

## Takeaways from Eurosfat, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, May 6<sup>th</sup> 2016

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The fourth edition of Eurosfat took place on May 6<sup>th</sup> 2016 under the patronage of the European Parliament, the European Commission's Representation in Romania and the Dutch Presidency of the Council of the European Union. It was organised by Europuls.

It featured a host of panels and speakers with the aim to foster debate on EU affairs. The following takeaways come from the opening ceremony, "Is Romania ready for the EU maturity test? Bettering Romania's European profile in the run-up to the 2019 Presidency of the Council", and from debate number 2 on the refugee crisis, "Solving the refugee crisis: Germany's and Romania's policies – European solutions". The full list of speakers and topics is available online at [Eurosfat](http://Eurosfat).

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### **Opening Ceremony**

The Romanian Prime Minister, Dacian Cioloș, stressed the need for more debate and for political consensus in the run-up to the July 2019 Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Cioloș has said that the priority needs to be drawing up several key strategies that reflect Romania's long-term vision. All major political parties need to contribute in order to have

internal stability and to be able to build an achievable foreign policy. This is the first time Romania takes over the Presidency therefore it must prepare well in advance.

Dacian Cioloş said that “we need to know what we want from this European Union, with or without this Presidency.”

The current Government has a short mandate and it will most likely be replaced after the upcoming parliamentary election at the end of the year. In his remaining time in office, Cioloş said that he intends to lay the groundwork for more debate about what these key strategies should be. He intends to foster debate on national problems while also raising awareness of Romania’s responsibility as a member of the European Union.

The Prime Minister has also said that he has already started prepare the administration. The Committee for Foreign Affairs, chaired by the Secretary of State for European Affairs, Mr Cristian Bădescu, has already started to prepare the ministries.

This responsibility is to a large degree also shaped by the political context. Romania must align its Presidency goals with those of the preceding and following presidencies, Austria and Finland. Also, these goals must comply with the European Commission’s agenda and with the realities of 2019. The risks of crises or unforeseeable events is a reality.

The term ‘presidency’ is itself misleading. The role implies mediation more than leadership although the latter exists to a limited degree. The institution of the rotating Presidency has been weakened since the Lisbon Treaty institutionalised a President of the European Council. According to Cioloş, Romania should prepare for a mediation role backed up by a very strong administration.

“We will assume the capacity to mediate common position, points of view between member states, taking into account the EU agenda at the time, you can see that there are subjects that appear every year. (...) There can be subjects that Romania can put up for debate if it can find allies among the member states, the European Commission, the European Parliament and will be able to spark interest.”

The most important thing, however, is to understand that the foundation of a successful Presidency lies in clear and achievable national goals in line with national strategies and in a very strong administration.

Stella Ronner-Grubačić, Netherland's Ambassador to Romania, said that in her country's experience Romania should focus on no more than three priorities for the Presidency. The ability to set the agenda is very limited.

She emphasized the needs for a strong mechanism of inter-ministry coordination. Mediation and consensus-building will require Romanian officials to communicate efficiently between themselves and to liaise with civil servants from other countries.

The Presidency of the Council of the European Union has the responsibility to plan and lead the Council's meetings and working groups and to represent the Council in its relationship with other EU institutions. Its mandate is to be an honest and neutral broker between member states and to ensure the continuity of the EU's work in the Council.

Romania is set to take over the Presidency of the Council between July and December 2019. It will be part of a trio with Austria (January-June 2019) and Finland (January-June 2020).

The full transcript of Prime Minister Dacian Cioloș's speech is available online at <http://bit.ly/1QVnn4B>.

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## **The Refugee Crisis**

This panel featured Cristian Bădescu, Secretary of State for European affairs, H. E. Werner Hans Lauk, Germany's Ambassador to Romania, Victor Negrescu, MEP, Leonard Orban, Presidential Adviser on European affairs, Christian Flisek, MP German Parliament (SPD), and Rob Visser, former Executive Director of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO). The panel was co-organized by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (The Friedrich Ebert Foundation) and Fundația Stânga Democratică (The Democratic Left Foundation).

The discussion focused on the differences in policy choices on refugees between Romania and Germany. At EU level, Germany has supported the Commission's policy of mandatory redistribution while Romania has constantly supported voluntary redistribution.

Leonard Orban has strongly emphasized that Romania is not against refugees but that it is against the planned redistribution and that it cannot cope with relocating 6200 refugees. It can manage between 1000 and 1700 refugees. Cristian Bădescu defended Romania's reluctance to take in more refugees by saying that Romania contributes with specialized personnel in other countries. This is in light of the proposed penalties for non-compliance with mandatory redistribution put forth by the Commission on May 4<sup>th</sup>.

Christian Flisek and Ambassador H. E. Werner Hans Lauk have underlined the hardships Germany has been going through by taking in a large number of refugees and stressed that it cannot keep up the current level. It is facing administrative challenges in registering refugees and the Government is pressured by social tensions. They framed mandatory redistribution as a form of solidarity despite the fact that even the member states who voted for this policy have been slow to handle asylum claims.

Rob Visser has underlined the fact that public debate needs to differentiate between refugees and migrants. Asylum claims for refugees fleeing from war-torn societies need to be handled at European Union level taking into account the particularities of each member state rather than at member state level.

What emerged as the central point is that the European Union has to mitigate the consequences of foreign policy decisions. It can only manage the flow of refugees but this will not stop until the root cause of the problem, namely underdevelopment of weak states in its surroundings and military conflict, is solved.