

Initiatives to expect from the EU within the first few months of 2009

By Julian Micallef

Now that the European Commission's work programme, the Czech Presidency priorities and the European Parliament's indicative programme have been made public, we should be getting a better idea of the various initiatives to be taken by the EU at least within the first part of this year (keeping in mind that the EP elections are to be held in June).

The Presidency of the European Council has highlighted three areas on which it will focus particular attention: economy, energy and external relations. There is no doubt that focus on the economy has been heightened during the past months and this Presidency should continue striving to attain progress in this area. Energy too has made strong headlines, particularly for Eastern European countries heavily dependent on Russian gas. However, proposals for the energy sector and energy efficiency have been at the forefront for quite some time. Plans to create various interconnected grids on the European continent as well as increase efficiency at all levels remains a sustained goal. This Presidency shall serve to further push those initiatives forward. The third priority is set to be characterised by renewed dialogue with the United States under a new administration, more focus on an Eastern European partnership, and engagement with the Arab world.

The Commission's work programme too shall be dealing with economic matters, both to address the current difficulties but also looking ahead towards a post-2010 Lisbon Strategy as a means to enhance the EU's competitiveness in a globalised world. The implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy's so-called 'health check' exercise will be of interest as financing is shifted towards tackling climate change, renewable energy, water management and biodiversity issues in rural areas. Migration too will be dealt with as progress on the proposals contained within the Common Immigration Policy presented last year should be registered.

The European Parliament is in the mean time preparing to conclude a number of legislative proposals by May. Among many others these include combating the illegal employment of non-EU citizens, legislate for cheaper roaming rates, measures to address regulatory gaps in the financial sector, patients' rights and energy matters.

Both MEPs and the College of Commissioners face a hectic period as they strive to conclude a number of initiatives on which they have worked on for the past five years. The Council on the other hand is being driven by the priorities of ambitious Presidencies and the various proposals being outlined by the Commission. Events taking place will surely add up to a full agenda and the results are eagerly awaited.

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