

March 2016

Outlook for the European Council of 17-18 March 2016

The European Council of 17-18 March 2016 will discuss further steps to address the migration crisis, focusing on the follow-up to the 7 March meeting of the EU Heads of State or Government with Turkey and on reforming the EU's existing framework for a common asylum policy. EU leaders will also discuss the priorities for the 2016 European Semester and endorse the 2016 Annual Growth Survey.

1. Migration

a) Follow-up to the 7 March 2016 meeting with Turkey

The main discussion on migration will represent a follow-up to the [informal European Council and the informal meeting of the EU Heads of State or Government with Turkey](#) of 7 March 2016, where EU leaders 'agreed to work on the basis of the principles' contained in the new proposals from the Turkish Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, to address the migration issue. The overall decision on the proposals was postponed to the 17-18 March 2016 European Council and its President, Donald Tusk, was asked to work out the details with Turkey beforehand. Some of the aspects still to be clarified include: the legality of the return of all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands; acceleration of the implementation of the visa liberalisation roadmap; preparation for the opening of new chapters in the accession negotiations; and the specific contributions of the EU and Member States to the additional funding for the Refugee Facility for Syrians. Mr Davutoğlu is expected to meet again with EU leaders on 18 March, immediately after the European Council, to complete discussions between the EU and Turkey on the proposals.

The European Parliament's [plenary debate on 9 March](#) showed that many political groups and individual MEPs have reservations about the results of the 7 March informal meeting with Turkey. Criticism was voiced of Turkey's restrictions on freedom of the press, as well as on linking EU accession negotiations to Turkey's role in solving the refugee crisis. These views were also [relayed](#) by the European Parliament's President, Martin Schulz, to Mr Davutoğlu prior to the meeting of EU leaders with Turkey on 7 March.

b) Follow up to other earlier European Council meetings

Emergency Assistance Instrument

Following the [European Council's conclusions of 18-19 February 2016](#), when the Commission was tasked with making proposals to develop the EU's capacity to provide humanitarian assistance internally (in cooperation with organisations such as the UN Refugee Agency), an 'Emergency Assistance Instrument' has been [proposed](#) by the Commission, and was welcomed by the 7 March European Council. On 9 March, the Council [agreed](#) on such an emergency support mechanism in response to the difficult humanitarian situation caused by the refugee crisis, notably in Greece. European Commission Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis [informed](#) the Parliament that the 'Emergency Assistance Instrument' will require an [amending budget in 2016](#). The estimated needs for this instrument are €300 million in 2016, with a further €200 million in both 2017 and 2018. In addition, the Commission has [adopted](#) modifications to the work programmes for 2016, increasing the financing for emergency assistance under the [Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund](#) (AMIF) and the [Internal Security Fund](#) (ISF) with an additional €275.5 million, bringing it to a total of €464 million for 2016.

Border and Coast Guard

EU leaders are also expected to further discuss the Commission's proposal for a European [Border and Coast Guard](#). The European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs had its first [exchange of views](#) on this dossier on 29 February 2016. The Justice and Home Affairs Council of 10 March took stock of the negotiations on the subject, and hopes to [reach an agreement by April 2016](#). The Council also welcomed the Turkish proposal and adopted conclusions on [migrant smuggling](#).

Reform of the Dublin Regulation

It is [expected](#) that EU leaders will have a comprehensive debate on reforming the EU's existing framework for a common asylum policy (the [Dublin Regulation](#)), building on the forthcoming Commission communication on 'The Reform of the Dublin Regulation, based on the objective of solidarity and fair burden-sharing between Member States', due to be [adopted](#) on 16 March. That same day, the Commission will also publish its 'First Report on Relocation and Resettlement commitments' which could also be addressed by EU leaders.

c) European Parliament's involvement

The European Parliament will have a significant role to play with regard to visa liberalisation for Turkish nationals, since visa liberalisation – under Article 77(2) TFEU – is based on the ordinary legislative procedure. The Parliament will also be jointly responsible with the Council for amending the EU budget, both for the 'Emergency Assistance Instrument' and as concerns the additional funding for the Refugee Facility for Syrians.

2. The European Semester/ Jobs, Growth and Competitiveness.

EU leaders are expected to endorse the [2016 Annual Growth Survey](#) (AGS) adopted by the European Commission in late November 2015 in the framework of the European Semester for fiscal and economic policy coordination. It highlights priorities to bolster economic recovery and employment across the EU for the coming year, which, similar to [2015](#), focus on a three-pillar strategy based on growth-friendly fiscal consolidation, boosting investment and the implementation of structural reforms. The European Council is also expected to review implementation of the Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) and to call for their implementation, in light of the late February 2016 [Country Reports](#) from the Commission. Overall, Member States made [some progress](#) in addressing the 2015 CSRs, but the Commission has repeatedly called on them to step up efforts to implement structural reforms to foster competitiveness and strengthen economic recovery. On 8 March, EU Finance Ministers [argued](#) that the level of implementation of the CSRs remained 'poor', as only 7% of them were substantially addressed last year, and over 50% remained unaddressed. The loss of momentum from Member States in meeting reform commitments has worsened over recent years – in line with EPRS [findings](#) – despite the 2015 Commission [initiative](#) to streamline and strengthen the Semester process. Member States, in close consultation with national parliaments and social partners, are expected to prepare and submit their Stability and Convergence Programmes and National Reform Programmes to the Commission by mid-April, taking into account the challenges identified in the 2016 Country Reports and the EU priorities set out in the 2016 AGS. Based on assessment of these programmes, the Commission will issue a new set of CSRs in May 2016, to be endorsed subsequently by the European Council in June and adopted by the Council in July 2016.

Single Market

The Netherlands Presidency is [expected to](#) report to the European Council on progress achieved and further steps planned in enhancing the Single Market. It is likely that the June 2016 European Council will discuss in more detail progress in implementation of the Single Market.

To contact the European Council Oversight Unit, please e-mail: EPRS-EuropeanCouncilOversight@ep.europa.eu

Manuscript completed on 10 March 2016. Brussels © European Union, 2016.

The opinions expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the author(s) and do not represent an official position of the European Parliament. Reproduction and translation of this document for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the publisher is given prior notice and sent a copy.

www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank (internet) – www.epthinktank.eu (blog) – www.eprs.sso.ep.parl.union.eu (intranet)

