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**Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union: Romania's
Environmental Mission and Priorities**

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Abstract: As holder of the Presidency of the Council of the EU, Romania will act as a true impartial mediator to generate solutions in view of advancing the European agenda. During its presidency of the Council of the European Union, Romania will act in a coordinated manner within the Trio of Presidencies along with Finland and Croatia, while ensuring continuity with the previous Trio in achieving the goals undertaken within the Strategic Agenda. Romania's taking charge of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union comes with a series of obligations for our country as regards the coordination of European actions to protect the environment, the Romanian Presidency having as its main objective the European citizens as both source and beneficiary of the European action, with their own aspirations and concerns; Romania is aware of its status of a transition presidency between two parliamentary terms, during which complex files will be discussed.

Keywords: Presidency; environment; European project; environmental mission

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As holder of the Presidency of the Council of the EU, Romania will act as a true impartial mediator to generate solutions in view of advancing the European agenda. During its presidency of the Council of the European Union, Romania will act in a coordinated manner within the Trio of Presidencies along with Finland and Croatia, while ensuring continuity with the previous Trio in achieving the goals undertaken within the Strategic Agenda.

The Romania, Finland and Croatia Trio will work together to set long-term goals and draw up a common agenda. Based on this programme, Romania will prepare its own agenda, a more detailed one, for the first six months of the trio. It is a unique opportunity to influence the EU agenda and guide the Council's

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efforts. The Ro2019 agenda will be drafted with the help of the General Secretariat of the Council, while also consulting the European Commission.¹

2019 will conclude a chapter of the European Union and mark a new stage of the European project. Romania will take over the Presidency when it will have to officially put an end to the Brexit chapter (the UK's exit from the EU – 29 March 2019), as well as organise the elections for the new European Parliament (23-26 May 2019) and start a new chapter in the relaunch of the European project, and all these issues are believed to also have an impact in the vicinity of the EU, where 2019 comes with presidential elections in countries dominated by political instability.

Aside from these main priorities, there are secondary priorities that can be continued after the end of this mandate, as they are not intrinsically related to the Presidency (e.g. Green, sustainable and safe energy • Maintaining a united EU • Creative Europe and entrepreneurship).

The drawing up of the work agenda of the Romanian Presidency starts from the conviction that any vision of the future must be built around the main principles that have guided the evolution of the European Union over time.²

The priorities of the Romanian Presidency can be classified under four pillars of action: Europe of convergence, a safer Europe, Europe – a stronger global actor, and Europe of common values.³

Europe of convergence has four goals: growth, cohesion, competitiveness and connectivity. We consider that it is only by convergence and cohesion that we can ensure sustainable and fair development for all European citizens. All of these are essential to promote a united Europe and to enhance the competitiveness of the European Union worldwide.

The pillar “Europe of convergence” includes climate change and environmental protection. Given the European and international agenda, as well as the national context, the Romanian presidency will focus primarily on climate change, sustainable development, biodiversity and water management.

The European Union's environmental policy has become increasingly comprehensive and closely related to the other policies of the EU. Bridging gaps between Member States and the EU average in ensuring the transition to a circular economy, including through the investments of the cohesion policy in the waste sector, is a central aspect of the citizens' needs and expectations.

The EU has become a global promoter of sustainable development, as well as a leader in meeting the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement. The EU will ensure the move towards a low-carbon economy. Its priorities also include the endeavours to ensure the quality of drinking water, the efficient use of water resources and the promotion of biodiversity. Environmental and climate change policies shape Europe's future and new development trends, all of these priorities contributing to improving the quality of European citizens' lives.

Implementing the Paris Agreement⁴

The Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union will continue to promote the EU agenda in the area of climate change and contribute to implementing the Paris Agreement.

¹ <http://www.europuls.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/GhidRO2019-Final.pdf>.

² https://www.romania2019.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ro_program_ropres2019.pdf.

³ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/council-eu/presidency-council-eu/>.

⁴ The Paris Agreement is a global climate change agreement reached in Paris on 12 December 2015. The agreement presents an action plan to limit global warming “well below” 2°C. It covers the period starting with the year 2020.

The efforts will focus on a sustained, coherent dialogue that will contribute to outlining a common vision within the EU as regards a long-term strategy, encouraging actions in the area of climate change and a sustainable transformation of the economy.

With regard to the legislative dossiers, the Presidency intends to complete the negotiations on the proposal concerning the setting of CO₂ emission standards for new heavy-duty vehicles, a proposal meant to support Member States in reducing road transport emissions. In addition, the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union will make the necessary efforts to advance as far as possible with the negotiations on the legislative proposal on monitoring CO₂ emissions in the maritime sector. The Presidency will coordinate the active participation of the EU and the Member States at the Bonn International Negotiating Session (17-27 June 2019).

The Romanian Presidency will also focus on preparing the European Union's position for the Bonn International Negotiation Session in June 2019.

Climate change is a reality that cannot be denied. Last year was the third warmest year since 1901 to date. In Romania, the average air temperature in 2018 was 11.57°C, the third highest value since 1901 to date, according to the meteorological records of the National Meteorological Administration. The average air temperature in 2018 exceeded the current climatological norm – the multi-annual average of 1981-2010 – by 1.35°C.¹

If we look at the list of the ten warmest years in the period 1900-2018, we can see that nine of them belong to the period 2000-2018.

Sustainable development² – implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development³ and enhancing the environmental dimension of sustainable development.

Romania will pay particular attention to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁴ and the strengthening of the environmental dimension of sustainable development, the promotion of which is a general objective for the EU and the Member States.

The Presidency will coordinate the active participation of the EU and its Member States at the 4th UNEA4 – United Nations Environment Summit, to be held in Nairobi on 11-15 March 2019 under the overarching theme “Innovative Solutions for Environmental Challenges and Sustainable Consumption and Production”.

The Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union will have the opportunity, together with the other Member States, to promote the Union's vision on sustainable chemicals management, as

¹ <http://www.ecologic.rec.ro/articol/read/politici-economie/17465/>.

² “Sustainable development is the development that aims to meet the needs of the present, without compromising the possibilities of future generations to meet their own needs”.

³ Romania joined the 193 UN Member States at the Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015, adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a global action programme in the area of development promoting the balance between the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. For the first time, the actions target both developed and developing countries.

⁴ The 2030 Agenda is based on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), informally known as the Global Goals. They are: No poverty; Zero hunger; Good health and well-being for people; Quality education; Gender equality; Clean water and sanitation; Affordable and clean energy; Decent work and economic growth; Industry, innovation, and infrastructure; Reducing inequalities; Sustainable cities and communities; Responsible consumption and production; Climate action; Life below water; Life on land; Peace, justice and strong institutions; Partnerships for the goals.

Based on the Global Goals, an action agenda for the following 15 years is established, in view of eradicating extreme poverty, combating inequalities and injustice and protecting the planet by 2030.

well as the chemicals/waste interface at the meeting of the three COPs to the relevant Conventions (Basel/Rotterdam/Stockholm), to be held in Geneva from 29 April to 10 May 2019.¹

The Presidency will coordinate the representation of the EU and its Member States at the 17th session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification (CRIC), which will be held in the Co-operative Republic of Guyana in January 2019.

Furthermore, the Romanian Presidency will start preparing the EU's position for the participation of the Union and its Member States at the 14th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification.

Biodiversity

The Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union will promote the values of biodiversity both at European and international level. Ensuring adequate funding of the measures aimed at protecting biodiversity is an extremely important element for meeting the EU goals, as well as the relevant goals under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)² and the 2030 Agenda.

Given the importance of programmes to support biodiversity and combat climate change, another important aspect on the Romanian Presidency's agenda is the advancement of the negotiations for the LIFE programme in the context of the Multi-annual Financial Framework 2021-2027.

For Romania, the protection of biodiversity is extremely important also because 23% of our country's surface area is occupied by nature protected areas within the Natura 2000 network.

Based on the results of the 14th meeting of the COP to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Presidency is to facilitate a ministerial debate on the consolidation of the biodiversity action plan for the post-2020 period, taking into account the challenge of achieving the Aichi Targets³ and the need to do more in this area.

In addition, a conference on large carnivores will be held in Bucharest, to highlight the importance of the representative species on our territory and their conservation needs.

The Presidency will coordinate the active participation of the EU and its Member States at major international meetings to be held in the first half of 2019, including the 18th Conference of the Parties to CITES (Sri Lanka, 23 May – 3 June 2019) and the 7th plenary session of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES, France, 29 April – 4 May 2019).

¹ https://www.romania2019.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ro_program_ropres2019.pdf.

² The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is an international agreement adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. It has three main objectives:

- conservation of biological diversity;
- the sustainable use of its components.
- the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources.

³ The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 includes 20 main targets for 2015 or 2020 ("Aichi Biodiversity Targets"), organised within five strategic goals. The goals and the targets include both: (i) aspirations for worldwide achievement; and (ii) a flexible framework to set international or regional targets.

Water Management

The Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union will focus its activity on advancing negotiations on legislative dossiers on water reuse and drinking water quality. The efficiency of water reuse and the high quality of drinking water will contribute to the European Union's achievement of the specific Sustainable Development Goals in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

The Drinking Water Directive¹ is one of the most important instruments for ensuring the quality of drinking water in the European Union, and Romania considers it a priority to ensure a high level of protection of the environment and human health from the adverse effects of any contamination of drinking water. Romania considers that the legislative proposal will establish a common approach at EU level by introducing minimum standardisation requirements, as well as clarity, coherence and predictability for operators that wish to invest in wastewater reuse under comparable regulatory conditions.

The advancement of negotiations on this dossier in the Council of the EU is a priority for the Romanian Presidency, which will hold a political debate at the Environment Council in March, possibly attempting a general approach at the Environment Council in June. On the other hand, another priority for the Romanian Presidency will be the adoption of the Council Conclusions on the Special Report by the European Court of Auditors concerning the implementation of the Floods Directive, in the context of the overall assessment by the European Commission on the water regulatory framework.²

The implementation of the Strategy for the marine environment³ and the measures taken to protect and conserve marine biodiversity are essential to achieving good environmental status in Europe's marine regions by 2020. One of the most significant threats to the quality of water and the marine environment, namely plastic and microplastic pollution, will be a topic of debate at the Informal Environment Council.

In addition to the above-mentioned dossiers, the Presidency envisages to complete the negotiations with the European Parliament for the proposal for a regulation setting CO₂ emission standards for new heavy-duty vehicles,⁴ as well as to finalise important legislative dossiers: the proposal for a regulation on the LIFE Programme and the proposal on the reporting and verification mechanism of the CO₂ emissions

¹ The Drinking Water Directive establishes quality standards for drinking water in the EU for 48 parameters to be monitored and assessed regularly by the Member States.

On 1 February 2018, in response to the European Citizens' Initiative "Right2Water", the Commission published a proposal to renew the 20-year-old Directive. The recast directive would update the existing safety standards and improve access to safe drinking water in accordance with the latest World Health Organization recommendations. In addition, it would increase transparency for consumers with regard to drinking water quality and water supply, thus helping to reduce the number of plastic bottles due to increased trust in tap water. An EU-wide risk assessment of water safety should help to identify and address the possible risks to which water sources are exposed as early as the distribution stage.

² <https://www.agerpres.ro/politic/2019/01/11/romania2019-eu-denes-managementul-apelor-o-prioritate-pentru-presedintele-romaniei-la-consiliul-ue--239846>.

³ It is the environmental pillar of the EU's Integrated Maritime Strategy (IMP), established to enhance the sustainable development of its maritime economy, while also protecting its marine environment. The goal of the framework directive is to reach good environmental status of the EU's marine waters by 2020, to continue the protection and conservation thereof and to prevent their subsequent deterioration.

It establishes the European marine regions (the Baltic Sea, the North-East Atlantic, the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea) and their sub-regions within the geographical borders established by existing conventions on regional seas. To achieve good environmental status by 2020, Member States must draw up ecosystem-based strategies for their marine waters, which are to be reviewed every six years.

⁴ It is hoped that from 2030 onwards new cars should emit 37.5% less CO₂ and new vans should emit on average 31% less CO₂ compared to 2021 levels, in accordance with an agreement recently approved by the Member States. Between 2025 and 2029 both cars and vans will have to emit 15% less CO₂. It is also desirable to decarbonise and modernise road transport in Europe.

generated by maritime transport, with the Romanian Presidency making every effort to make progress in this regard.

Among the most important environmental events during this period, Romania will host the meeting of the Informal Environment Council on 20-21 May 2019 in Bucharest, where the main themes will be climate change, biodiversity and water management. Three conferences will also be held in Bucharest: the International Conference “2030 Agenda: Partnerships for Sustainable Development” on 16 April 2019, the Ministerial Conference “The state of implementation of the Water Directives: Difficulties and Good Practices” on 21-22 May 2019, and the Ministerial Conference on “Large Carnivore Management – Challenges and Solutions” on 6-7 June 2019.

Let us hope that this stage, which Romania, as holder of the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union, will prepare with the other Member States and the European institutions will be a fruitful one, and let us be confident that the Sibiu Summit¹ on 9 May 2019 will be a milestone in the projection on the future of a stronger, more united, more cohesive and more democratic Union, this summit being an important moment for strengthening the foundation of the future of the European Union.

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¹ The Summit of 9 May 2019 will bring together in Sibiu 27 heads of state or government of European countries, 36 official delegations, 400 high-ranking guests and about 800 journalists. In addition, over 100 interpreters will come to Sibiu.