Concept Paper
RO2019

The RO2019 is a non-governmental project initiated by Europuls - the Centre of European Expertise and the Foundation for Civil Society Development, with the aim to create a Support Platform for the preparations of the Romanian presidency of the EU Council, in the first half of 2019.

Neutral from a political point of view, the project intents to aggregate the Romanian civil society’s efforts to ensure the full success of the first and most important maturity test for Romania since its accession to the European Union in 2007. RO2019 is a project based on the European values of democracy, civic engagement and open dialogue, with strong support for the European idea and the European integration process.

1. Context

The rotating presidency of the EU Council coordinates for a period of six months all working meetings of the Council, with the main responsibility to ensure the work of the European Union and to establish the priorities at the given moment. The rotating presidency represents an important administrative and human resources exercise, but above all an extraordinary challenge for the involved country to demonstrate and boost its European image and expertise.

The leadership of the Council is secured through a format of three successive presidencies named the “Presidency trio”, which coordinates the main priorities for a period of 18 months. Romania, as the first country, will be followed by Finland in the second part of 2019 and finally Croatia in 2020.

A successful Presidency must have a coherent and consistent message, condensed to a few priorities (a maximum of 3 is recommended). Thus, after consultations with the European Commission and proposals from previous presidencies, the leading Presidency is required to take over, being given at best the opportunity to choose and promote only one new priority with limited or no time to actually implement it. This requires excellent coordination with the other
two countries under the "Presidency Trio", which in the case of Romania are Finland and Croatia, but also countries coming after.

For Romania, 2019 may very well become the moment in which both the European prestige of the country and the proposed thematic priorities may reach their peak within the EU. Additionally, various negotiations and ongoing projects can be conducted in an advantageous manner for our national policies - provided that Romania meets the capacity, expertise, strength and dynamism required.

The Romanian governments, regardless of their political affiliation, should therefore begin a thorough preparation and the RO2019 project will contribute via the Romanian civil society, ensuring a successful Presidency.

2. RO2019 Actions

The RO2019 Project will have three main lines of action, engaging in a constant consultative process with the Romanian civil society, concerned national authorities and other partners, as follows:

I. Identify and support the 2019 Romanian Presidency Priorities - A Presidency must have several thematic priorities to be promoted before and after its 6 month mandate;

There are multiple important areas of national and European interest that Romania could propose to the other Member States involved in the process such as Finland and Croatia, in coordination with the European Commission, for the year 2019:

- To strengthen the monitoring mechanisms of democracy and the rule of law within each Member State;
- To push for the completion of the European Energy market, having in mind ambitious anti-climate change goals;
- To put in practice the European public prosecutor proposal, by finalising the agreement regarding its duties and powers in relation with the national institutions;
- To fight against poverty and social exclusion, a major problem in Romania, where the EU needs to set up new and more ambitious policies;
- To revive integration measures into the labour market, with focus on young people, that would properly answer the skill mismatching and the increasing rate of unemployment;
- to develop and implement a holistic European response for the situation of refugees, for both social inclusion and labour market integration;
- To re-start the debate and work on the Danube Strategy;
- To reaffirm the Security Policy in South-East Europe and reform the Common Defence policy of the EU, taking into consideration the recent threats coming from Crimea, East Ukraine and the frozen conflicts in South-Caucasus, as well as the weakening of the EU’s external borders due to the refugee crisis;
- A new long-lasting strategy for the Black Sea that takes into consideration the current geopolitical realities, with a special focus on development and security;
- To reshape, in close cooperation with the EC and other Member States, the new economic, growth and social policies post 2020 (Europe 2020, 2014-2020 MFF).

II. Capacity building for Romania – to create the necessary resources for the directly involved actors such as public authorities or institutions, and for the other actors concerned namely the civil society, academics and journalists, to be able to cover all European issues, the national policies of the other Member States, and to develop their negotiation skills.

Within this action, RO2019 proposes to:

- Have an inter-party agreement that regardless of the party in power between July 2018 (when Romania might already be required to chair some meetings) and July 2019, all ministers in Government will be designated taking into account their high level of EU knowledge and expertise;
- Organise formative sessions for the authorities, civil society, journalists and other interested actors regarding the functioning of the European institutions, European law, the procedures of the Presidency of the EU Council and the inter-institutional relations within the EU;
- Set up meetings for exchange of good practices between Romanian representatives, diplomats, public authorities, civil society representatives and their counterparts from other Member States (especially from the 2004 enlargement) with prior experience in leading the Presidency of the Council;
- Prepare a roadmap until the end of 2016 where the main thematic priorities and challenges of the Romanian Presidency 2019 will be identified;
- Write a Report/Guide RO2019 until the end of 2017, to be used by the authorities and civil partners for a better understanding and preparation of the 2019 moment;
- Organise working visits between the Romanian authorities and representatives of the ongoing Council presidencies;
- Write reports and thematic studies;
- Launch a website containing all necessary information for the project.
III. Large scale promotion of Romania's image in Europe – the year 2019 has a huge potential for promoting Romania. We believe that negotiations and meetings in Brussels must be coupled with a wide range of events in order to secure Romania’s visibility in the EU.

Actors involved:

- The Romanian Members of the European Parliament;
- The Romanian Cultural Institute (ICR);
- Romanian Embassies within EU Member States;
- Romanian associations in other Member States of the EU;
- NGO’s from Member States and third countries interested in the RO2019 priorities.

The activities will include:

- Weekly promotional events at the European Parliament in Brussels and Strasbourg, secured through a rotation by the Romanian MEPs;
- Cultural Romanian events in all European Capitals;
- Artistic and culinary exhibitions;
- Thematic exhibitions;
- Seminars and academic debates to take place in renowned universities in all Member States with a focus on priority policies for RO2019;
- Conferences and political debates regarding the RO2019 priorities organised in the grand capitals of the EU.

3. Project Management

Europuls and FDSC are the initiators and main coordinators of this project, which aims to take place both in Romania and abroad. The two organizations will delegate members to handle the proper development of the project. The swift communication process will be ensured by involving external partners, while the implementation of various events such as conferences, seminars, public hearings, training sessions, exchanges of best practices, as well as drafting and publication of materials will be done in coordination with national partners.

Europuls will ensure, through its European expertise, a high level of institutional-related content and logistical details regarding the Presidency and the European Union, and will secure the relationship with Romanian and foreign partners, and manage the Brussels-based events.
FDSC will capitalize on their rich expertise at national level to coordinate national partners in order to identify key priorities for Romania, will provide event coordination and leadership in the country, and will secure the relationship with internal sponsors.

An important component in the RO2019 project’s leadership is the **Steering Board** which will be elected by the two organisations based on their competence, ethics, integrity and promotion of European values.

The members of this Board will be invited to join in order to ensure a more diverse representation of the civil society sphere and of the economic, social, academic and media-related Romanian environment. They will be invited to propose priorities and will be given responsibilities that cover all three main lines of action, where they can apply their expertise to improve project results.

RO2019 will coordinate permanently with the Romanian authorities involved in the preparations of the Romanian Presidency of the Council in 2019. Europuls and FDSC representatives will take part in various consultation meetings between national and foreign partners.

### 4. Other Partners

RO2019 will sign a memorandum of cooperation with the Romanian authorities that will deal with this topic in 2016. Equally important, the project will request the support and permanent cooperation with the representatives of the European institutions in Romania, especially the ones of the European Commission. Last but not least, RO2019 is a project open to all parties interested to make a contribution to this important test of maturity.

In this way, other interested organizations in the country or abroad will be included as partners of the project and will help create a broad base of expertise, for Action I, II and III.