



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

CULTURE, TOURISM, EUROPE AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

AGENDA

27th Meeting, 2017 (Session 5)

Thursday 16 November 2017

The Committee will meet at 10.15 am in the Robert Burns Room (CR1).

1. **Presidency of the Council of the European Union:** The Committee will take evidence from—

H.E. Tiina Intelmann, Ambassador of Estonia to the United Kingdom.

Katy Orr
Clerk to the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee
Room Tower T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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The papers for this meeting are as follows—

Agenda item 1

Note by SPICe

CTEERC/S5/17/27/1

PRIVATE PAPER

CTEERC/S5/17/27/2
(P)

[Programme of the Estonian Presidency of the Council of the European Union](#)

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

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The Estonian Presidency of the European Union

Background

On 1 July 2017, Estonia took over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union from Malta. The Estonian Presidency is the first of the current trio of presidencies, with Bulgaria and then Austria to follow it.

The Presidency has two main tasks¹: Firstly, the Presidency chairs meetings of the different Council configurations (with the exception of the Foreign Affairs Council) and the Council's preparatory bodies, which include permanent committees such as the Permanent Representatives Committee (Coreper), and working parties and committees dealing with very specific subjects. The Presidency also organises various formal and informal meetings in Brussels and in the country of the rotating presidency.

The Presidency is also responsible for representing the Council in relations with the other EU institutions, particularly with the Commission and the European Parliament. Its role is to try and reach agreement on legislative files through trilogues, informal negotiation meetings and Conciliation Committee meetings.

This briefing provides the context to and priorities of the Estonian Presidency of the EU.

Estonia's Presidency – the context

This is the first time that Estonia has held the Council Presidency since it joined the EU in 2004.

It was originally intended that the United Kingdom would hold the presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of 2017. However, following the vote to leave the EU in June 2016, the UK Government informed the EU that it would abandon its presidency to be replaced instead by Estonia, which had been due to assume the presidency in January 2018.

According to an article on Estonian World:

“During the presidency, Estonia will be responsible for leading the work of nearly 200 working parties in both Brussels and Tallinn...

... During the presidency, about 20 meetings at the ministerial level, visits and conferences as well as around 200 other presidency-related events are taking place in Estonia during the presidency. Most of these events are related to the political and daily work of the EU...

¹ www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/presidency-council-eu/

... The total budget available for the Estonian presidency of the council of the EU is €75 million. This amount covers all activities related to preparing for and implementing the presidency. The biggest part of the cost – €41.4 million – is personnel expenses, as the staff involved in the organisation and implementation of the presidency consists of 1,300 people.

Another big part of the budget is the 200 events, conferences and visits in Estonia to introduce the country to a diverse audience – €23.3 million.”²

Estonia and Brexit

As President of the Council, Estonia has been responsible for chairing meetings of the General Affairs Council (Article 50). This formation of the Council has met two times so far under the Estonian Presidency – on 25 September and on 17 October with further meetings due on 20 November and 12 December.

The Estonian Presidency also chairs the General Affairs Council which is responsible for agreeing the agenda for the European Council meetings.

The Estonian Prime Minister, Jüri Ratas met with UK Prime Minister Theresa May in London on 18 July 2017³. According to the Estonian Government, the discussion focussed on EU-NATO defence cooperation⁴. Quoted after the meeting, the Estonian Prime Minister, Jüri Ratas said the UK is and will continue to be an important ally of Estonia, the EU and NATO in ensuring security and the fight against terrorism. An Estonian Government news release published following the meeting said:

“Enhanced cooperation between the EU and NATO is proof of Europe’s unity and strengthens trans-Atlantic relations,” said Prime Minister Ratas. “The presence of our allies in the Baltic countries and Poland is essential to guarantee our security, and the UK has contributed significantly to that. The defence forces of Estonia and the UK cooperate very closely and actively in this area.”

During the meeting with Prime Minister May, the Estonian Prime Minister presented the priorities of the Estonian Presidency including promoting digital matters in the EU.

The meeting also touched upon the migration crisis and the UK’s withdrawal from the EU. According to the Estonian Government, the two countries have similar positions on the migration crisis: and believe it is crucial to address the root causes of migration, to ensure effective control of external borders and support border countries.

On Brexit, the Estonian Prime Minister said:

“It is important to keep calm and look for balanced solutions. The UK’s leaving the EU will affect the everyday lives of many European citizens and companies. Estonia’s main objective, as the holder of the Presidency, is to maintain the unity of the 27 Member States and to focus on the everyday running of the EU.”

During his visit to London, Prime Minister Ratas also met with representatives of the Estonian community in London. According to the Estonian Government, about 40 Estonian companies are operating in London and the number of Estonians studying or working in

² <http://estonianworld.com/life/estonian-presidency-council-eu-begins-mean/>

³ www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-meeting-with-estonian-prime-minister-ratas-18-july-2017

⁴ www.valitsus.ee/en/news/meeting-between-prime-minister-ratas-and-british-prime-minister-theresa-may-focuses-defence

the UK is increasing. The estimated number of Estonian nationals in the UK is between 10,000 and 15,000, while London is home to 3,000-5,000 of them.

Estonia's Presidency – the priorities

The main theme of the Estonian presidency is “unity through balance”. According to the Presidency's programme:

“As the EU is facing unprecedented challenges, both at the global and European level, Estonia as the Member State holding the Council presidency is confident that there is sufficient unity and determination in Europe to tackle all problems dynamically. While negotiating the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union in accordance with European Council guidelines and negotiating directives adopted by the Council, we also need to adapt to a union of 27 as swiftly as possible. We are confident that we will have the strength and capability to turn these challenges into opportunities, and we have reason to view the European Union and its future with great hope. European unity is expressed through both speaking with one voice and joint action. Together we are stronger than 60 years ago: hundreds of millions of Europeans benefit from living in a greater union. A union that has set aside old divisions and is willing to defend what has been achieved. A union that is determined and tenacious to resolve the current and future challenges. A union where Member States and institutions share responsibilities and take joint decisions that serve the interests of and improve life for all European citizens.

The Estonian Presidency strives for unity through balance; however, this does not mean settling for the lowest common denominator. Unity means broad-based support for the founding values of the European idea and the goals of the European Union, as well as respect for diversity – a fundamental European value – and regarding it as an asset. In building on these principles, Europe – a rather disparate political conglomeration – can succeed in striking a balance between various points of view, interests and traditions. Tenacity, unity and future-oriented thinking require the willingness to compromise from all parties and a constant balancing act between preservation and new developments. ‘One for all and all for one’ means that together we are stronger.”⁵

Beneath this overarching priority, the Estonian Presidency has focussed on four priorities⁶:

- An open and innovative European economy
- A safe and secure Europe
- A digital Europe and the free movement of data
- An inclusive and sustainable Europe

Each of these priorities is discussed briefly below.

An open and innovative European economy

According to the Estonian Presidency, an open and innovative economy means:

“developing a business environment, which supports knowledge-based growth and competitiveness.”

⁵ www.eu2017.ee/programme

⁶ www.eu2017.ee/priorities-estonian-presidency

The Estonian Government will use its EU Presidency to focus on:

- protecting and promoting the EU's four freedoms – free movement of goods, persons, services and capital
- making sure that providing services and starting a business in the EU is as easy as possible, and advancing trade negotiations
- creating new funding opportunities for companies and ensuring a stable banking sector
- establishing a stable and well-functioning electricity market and empowering consumers
- ensuring fair competition by preventing tax evasion

A safe and secure Europe

The Estonian Government believes that only by acting together and preserving its unity on the global stage can the EU keep its citizens safe and promote peace, prosperity and stability.

During the Presidency, the Estonian Government will focus on:

- strengthening the fight against terrorism and organised crime, strengthening the internal security as well as the protection of the EU's external borders by improving cooperation and using cutting-edge information systems
- continuing the work tackling the migration crisis and reforming the Common European Asylum System
- supporting and strengthening relations with Eastern partnership countries
- an increase in defence expenditure, developing European defence cooperation and the EU-NATO partnership

Given Estonia's geographical proximity to Russia, the Presidency has highlighted development of the EU-NATO partnership as a priority during its Presidency. In an [interview with the Washington Post](#) in March 2017, the Estonian President acknowledged that Russia was a threat to Estonia and its neighbours' security, not just militarily but also through the possibility of cyber-attacks and seeking to destabilise regional governments.

A digital Europe and the free movement of data

The Estonian Presidency believes that "Europe must exploit the benefits of the technological progress that is resulting in constant change for citizens, businesses and governments".

The Presidency will focus on:

- developing cross-border e-commerce and e-services for the benefit of consumers, producers and businesses
- ensuring modern and secure electronic communications available everywhere across Europe as well as creating a favourable environment for new innovative services
- advancing cross-border digital public services to facilitate everyday life

The Tallinn digital summit in September discussed what Europe should do to be a world leader economically, industrially and in creating connections, as well as in the provision of public services and in ensuring the security of the information society.

An inclusive and sustainable Europe

The final Presidency priority is an inclusive and sustainable Europe. According to the Presidency, this should support equal opportunities for high-quality education, employment, access to services and development of skills. In addition, the Estonian Government believes a sustainable Europe should care about and be committed to achieving a cleaner environment.

In terms of actions under this priority, the Presidency will focus on:

- modernising rules in order to promote labour mobility and free movement of persons
- ensuring equal opportunities in the labour market and social inclusion
- securing a more sustainable environment

Estonia's Presidency - Engagement with the European Parliament

At the beginning of the Presidency in July 2017, Estonian ministers outlined the priorities of the Estonian Presidency to relevant European parliamentary committees⁷. The Presidency told the Parliament's International Trade Committee that:

“The Presidency wants to advance with several negotiations, open new markets for European businesses, but at the same time regain citizen's trust in free trade.”

At the Civil Liberties Committee, the Presidency outlined that:

“Migration will continue to be at the forefront, with the aim of establishing a proper asylum system combined with rigorous border controls and an effective returns policy.”

Linked to this, the Estonian Foreign Affairs Minister told the Foreign Affairs Committee that:

“Setting up a comprehensive approach to migration and reinforcing the eastern vector of EU external policy are priority issues.”

The Rural Affairs Minister told the Agriculture Committee that reform of the Common Agricultural Policy would be a top priority for the Presidency. And on fisheries, sustainable management of fish stocks and the protection of the oceans are the two key priorities for the Presidency according to the Estonian Environment Minister's discussion with the Fisheries Committee

A [summary of all the meetings](#) is available on the European Parliament website.

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⁷ www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20170712IPR79622/estonian-presidency-priorities-discussed-in-committee