had the Directive on the development of infrastructure for alternative fuels, which is aimed at reducing transport dependency on petrol, while also strengthening growth and employment, particularly as regards SMEs.

In the area of stimulating job creation, we particularly underline the agreement reached on the Directive on the posting of workers.

On the major issues that concern deepening the Union, especially the EMU, beyond the Single Resolution Mechanism, I must mention the new rules on undertakings for collective investment in transferable securities (UCITS V) and the Directive and Regulation on markets in financial instruments, on access to basic deposit accounts and the comparability of commissions, and on the packages of investment products for private investors. The basic aim of all these pieces of legislation is better protection for investors and consumers, as well as ensuring the stability of the financial markets.

In the area of Migration, border management and mobility of Union citizens, in the context of enhancing European security, both internally and externally, our important achievements include the revision of the listing of third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement. A result of that agreement has been the liberalization of visas for Moldova. A second point is the Directive on the conditions of entry and stay of third-country nationals in the context of Intra-Corporate Transfer (ICT), as well as the Directive on the conditions of entry and stay for third-country nationals for the purposes of seasonal employment.

In the border surveillance sector, the Hellenic Presidency achieved the adoption of the Regulation on external maritime border surveillance in the context of operational cooperation that is coordinated by FRONTEX. The adoption of the Regulation constitutes a very important step that took many years to reach.

In the Justice sector, there was substantial progress in legislative files that protect the Union's interests by means of criminal law. Examples are the Directives on protecting

the Euro and other currencies against counterfeiting by criminal law and on the freezing and confiscation of proceeds of crime in the EU. In the sector of civil and commercial law, we had the important adoption of the Regulations on the enactment of a European account preservation order, on international jurisdiction, recognition and execution of rulings in civil and commercial cases. This is an amendment of the Brussels I Regulation.

In the area of EU Maritime Policies, apart from the European Strategy on Maritime Security, the Directive on maritime spatial planning was adopted, which will have significant effects on tourism, as well as the environment. Additionally, we had the adoption of the revised Regulation on Community-fleet capacity policy to promote inland waterway transport, as well as of the Regulation to finance the actions of the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) in the field of response to marine pollution.

In the wider area of Transport, Environment and Quality of Life, we mention in a cursory but indicative manner the legislative files already concluded on the introduction of noise-related operating restrictions at Union airports, the reduction of CO2 emissions from new light commercial vehicles, the greenhouse gas emission allowance trading system (ETS aviation), the shipments of waste and the marine equipment.

In the area of Culture, we had the adoption of the Directive on the return of cultural objects unlawfully removed from the territory of a member state. I will have the opportunity to address the plenary on this issue, as well, tomorrow. Moreover, the organization once again and the continuation of the institution of European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033 was secured.

In the area of Institutional Issues, a mutual agreement was reached on the Regulation on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations.

I thank you for your attention and your patience.