

Enikő Győri

## The Context of the 2011 EU Presidency, Policy Successes and Challenges

### Introduction

An EU Presidency<sup>1</sup> may be presented in crude figures: in the first half of 2011 members of the Hungarian Government as well as the approximately 800 presidency staff chaired nearly 2,000 working party, Coreper<sup>2</sup> and Council meetings, and handled some 320–340 dossiers. In Hungary, we hosted around 50,000 guests at the Presidency events.<sup>3</sup> But these indicators on their own have nothing to say about us or the EU. It is therefore worth looking beyond them to glimpse the circumstances and the ideas behind the work programme we compiled when Hungary headed the European Union for the first time. The following questions arise: how remarkable were the results achieved at the time, what remained of these results 13 years on, and how relevant are the ambitions formulated back then today?

We have made a commitment to the Member States that we will work to make *Europe stronger by the end of the Hungarian Presidency* than when we took over the wheel, and that we will do so with a *human touch*, putting the interests of the citizens at the centre (*strong Europe with a human touch*).<sup>4</sup> We have maintained that the European Union is strong if it consists of strong Member States and strong institutions, working together along the principles and competences laid down in the Treaties. The topics we raised, but also the agenda we inherited, pointed in this direction. This approach was successful in 2011; no one fundamentally questioned these ambitions and we delivered on our commitments. We can say that by successfully managing the dossiers, by implementing the Presidency programme, we handed over the leadership of a Union in better condition to Poland, the next presidency holder, on 1 July 2011, than when we had received it on 1 January 2011.

Of course, institutional chauvinism was present at the time, and the European Parliament (EP) had always wanted to attain more power at the expense of the Member States,

<sup>1</sup> The official name is the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which is the decision-making body of the European Union comprising the governments, the Council of Ministers (hereinafter: Council) for a period of six months. In the first half of 2011, Hungary held the Presidency, referred to in this article as the Hungarian EU Presidency (GYŐRI et al. 2014: 163).

<sup>2</sup> Coreper is the Council of Permanent Representatives, the forum for the Member State ambassadors. Coreper I deals with more policy-sensitive dossiers, while Coreper II deals with the more politically sensitive dossiers.

<sup>3</sup> GYŐRI 2011a: 5.

<sup>4</sup> Európai Tükör 2011: 95.



yet the Barroso Commission<sup>5</sup> played a stronger balancing role than the von der Leyen Commission today, which affords the institution a distinctly geopolitical role,<sup>6</sup> entering politics with its own tough agenda. We managed to tame the EP by proclaiming and putting into practice the slogan of a pro-Parliament presidency, despite the fact that we were politically under fire for the entire time. Our stated aim was to reduce interinstitutional conflicts arising from the practical difficulties of kickstarting the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty.

In an EU fraught by successive crises<sup>7</sup> over a short period of time, the fault lines between Member States and institutions are even deeper today, rendering the EU's internal cohesion weaker than it was in 2011. Problems surrounding competitiveness have worsened since then, and the ideological warfare and politicisation of the Commission complicated the situation. Hungary's four priorities formulated in 2011, and the drive for a strong Europe underpinning all Presidency objectives, would thus be even more relevant today than they were 13 years ago.

### **The context of the 2011 Hungarian Presidency**

A presidency's room for manoeuvre is determined by its specific internal circumstances and the external factors beyond its control.

#### *Internal determining factors*

As far as the first Hungarian Presidency is concerned, the most important domestic political circumstance was that the government formed following the April 2010 elections had barely six months to prepare for it. The key staff, including senior officials were replaced, while the civil servants who were already trained largely remained in their respective positions. We consciously built the team to include old and new members, because we knew that teamwork was the key to success. The members of the Government had to be prepared at a rapid pace, mainly by foreign heads of government and ministers with experience in implementing the presidency, as well as experts from the Brussels institutions. The biggest backlog was in the development of the domestic infrastructure, where a huge effort had to be made to create the necessary conditions for the Presidency.<sup>8</sup>

For the government that came into power in May 2010, the Presidency was just one of the issues to be resolved: a two-thirds majority gained in the National Assembly provided

<sup>5</sup> The Hungarian Presidency was held during José Manuel Barroso's second term as Commission President (2009–2014).

<sup>6</sup> Speech by Ursula von der Leyen, candidate for Commission President, in the European Parliament on 16 July 2019 (see VON DER LEYEN 2019).

<sup>7</sup> 2015: migration crisis; 2016–2020: Brexit; 2020: Covid; since 2022: Russian–Ukrainian war; 2023: crisis in the Middle East.

<sup>8</sup> For more details see the chapter authored by Ferenc Robák in this book.

a strong mandate for putting the country on a new trajectory. Some of the democratic institutions were inoperable, corruption scandals surrounded the previous administration, disgraced by its campaign of lies, while the economy lay in ruins. Few people remember it today, but in the global economic crisis of 2008, Hungary was the first country in Europe to collapse and to be bailed out, with IMF and EU loans providing some breathing space. This came at a heavy price: since 2009, we have had no room for manoeuvre in economic policy. When the new government came into office, the Commission made it clear that no extra time was granted, we were to meet macroeconomic requirements immediately, in particular, we had to bring the deficit below the mythical 3% threshold. Let us not forget that, since our accession in 2004, Hungary had been subject to an excessive deficit procedure, the government at the time could not produce the necessary macroeconomic figures, not even in a period of favourable global economic trends. The Presidency did not halt the process of internal political and economic consolidation, the structural reforms had to continue. The combination of radical domestic policy changes, the rapid pace of legislation, especially in the field of media law, and the unorthodox economic policy employed to reduce the deficit, threatening foreign business interests, had caused at a minimum confusion and consternation by the beginning of the Presidency, but also serious hostility on the side of the press. For example, at the press conference held in Brussels on 20 December 2010 with the aim of presenting the Hungarian Presidency's programme, the questions raised solely concerned the media law.

### *External circumstances*

The Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force on 1 November 2009, brought about several changes to the EU's institutional system. It introduced a system of trio presidencies, in other words three successive six-monthly presidencies coordinating their programmes, to ensure continuity in the legislative process. The first trio consisted of Spain, Belgium and Hungary. Spain took up the reigns on 1 January 2010, so the Spanish Presidency was already underway when the change of government took place in Hungary. The trio programme and the common logo were created a long time ago, the new Hungarian Government inherited them. But we still had the opportunity for fine-tuning, to express our priorities.

We voluntarily added a duo to the above trio. Working closely with the incoming Polish Presidency, due to enter into office on 1 July 2011, we lay emphasis on the Visegrád cooperation and our shared destiny in Central Europe. These were reflected in the discussion of substantive agenda items (the legislative six-pack, the Eastern Partnership Summit, see below) and formal gestures (Hungarian wine was put on the table even during the Polish Presidency events).

The European Parliament was the major institutional victor of the Lisbon Treaty, becoming co-legislator in 41 new areas. As a result, the Presidency had to establish institutional cooperation in these areas. In the spirit of a Parliament-friendly presidency, we put a lot of energy into the issue of correlation tables (matching references in the annexes to legislation) and into involving the EP in the negotiations on the Multiannual

Financial Framework (MFF).<sup>9</sup> After many months of negotiations, there was no breakthrough in the first issue, but there was in the second: the Council and the EP agreed on the coordination between EP representatives and the Presidency before the General Affairs Council meetings concerning the MFF. Negotiations on the 2014–2020 MFF were then conducted along the lines set by the Hungarian Presidency.<sup>10</sup>

Another new feature of the Lisbon Treaty was that the institution comprising the Heads of State and Government, namely, the European Council, but also the Foreign Affairs Council were given a permanent president, so they were no longer led by the rotating presidency. It was up to our trio to put the new posts into operation and work out the details of the cooperation between the President-in-Office and the Permanent President.

According to some interpretations, these changes have reduced the political role of the rotating presidency, leaving it largely to manage the legislative process between the Council and the EP. I disagree: the role has certainly changed, but it has not lost its relevance. I will come back to this when I present the priorities of the Hungarian Presidency.

The crisis that unravelled in Europe in 2008 also left its mark on the Hungarian Presidency: it was not limited to a financial crisis, but blew up into a general economic crisis. By the beginning of 2011, five Member States had already failed<sup>11</sup> and the first priority was to protect the euro and stabilise economies. On the European horizon, growth was more and more becoming a distant dream.

The fact that, as a result of deliberate misrepresentation, Jobbik was often presented in the international press as a governing party was also very damaging. And this party was portrayed in the media as people marching in black uniforms, giving the impression that the far right was governing Hungary.

Consequently, expectations were low, perhaps even very low and the mood was glum at the start of the Hungarian Presidency.<sup>12</sup> Hostility was mainly experienced from the side of the European Parliament, but it did not hinder the work internally, for example in the Council.

### **Philosophy, presidency techniques**

*Vocation, service, responsibility.* These three words were the compass for the Presidency team. Our commitment meant a strong resolve to make Hungary's first EU Presidency a success. It typically meant 24-hour workdays for half a year, indeed, we asked our families for time off for a good six months. We felt the responsibility of having this great opportunity: all eyes were on us; we had to prove that no matter how deeply we were being maligned, we would do the job professionally.

<sup>9</sup> This was significant, because the European Parliament can only say yes or no to the Multiannual Financial Framework (in a consent procedure), but cannot change the substance agreed upon in the Council. Involving the European Parliament at some level will help facilitate agreement at the end of the process.

<sup>10</sup> GOSTYŃSKA 2011: 543.

<sup>11</sup> In 2008 Hungary and Latvia, in 2009 Romania, in 2010 Greece and Ireland (see GYŐRI 2021: 108).

<sup>12</sup> KACYŃSKI 2013.

The role of EU presidencies is most often described as acting as an impartial *honest broker* to bring together the diverse opinions of Member States to find common ground. The incumbent Foreign Affairs Minister, János Martonyi preferred the term “good shepherd”, meaning that “the flock must be herded” to build consensus. All this was to be done without making anyone feel like they had lost – instead, the aim was to create unanimity.<sup>13</sup> By contrast, today many in the EU call for a move towards majority decision-making,<sup>14</sup> which means giving up on the painstaking task of building consensus. Consensus, however, is the key to long-term cooperation.

This does not mean that I consider a sterile, colourless, odourless presidency to be the right one. The value of the rotating presidency is precisely that, every six months, a Member State can express more clearly how it sees Europe, which issues are most important to it and which issues it intends to raise (or demote) to move Europe forward on its path. It is not appropriate for a presidency to push national interests forcefully, but it is still possible to promote them in a skilful manner. Anyone who fails to do so is giving up on serving their own country. In the case of the 2011 Hungarian Presidency, the Hungarian and EU interests coincided: a strong Europe was a common objective. Even so, we were also able to raise issues that were important to Hungary (see below).

To build a memorable presidency, with character, the narrative must be well construed, its concept elaborated and its messages clearly formulated. These are the building blocks of the image we want to project of ourselves. For the 2011 Presidency, we wanted to introduce Europe to an exciting Central European country that is building a work-based society. In a disciplined but innovative way, it implements the agenda it inherited, cooperating with its trio partners, with the courage to take on big commitments (see the accession of Croatia) and putting issues of importance to it into the spotlight (Roma strategy, Danube macro-region, family policy).

The message gets across when the substance (agenda), the form (how it is delivered, venues, decoration) and the communication are in harmony. We used the Liszt anniversary to show that the man known as Franz was in fact Ferenc, a Hungarian composer. With the European Year of Volunteering, we encouraged people to do something good, and, by showcasing Hungarian inventors, we wanted to show how much Hungarians have contributed to the world.

For us, the trio not only provided a one-and-a-half-year strategic framework and an operational programme to set our own priorities, but also a permanent space for consultation. Working closely with a founding Member State (Belgium) and a Mediterranean country (Spain) meant that, if we could agree on something in this group, then we had

<sup>13</sup> GYÖRI 2011a: 6.

<sup>14</sup> Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission: “I have always argued that unanimity voting in some key areas simply no longer makes sense if we want to be able to move faster” (VON DER LEYEN 2022). Laurence Boone, State Secretary for EU Affairs, France: “We need reform to facilitate the decision-making process [...] we are discussing qualified majority voting”; Anna Lührmann, European and Climate Minister of State, Germany: “By the end of the year, we are working on reform steps, in particular using the Passerelle clause to move from unanimity to qualified majority voting for certain foreign policy decisions” (HANKE VELA 2023a).

a good chance of building a strong majority around it at EU level. Prior to EU meetings, we consulted first in a trio setting, from expert level to ministerial level, and sent liaison diplomats to one another's foreign ministries to facilitate day-to-day cooperation.

A presidency is effective if it is truly responsive, professional, the first to communicate, speaking with one voice on all matters at all levels, from working group leaders to the Prime Minister, with all actors being available at all times. This is what we endeavoured to achieve all along – and according to the feedback received – succeeded.

### **Presidency priorities**

In setting priorities, the dilemma of undercommitting—overperforming or overcommitting—underperforming must be taken seriously. The first is a safe game, but it is difficult to “get a win” out of it, meaning to achieve something extraordinary. Meanwhile, the latter approach is doomed to fail. We must also recognise that there are some successes that fall into our lap as presidency holders, but for which it was the previous presidency that did the heavy lifting (e.g. in our case, the implementation of the European System of Financial Supervision), and then there are others that we worked, but are finally agreed or signed during the presidency of our successors (e.g. the final agreement on the legislative six-pack or the signing of the accession treaty with Croatia took place under the Polish Presidency; see below).

As mentioned in the section on the Hungarian Presidency's philosophy, legislation must be carried forward diligently, the dossiers that had been opened, must be completed and negotiations on the proposals that the Commission had issued in the meantime, must be started. There is, of course, some room for manoeuvre here, too: choosing what to rush, where to apply the brakes, how many new topics to introduce; in other words, to give the semester a Hungarian flavour. The four priorities of the Hungarian Presidency Programme were drawn up by taking all these factors into account.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Promotion of economic growth by strengthening economic governance and focusing on job creation and social inclusion*

This complicated title reflected the Hungarian Presidency's ambition, that it is not enough to weed out the root causes of the 2008 crisis (irresponsible financial management by the states), but that they must be put at the service of the European economy's ability to achieve growth and to create jobs, which is a prerequisite for the welfare of citizens. In the early 2010s, Hungary proved that it was possible to have both fiscal discipline and growth, which is a rare moment of grace. The foundations for this were laid down in 2010–2011 with the proclamation of a work-based society, and we were working towards implementing this at European level during the Presidency.

<sup>15</sup> See details in the itemised list of all adopted documents (Európai Tükör 2011: 94–155).



Economic policy coordination and consolidation, coupled with disciplined national finances were the aims of the so-called *legislative six-pack*. The preventive and corrective arms<sup>16</sup> of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) had to be strengthened, the fiscal frameworks of the Member States had to be harmonised and a macro-imbalances procedure had to be introduced to ensure that the euro would not be put at risk once again by irresponsible spending by a Member State. This was the biggest professional challenge of our Presidency. András Kármán, State Secretary at the Ministry of Finance, practically moved to Brussels for six months to manage this file.

By March, the Council's position was agreed and then, in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, the series of trilogues with the European Parliament started on over two thousand amendments the EP had proposed. These covered about a hundred issues, and by the end of our presidency only one of them remained outstanding. Here we also developed a reasonable compromise, so the debate was narrowed down to a single open political issue: the extension of the so-called qualified majority voting to the preventive arm of the SGP. The EP refused to budge on this. I cannot rule out the possibility that the reason for this was that the Hungarian Presidency would not take full credit for the success. Thus, this issue was passed on to the Polish Presidency, and was resolved almost immediately, which is why I still have my suspicions to this day. Nevertheless, Ollie Rehn, the incumbent Finance Commissioner, wished to award András Kármán a Schuman Prize for the work he had done.<sup>17</sup>

These six basic laws of economic governance are still in force, but are currently subject to reform. With its proposal of 26 April 2023, the Commission intends to relax in particular those provisions that have proved to be unrealistic and unenforceable in recent years (e.g. the reduction of debt by one twentieth per year). The ECOFIN<sup>18</sup> reached a compromise in December 2023, and the EP is due to adopt its position in early 2024. The idea is to conclude the trilogue negotiations between Council and European Parliament before the June 2024 European elections.<sup>19</sup>

During the Hungarian Presidency, the EU conducted the first exercise of the so-called *European Semester*. This economic governance tool is designed to monitor fiscal and structural developments in the EU and the Member States over a cycle between November and June each year, and to make recommendations to them upon conclusion regarding

<sup>16</sup> The 1997 Stability and Growth Pact is a set of rules designed to ensure that EU countries have sound public finances and coordinate their budgetary policies. The preventive arm of the SGP came into force in 1998 with the aim of setting certain parameters for Member States' budgetary planning, thus ensuring sound fiscal policies in the medium term under normal economic conditions. The corrective arm was introduced in 1999 to ensure that Member States adopt appropriate policy measures in order to correct excessive deficit (and/or debt) through the excessive deficit procedure (see *Stability and Growth Pact* s. a.).

<sup>17</sup> GYÖRI 2011a: 12.

<sup>18</sup> The ECOFIN is the Council configuration of the Ministers for economic and financial matters.

<sup>19</sup> The package of proposals consists of a new preventive arm regulation, an amendment to the corrective arm regulation and an amendment to the budgetary framework directive. The preventive arm of the regulation shall be adopted in an ordinary legislative procedure (co-decision) with the European Parliament, the corrective arm by unanimity in the Council and a directive on national fiscal frameworks by qualified majority. The latter two require only consultation with the European Parliament (see *Economic Governance Review* s. a.).

their national budgets and sectoral policies. We managed this soundly, although we were critical of the recommendations we received as a Member State at the time, as we have been regularly since.<sup>20</sup>

The European Semester exercise has taken place every year since then, over an extended timeframe and set of criteria.<sup>21</sup> Its importance has been further underlined by the fact that the funds of the post-Covid Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) are linked to the fulfilment of these recommendations.<sup>22</sup>

In 2011, the euro and all Member States were far from safe from a financial point of view. *Portugal collapsed during our semester*, and Eurozone finance ministers decided on a bailout. It caused no issues that the Hungarian finance minister, a representative of a non-Eurozone Member State, was not present at the Eurozone meeting in Gödöllő. The respective press conference and the subsequent Council of Finance Ministers meeting took place simultaneously.

In June 2011, Hungary, together with three other Member States at the time,<sup>23</sup> did not join the *Euro Plus Pact*, which was intended to improve the competitiveness, employment, fiscal and financial stability of European economies through further cooperation outside the Community method.<sup>24</sup> There was some uproar about how we could do this as presidency holders, but in the end it had no consequences. The device was then abandoned without much ado and it faded into oblivion.

Financial stability was also served by the adoption of the Treaty amendment necessary for the creation of a permanent *European Stability Mechanism* (ESM), the increase in the capacity of the former stability instrument (EFSF), the first European bank stress tests, the start of the European system of supervision and the adoption of various measures to tighten the regulation of the securities market and banking. The position of the Executive Director of the European Banking Authority was filled by a Hungarian professional; since then, no one has managed to obtain such an important position in an EU institution. This also shows how the presidency can be used for the smart enforcement of interests.

In the Competitiveness Council, we have had great successes in completing the Single Market, which we saw then and still see as a key instrument for achieving EU competitiveness. The cornerstone of this endeavour was the *creation of a European patent*. The issue had dragged on for thirty years without any breakthrough. To be fair,

<sup>20</sup> Most of the debates stem from the fact that the Commission often makes recommendations on issues outside its remit. In case of Hungary, this has included criticism of the public employment programme or tax policy. Later on, the Commission also issued recommendations on issues outside of economic policy, such as the judicial system, which was criticised by Hungary.

<sup>21</sup> In 2011, the Commission only published its annual growth survey (AGS) on 12 January, so the cycle was shorter than today, since it is published in November of the previous year. Sustainability aspects were added to the forecast in 2020, so the Commission is now launching the exercise with an ASGS, an annual sustainability and growth survey. There is a debate on how far the focus of the analysis should be extended beyond macroeconomic indicators (to social, environmental and governance issues).

<sup>22</sup> European Commission s. a.b.

<sup>23</sup> United Kingdom, Sweden, the Czech Republic.

<sup>24</sup> The main reason for this was that if we had joined the Pact our corporate tax system would also have had to be harmonised, which would have made us less competitive (see Európai Tükör 2011: 97).



by the time we received the baton, 12 Member States had aligned themselves to a coalition to break this deadlock. We were able to increase this number to 25 through the enhanced cooperation<sup>25</sup> toolkit. The two Member States that we sought to persuade in vain were Spain and Italy, who could not come to terms with the language regime that had been negotiated, because the system did not provide for the registration of patents in their official language. The idea is that EU patent protection means that an invention can be registered in a single Member State and enjoys universal protection in all participating countries, so it provides much cheaper and more effective protection, while promoting innovation.

Agreement on all elements of the package was reached in 2012. Italy did join in 2015, but Poland has left since, and Croatia, which joined the EU in 2013, has not opted in, so in principle 24 Member States are now part of the unitary patent protection. However, by May 2023, only 17 Member States had ratified the Agreement on the Unified Patent Court (UPC), so the system started only with them on 1 June 2023.<sup>26</sup>

It was also a success to reach unanimity in the Council on improving the situation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs): all Member States decided to reach an agreement within a year on improving the financial situation of SMEs, easing their administrative burden and helping them to access markets, on the basis of the Commission's 12-point Single Market Act. These issues are just as relevant today. The process was completed and the elements of the package were later put into force, but, in the meantime, due to multiple crises, the situation of SMEs has steadily deteriorated. Their administrative burdens have only increased, despite Ursula von der Leyen's promises made at the beginning of her term<sup>27</sup> and repeated several times since then, to reduce their<sup>28</sup> obligations.

During the Hungarian Presidency, negotiations on the draft directive on consumer rights were finalised; with this, the new European framework rules for *consumer protection* have been established. Since then, EU legislators have been constantly adapting it to rapidly-changing consumer habits and trends (e-commerce, etc.).

<sup>25</sup> Enhanced cooperation is a procedure that allows at least 9 Member States to establish deeper cooperation in a specific area, where it is established that the objectives of such cooperation cannot be achieved by the Union as a whole within a reasonable timeframe (see *Treaty on European Union* 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Member States that already ratified: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden. Member States that have signed but not yet ratified: Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Romania, Slovakia. Three Member States have not even signed it: Croatia, Poland and Spain (see European Commission s. a.b). Although Hungary signed the UPC Agreement in 2013, it did not ratify it because the Constitutional Court held, in its Decision 9/2018 AB, that the convention is not compatible with the Hungarian Fundamental Law (constitution), as it would remove judicial decisions from the jurisdiction of the Hungarian state. We therefore have observer status in the governing bodies of the UPC [see *Decision 9/2018 (VII.9.) AB of the Constitutional Court*].

<sup>27</sup> She last promised a 25% reduction in the burden on 13 September 2023 in her State of the Union (SOTEU) address (see VON DER LEYEN 2023).

<sup>28</sup> Announcement of the *one in, one out* rule when the Commission presented its working methods on 4 December 2019, promising that for every new rule introduced, an old one would be repealed. This has yet to be implemented (see European Commission 2019).

Bringing a new topic onto the Presidency agenda is a risky exercise. It requires serious preparation and interinstitutional cooperation. This is the approach we took with the *Roma strategy*. In the EP, Livia Járóka wrote a report on the subject,<sup>29</sup> and the Commission published a communication on the issue in April.<sup>30</sup> It was discussed in several Council formations and the Council Conclusion was adopted by EPSCO in May. The process concluded with the endorsement of the document by the June 2011 European Council.<sup>31</sup> It requires Member States to draw up an annual action plan on how they will improve the education, employment, health and housing conditions of the Roma community living in their countries by 2020. These are then examined by the Commission, which reports to the Council and the EP on their implementation. The strategy is based on the principle of subsidiarity and does not create any EU competence, but coordinates the work of Member States. It is important to note that there is no EU competence in minority matters; only Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union foreseeing the respect for the rights of persons belonging to minorities may be invoked.<sup>32</sup> The inclusion of marginalised and disadvantaged groups is also a national competence.

This process took place every year since the Hungarian Presidency, in line with the Roma Framework Strategy, until 2020. Then, after its expiry, the Commission effectively renewed the programme by drawing up a novel 10-year plan (2020–2030) on 7 October 2020.<sup>33</sup> It calls on Member States to submit their national strategies by September 2021 and report on their implementation every two years. Thus, it is since the Hungarian Presidency, that Member States must account for what they do for their Roma communities.<sup>34</sup>

Other achievements in the area of social inclusion include the implementation of the European Disability Strategy and the adoption of Council conclusions to reduce child poverty.

The announcement of the concept of a people-centred Europe enabled the Hungarian Presidency to draw attention to the importance of the *family*. This theme was represented in a series of events: the informal ministerial meeting provided an opportunity to showcase Member State best practices, while the civil and church meetings ensured an in-depth look at the topic. The Council adopted a declaration on reconciling work and family life in Trio + 1 (the forthcoming Polish Presidency) format.<sup>35</sup>

Upon the initiative of the Hungarian Presidency, 2014 was supposed to be the European Year of Families, but this was later changed to the European Year of Citizens, which shows how cautious Brussels is on this subject. Since then, the demographic situation in Europe has further declined, with migration causing many new challenges; moreover,

<sup>29</sup> European Parliament 2011.

<sup>30</sup> European Commission 2011.

<sup>31</sup> European Council 2011.

<sup>32</sup> *Treaty on European Union* 2012.

<sup>33</sup> European Commission 2020.

<sup>34</sup> Of the Member States, Malta is the only one without a Roma strategy because there are no Roma living on the island.

<sup>35</sup> Európai Tükör 2011: 100.

the Hungarian Government has considerable experience and achievements in the field of family policy, so this topic will continue to be a priority during our upcoming Presidency in 2024.

*Strengthening common policies by making them more effective and competitive, while preserving their core values and their capacity to create cohesion*

During the Hungarian Presidency, the launch of the negotiations on the European Union's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2014–2020 was imminent.<sup>36</sup> Our task was to position those political matters that were of outstanding importance from a Hungarian perspective. These were the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Cohesion Policy, which are still major items accounting for the largest expenditures from the EU budget, but have been under immense pressure from net contributors for many years, and have been the subject of major press campaigns, purporting their obsolescence and frivolity. Our task was to adopt Council conclusions confirming that these were necessary policies and worthy of support.

In the field of *cohesion policy*, this was achieved; the relevant document laid down with the unanimous support of the Member States the most important principles for reducing territorial disparities and helping them catching up.<sup>37</sup> Based on these conclusions, work was launched to re-organise the “Friends of Cohesion” group in autumn 2011, already after the Hungarian Presidency. This was why, at the General Affairs Council meeting of 15 November 2011, Foreign Affairs Minister János Martonyi could present the position of this group of 14 Member States to his partners, namely, that the countries concerned agreed that cohesion policy was a strong, integrated development instrument that must be funded at a level similar to the current level. This ensured that our arguments could not be swept off the table during the starting MFF debate.<sup>38</sup>

However, on the hypersensitive issue of the *CAP*, we only managed to achieve qualified majority, so we only managed to get Presidency Conclusions adopted.<sup>39</sup> But even this helped: it provided a reference point for the MFF negotiations on agricultural funding.

In the context of today's energy crisis, our efforts in 2011 in the field of *common energy policy* seem perhaps even more valuable. The conclusions of the February European Council included the objective of creating an internal market for energy (gas and electricity) by 2014 (!) and internal interconnections with a sufficient number of interconnectors to avoid so-called energy islands, meaning areas in the EU where an energy supply is not ensured. Unfortunately, this plan was not implemented on time, and was completely over-shadowed by the forced green transition plan and the

<sup>36</sup> The Communication on the Multiannual Financial Framework was presented by the Commission at the very end of the Hungarian Presidency, on 29 June 2011 (see GYŐRI 2011b: 8).

<sup>37</sup> Government of Hungary 2012.

<sup>38</sup> GYŐRI 2011b: 8.

<sup>39</sup> Európai Tükör 2011: 133.

Russian–Ukrainian war. Nevertheless, it is clear that 13 years ago we set the right course to diversify energy sources and supply routes, with a view to develop the infrastructure.

Strengthening Community policies has also been reinforced by adopting a green but competitive EU transport policy, revising the TEN-T network, adopting the first railway package to create a single railway area, introducing legislation and resolutions in the field of tolls, water policy, EU biodiversity protection, food labelling and climate protection.

The *Danube Region Strategy* was not part of the compulsory programme either, but, unlike the Roma strategy, it already had a predecessor, the Baltic Sea Macro Regional Strategy, adopted by the EU in 2009.<sup>40</sup> Its importance was that it was to embrace 14 countries along our largest river, 8 of which were (then) EU Member States and 6 of which were (then) non-EU countries,<sup>41</sup> thus providing a new opportunity for cooperation for 12 years for the parties involved, some of them our neighbouring countries. The aim was to find solutions to the problems that arise in every riparian state. The European Council endorsed the plan at its meeting in March 2011, so that national coordinators could be appointed and concrete projects could be agreed still during the Hungarian semester. All this without any extra funding, without any new institution, without any legislation, without adding to the EU's red tape. The focus has been on reallocating existing funds to joint projects in order to better coordinate the actions of people living along the Danube, from economic development to environmental protection, from water quality and flood protection, to cultural initiatives.

The Danube Strategy has been in place ever since. Every two years, the Commission publishes a report on the implementation of the macro-regional strategies, which is followed by Council Conclusions. Between 2014 and 2020, a new transnational programme was set up with a budget of around €277 million to help achieve the objectives of the strategy. Its institutional system found a home in Budapest. In 2020, the Action Plan was renewed to adapt the work in the 12 priority areas to the changes that had occurred in the meantime. Cooperation between the 14 countries has deepened and became more practice-oriented, with new platforms emerging (artificial intelligence, disaster management, geothermal energy). Building on the success of the Hungarian Presidency, two more macro-regional strategies were subsequently launched: Alps and Ionian Adriatic.<sup>42</sup>

It should be noted, however, that an EU Presidency is not just about successes: on the issue of genetically modified plants in Europe and the authorisation and marketing procedure for new foods (cloning), we did not succeed in finding a solution that was acceptable to all three EU institutions.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> EUSBSR s. a.

<sup>41</sup> Since the accession of Croatia to the EU in 2013, already nine Member States: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Romania and 5 non-EU countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Moldova, Serbia, Ukraine. The five non-EU countries are now all candidate countries (see *Danube Region Strategy* s. a.).

<sup>42</sup> EUSDR 2021: 4–5.

<sup>43</sup> For the background see Európai Tükör 2011: 103.

*Bringing the Union closer to its citizens*

The overarching objective of the Presidency, which was to serve the interests of citizens, meant that every proposal had to be examined to see whether it would make life easier for citizens. And our third priority specifically covered themes related to citizens.

Thus, during our Presidency, we managed to adopt the regulation on the *European citizens' initiative*, namely the conditions under which citizens can request that the Commission propose an initiative on a specific issue. These rules have been in place ever since.

*Migration* was not as much of a pan-European problem in 2011 as it has been since 2015, although some Member States (back then mainly Italy and Malta) were already severely affected, mostly in the wake of the Arab Spring (see below). We have kept this issue on the Council's agenda, with visits to the region by foreign affairs ministers and state secretaries, and we have tried to achieve an agreement on practical steps. Following the instruction from the March 2011 European Council, it was possible to amend the *Frontex Regulation*, thereby reinforcing the operational capacity of the European Border Agency (e.g. to purchase appropriate equipment). We decided to provide humanitarian aid and additional financial resources for Member States in difficulty and to work closely with the countries of the Southern Mediterranean.<sup>44</sup> Under our Presidency, the European Asylum Support Office was set up, becoming the primary forum for practical cooperation between the Member States.

The *Common European Asylum System* was negotiated during the Hungarian Presidency, but it has given work to many presidencies ever since, and to date the EU still does not have an asylum system that works in a manner that is satisfactory for all. Already then, however, we had formulated the essence of our approach to migration: a clear line between irregular migration and refugees, not allowing economic immigration, while helping countries of origin to retain young people who are able to work in their home states, giving them a perspective in their own country.<sup>45</sup> In both 2015 and 2023, the Council decided by force, meaning by qualified majority, on compulsory relocations, which has never worked in practice. Results achieved during our Presidency, nevertheless, were immediately applicable, and have therefore resolved at least some of the problems within a short timeframe.

When we fought for the Schengen membership of Romania and Bulgaria, we also fought to ensure that Hungarians from Transylvania and the Partium could enter Hungary and travel to any part of the EU without any obstacles. On the one hand, we had to encourage Bulgaria to meet its obligations, while, on the other hand, we tried to convince sceptical EU Member States not to impose again any new conditions. The Commission has been an ally in this process, and after a lot of hard work, we managed to unanimously declare, by convening an extraordinary Home Affairs Council meeting in May, that the two states were sufficiently prepared to apply the Schengen acquis in full, *technically* compliant, and

<sup>44</sup> GOSTYŃSKA 2011: 543.

<sup>45</sup> VIDA 2011: 2.

that their accession date would be set for September that year. That is all that has been achieved until 2023. Most recently the two countries' Schengen membership was blocked in the spring of 2023 by Austria. Although the requirements were met 13 years ago, Member States were only capable of adopting a partial political decision, when in December 2023 they agreed to eliminate passport controls for Romanian and Bulgarian citizens in EU ports and airports. Terrestrial entry has not been foreseen for them so far.<sup>46</sup>

Other noteworthy developments include, but are not limited to, the adoption of Council conclusions on an internal security strategy to combat organised crime, the adoption of the anti-trafficking directive, the Council's Position on the draft directive on cybercrime, the directive on the exchange of data on road safety, the Budapest Roadmap on victims' rights, the definition of new directions for data protection, law enforcement cooperation with the U.S., and developments in the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights.<sup>47</sup>

In the cultural field, it was important for us to recognise the importance of recalling the crimes committed by totalitarian regimes by designating 23 August as a common day of remembrance in Council Conclusions. Cultural diversity, which is important for Central Europe, has been included in the Council's cultural work plan, so that joint cultural programmes of this kind can now be organised. We also reached a political agreement on the creation of a *European Heritage Label*, which has since become a kind of trademark for sites playing an important role in the creation, historical evolution and spiritual unfolding of the Union.

*Responsible continuation and credibility of the enlargement process,  
global engagement*

According to all analysts and in my own assessment, *the greatest achievement of our Presidency was the accession of Croatia to the EU*. This was the biggest dilemma in the formulation of the Presidency's priorities: if we make an express undertaking, it would be a failure if it did not happen. However, if we do not add it to the Presidency programme, no one will take our efforts seriously. We therefore made the serious and risky political decision and announced that we would fight for the EU membership of our Southern neighbouring country.

At the beginning of our Presidency, there were still seven chapters open, so we had to set a very tight timetable. It was necessary to plan well when political intervention, even at the highest level, was needed to ensure that negotiations did not stall. Croatia did an immense job and, despite last-minute intrigues, we managed to conclude the negotiations at 18:00 on the last day of the Presidency, i.e. 30 June 2011. The show, namely the signing ceremony of the Accession Treaty took place during the Polish Presidency.

<sup>46</sup> At the Home Affairs Council meeting on 7 December 2022, Austria and the Netherlands blocked the Schengen accession of Romania and Bulgaria, while Croatia's accession was accepted by all. This is how Croatia became not only a member of the euro area but also of Schengen on 1 January 2023 (see TESÍJA 2022).

<sup>47</sup> Európai Tükör 2011: 106–107.



Croatia's accession was not only important in itself, but also sent a message to the rest of the Balkans: if the accession work is done, you can join the EU. While the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit had outlined the prospect of enlargement for the Western Balkans, up until the Hungarian Presidency, progress was sparse. In 2011, four out of the five candidate countries belonged to this region, namely Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Turkey. We were unable to give any real impetus to the negotiations with Turkey, i.e. to open any chapter; political opposition was already strong and has not eased since.<sup>48</sup> Montenegro and Macedonia (now North Macedonia) moved forward and started accession negotiations, with Serbia joining them later on. However, it was only the Russian–Ukrainian war and the politically motivated push for Ukraine's membership that gave the process a boost in August 2023, with the vague promise of a 2030 accession target date.<sup>49</sup>

Accession negotiations with Iceland, the only non-Balkan and developed candidate country, started during the Hungarian Presidency, but then it decided to suspend the process in 2013 and withdrew its application in 2015.<sup>50</sup>

We also expressed our commitment to enlargement by inviting the candidate countries to our informal Council meetings during the semester; by holding a Western Balkan Forum at Foreign Minister level in Luxembourg in June, chaired by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy; and by the Hungarian Prime Minister's visit to the countries of the region.

As mentioned above, the Lisbon Treaty provides for the position of permanent President of the Foreign Affairs Council through the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, taking away this role from the country holding the Presidency. However, it is not true that the rotating presidency has been left without foreign policy tasks. There was a division of labour between Catherine Ashton and János Martonyi, who shared tasks, even missions or presidencies. The Hungarian Presidency took part in setting up the European External Action Service. The Hungarian Foreign Minister substituted the High Representative on a total of 14 occasions at events held with third countries or regions.<sup>51</sup> We also played an active role in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) Strategic Review process, which led to the recognition of the importance of a stable Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood. Hungary was in charge of international development and humanitarian aid, where significant progress was made in several areas (the role of water in development policy, EU–US development cooperation, etc.).

An attempt was made to portray the cancellation and rescheduling of the *Eastern Partnership (EaP) Summit* as a failure during the next, Polish Presidency, when in fact this decision was the outcome of sober reflection and a gesture of good will. There were two main reasons for this postponement. The first was that the international calendar had

<sup>48</sup> Accession talks with Ankara started in 2005, but “have been stuck in the freezer ever since” (HANKE VELA 2023b).

<sup>49</sup> At the Strategic Forum in Bled in August, European Council President Charles Michel envisaged 2030 as a de facto deadline for enlargement, for which both the EU (Member States) and the candidate countries must be ready (see EU Monitor 2023).

<sup>50</sup> MTI 2015.

<sup>51</sup> Európai Tükör 2011: 109.

become very busy, with OECD, G8 (Russia was still a member of the world's leading powers) and G20 summits scheduled for the end of May. The second was that the Arab Spring (see below) drastically shifted the focus, and there were fears that the problems of the Eastern half of Europe would not receive the attention they deserved, which would have resulted in a low level of participation. As we did not want to come up with a pretext for an empty summit, because we considered the topic to be very important, the solution was to hand over the organisation of the summit to Poland, the next Presidency following ours, whose representatives were very ambitious and committed to the issue.<sup>52</sup> This was a serious gesture of good will on our part. According to the agreement, Hungary co-chaired the EaP Summit held in Warsaw on 29–30 September 2011, i.e. in a post-presidency period.<sup>53</sup>

In the field of foreign policy, our highest level and largest event with fifty delegations was the June *Asia–Europe meeting* in Gödöllő, which addressed non-traditional security challenges. By the way, the venue originally planned this event was Brussels.

### Dealing with unexpected situations

The true test of any Presidency is the occurrence of an extraordinary situation. This is when the machinery is really put to the test: whether it can continue to operate smoothly, adapt flexibly, recognise and then control the situation, maintain the initiative, and react quickly but not rashly to the new developments.

The first such test for the 2011 Hungarian Presidency was the *Arab Spring*, which started with a Tunisian greengrocer setting himself on fire in despair, and then the entire North Africa started to boil over. *Libya* toppled Gaddafi's regime. Since it was a foreign policy matter, the High Representative was at the wheel, but we played a strong coordinating role in close consultation with her to protect EU citizens and ensure multilateral EU action. We undertook a mission to the region with the Foreign Affairs Minister and the State Secretary to assess the humanitarian situation. In Libya, as a part of the activation of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, our embassy in Tripoli organised the evacuation of EU and non-EU nationals by chartered aircraft and provided consular assistance when most of the embassies on site were closed. The Presidency was also in charge of chairing the RELEX working party of external relations advisers, so the task of having European sanctions adopted against Libya also rested on our shoulders. We convened an extraordinary Energy Council to address energy policy aspects, and the Home Affairs Council discussed its asylum matters on three occasions.

The second test case was the *nuclear disaster at Fukushima*, caused by an earthquake and tsunami. The Presidency was tasked with protecting EU citizens and coordinating aid to Japan, together with the Commission. We convened a working party on nuclear issues without delay, and a few days later convened the Energy Council, which was able

<sup>52</sup> As a neighbouring state, Poland (together with Sweden) is the parent country of the Eastern Partnership.

<sup>53</sup> See RÁCZ 2011; TÜRKE 2011: 1–15.

to adopt the proposal for the European Council to decide on the stress tests of nuclear power plants in the EU. This took place on 21 March 2011. Following this disaster, Germany decided to close its nuclear power plants. The consequences of this decision are still being felt throughout Europe today.

11 March 2011 was a memorable day in the history of the Presidency: four Council meetings had to be held simultaneously, one of which was the aforementioned extraordinary Energy Council.

Our third case was an E. coli infection through cucumbers, which resulted in a fatality. It was immediately put on the agenda at the informal Agriculture Council and the subsequent extraordinary Agriculture Council, so the Commission could not delay the issue: it came to the aid of the vegetable producers, along the lines set out by the Council, ensuring the containment of the crisis.

Effective action was made possible by a clear decision-making system, speedy action and uniform implementation of decisions. The so-called *situation room*, the Budapest management, met several mornings a week, in online liaison with the competent staff in our Permanent Representation in Brussels.<sup>54</sup> What was decided there, even if forged in heated arguments, was then implemented without delay by everyone with military discipline, regardless of what the person had previously represented in the debate earlier. The Hungarian Presidency was Brussels-driven, with day-to-day micro-management by the Permanent Representation, conducted within the framework mandate provided by Budapest. Of course, the strategic decisions were made in the Hungarian capital.

### **Presidency assessment – Benefits for Hungary**

It is difficult to give an objective assessment, because every Presidency faces different circumstances and extraordinary events, which makes it impossible to compare them. However, the Brussels bubble, especially the press there, often puts Presidencies on a shelf in advance, with complete disregard to their performance. In the case of Hungary, the saying was that expectations were so low that it was easy to exceed them. The international press was not receptive to the positive results; the most they were willing to write was that it was a limited success because it was not a failure.<sup>55</sup>

Leaving these aside, let us look at the exact figures: 103 closed legislative and non-legislative dossiers, of which 43 were agreed with the European Parliament in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure: twenty at first reading, six at second reading and one at third reading. This means that we had no open dossier remaining at second reading.<sup>56</sup> The number of Council and Presidency conclusions adopted reached sixty.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> See GYŐRI 2011a: 9.

<sup>55</sup> KACYŃSKI 2013.

<sup>56</sup> GYŐRI 2011a: 17.

<sup>57</sup> GYŐRI 2011b: 4.

There are no retrospective statistics<sup>58</sup> for every presidency, but the numbers speak for themselves.

The laws, measures and resolutions adopted all pointed in one direction: towards a stronger Europe, which, according to our slogan, acts in the interests of its citizens. We did not include any divisive issue on the agenda; we were able to elevate our own priorities to form pan-European issues that were mostly shared by all. This way, we were able to preserve the unity of the Union. We expected respect for the Treaties and a preference for the Community method over intergovernmental solutions. We succeeded in making the internal affairs of the euro area transparent to non-euro area Member States at a very sensitive time (the sovereign debt crisis) and in keeping outsiders informed of Eurozone decisions.

There were many words of appreciation published by senior managers following our six months of presidency, and a collection of these was compiled.<sup>59</sup> It is more exciting to look at the attitude of our opponents. The European Parliament, whose plenary descended into political fireworks at both the inauguration and the closing of the Hungarian Presidency, tried to diminish the merits by saying that the Presidency was indeed adequate at the level of officials, but not at the political level.<sup>60</sup> This may sound credible in technocratic Brussels; however, it is not true. The Presidency was led by politicians from the Hungarian Government, with a clear set of objectives, playing on all the instruments of politics. We tried to insulate the Presidency from Hungarian domestic political developments; rather, it was our opponents that tried to conflate the two. The European Parliament was the arena for this effort, which is fine, since it is the natural arena for party political battles in Europe as foreseen in the Treaties. We succeeded to avoid these debates in the Council and the European Council.

The main question is how visible the positive results are beyond the Brussels bubble. In my view, a good Presidency is like a good schedule: if everything is in order, no one notices. Meaning that when the Presidency does its job fairly, it may receive some recognition within the bubble, but not beyond it, because the ordinary course of business has no news value. If a presidency is weak and far from being on top of the situation, the inertia of the system, the permanent players and the Brussels institutions will take over, and there will be only internal grumbling and perhaps criticism. Hungary received a lot of positive feedback within the bubble and even at the level of public statements; however, this did not change the negative bias of the international press towards Hungary.

In terms of gains, it is worth taking into account the things that are less visible from the outside, but are still very important. The Hungarian political class and government officials gained valuable experience and a better understanding of the workings of the EU institutions, and established contacts with colleagues in Brussels and the Member States.

<sup>58</sup> The Council has been keeping a record of the Presidency's achievements since 2015, but it is not consolidated, let alone presented in a comparable way (see European Council s. a.).

<sup>59</sup> Words of appreciation for the 2011 Hungarian Presidency in *Európai Tükör* 2011: 153–154.

<sup>60</sup> For plenary debates in the European Parliament on the Hungarian Presidency, see European Parliament s. a.a.; European Parliament s. a.b.

This subsequently helped improve both domestic decision-making and enforce national interests. For example, in the spring of 2012, when the excessive deficit procedure against Hungary reached the stage of imposing a fine, i.e. when the Council, upon the proposal of the Commission, put a six-month deadline on correcting the deficit to avoid the suspension of cohesion funds to Hungary. The network of contacts was already in place, and that, together with reducing government spending, helped avoid losing EU money.

What is unfortunate is that we have not been able to make good use of the experiences and knowledge gained through the Presidency and the network of contacts to place more Hungarians in better positions in the EU institutions than before. Whereas at the time of accession we were over-represented in terms of numbers, for example in senior management positions in the Commission, today we do not have a single Hungarian Director General or Deputy Director General. This is certainly linked to the political climate surrounding Hungary, and it is an important task for the Hungarian Government at all times to overcome this.

### **Outlook to 2024**

I am convinced that the second Hungarian Presidency, due in the second half of 2024, should not be compared with the 2011 Presidency in any way, either in advance or following its completion. Thirteen years ago, we had to deal with an economic crisis; today, we need to manage many parallel crises: the war in Ukraine, war in the Middle East, migration, economic stagnation, sky-rocketing energy prices, competitiveness challenges. It seems increasingly so that the EU will be hard put to maintain the standard of living that its citizens, at least those in the Western half, have become accustomed to over the past decades. Moreover, second six-month presidencies are already shorter owing to the August and Christmas breaks, and with EP elections in 2024, it will take months to set up the new institutions. Thus, in terms of legislative work, it will be physically impossible to move forward.

More than ten years of successive disputes on the rule of law (Article 7 procedure, conditionality, etc.), the monopolisation, arbitrary interpretation and application of the Union's values, especially against Hungary and Poland, and the withholding of RRF and cohesion funds have not brought any tangible benefits, but only weakened internal unity. These procedures undermine the credibility of the European Union and erode citizens' faith in democratic institutions. Today, it is much more difficult for Member States to cooperate and find unity than in the past.

As a result, the EU is in a worse state and the challenges are much greater than they were under the first Hungarian Presidency. Moreover, Hungary has been in the crosshairs of European politics for some time, and this is unlikely to change in the near future. This will make it much more difficult for the team that will lead the 2024 Presidency. The European Parliament would even take the Presidency away from Hungary, although it

has no mandate or powers to do so.<sup>61</sup> This has not been raised in the Council, although there has been a Member State that made a similar statement.<sup>62</sup>

Hungary, as a Member State committed to the rule of law in the EU, should, in my view, focus on the external and internal strengthening of Europe during its Presidency in 2024. The institutions should return to acting within their own sphere of competence. The Commission should not involve itself in politics, but enforce the Treaties and the law, and use its right of legislative initiative where EU action is really needed. Matters that divide Member States or weaken the Union must be forgotten. There is no general need for more Europe, only where it is of added value for European citizens. Only an economically and politically reinforced Union with a strong identity can stand its ground in today's complex international relations to assert its interests. Looking back on twenty years of experience as a Member State, and having already gained presidency experience in several leadership positions, the 2024 Hungarian Presidency is well equipped to perform the valuable work necessary to achieve this goal.<sup>63</sup>

## References

- EU Monitor (2023): EU bővítéspolitikai: több kérdés, mint válasz. *EU Monitor*, 29 August 2023. Online: [www.eu-monitor.hu/hu/cikk/20230829-eu-bovitespolitika-tobb-kerdes-mint-valasz](http://www.eu-monitor.hu/hu/cikk/20230829-eu-bovitespolitika-tobb-kerdes-mint-valasz)
- Európai Tükör (2011): Hat hónap egy erősebb Európa szolgálatában. Áttekintés az Európai Unió Tanácsának magyar elnökségéről 2011. január–július. *Európai Tükör*, 16(7), 94–155. Online: [https://brexit.kormany.hu/download/6/18/20000/europai\\_tukor\\_2011\\_07.pdf](https://brexit.kormany.hu/download/6/18/20000/europai_tukor_2011_07.pdf)
- GOSTYŃSKA, Agata (2011): Evaluation of the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. *Bulletin of the Polish Institute of International Affairs*, 288(71), 542–543. Online: [www.files.ethz.ch/isn/130802/Bulletin%20PISM%20No%2071%20\(288\),%20June%2030,%202011.pdf](http://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/130802/Bulletin%20PISM%20No%2071%20(288),%20June%2030,%202011.pdf)
- GYŐRI, Enikő (2011a): Magyar szemeszter Európában. *Európai Tükör*, 16(7), 5–19. Online: [https://brexit.kormany.hu/download/6/18/20000/europai\\_tukor\\_2011\\_07.pdf](https://brexit.kormany.hu/download/6/18/20000/europai_tukor_2011_07.pdf)
- GYŐRI, Enikő (2011b): Válság közben, elnökség után – budapesti pillantás Európa közeljövőjére. *Külgügyi Szemle*, 10(4), 3–15. Online: [https://kki.hu/assets/upload/Kulugyi\\_Szemle\\_2011\\_04\\_Velseg\\_kezben\\_elnekseeg\\_u\\_.pdf](https://kki.hu/assets/upload/Kulugyi_Szemle_2011_04_Velseg_kezben_elnekseeg_u_.pdf)
- GYŐRI, Enikő (2021): Válságból válságba, avagy mit tanult az Európai Unió a gazdasági krízisek kezelése terén. *Európai Tükör*, 24(3), 103–145. Online: <https://doi.org/10.32559/et.2021.3.5>
- GYŐRI, Enikő – GYÖRKÖS, Péter – MARGITAY-BECHT, Beáta – MÜLLER, Adrien – ROBÁK, Ferenc (2014): A magyar EU-elnökség tapasztalatai. In MARJÁN, Attila (ed.): *Magyarország első évtizede az Európai Unióban 2004–2014*. Budapest: Nemzeti Közszerológai Egyetem. 163–182. Online: <https://tudasportal.uni-nke.hu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.12944/8570/Teljes%20szoveg%21?sequence=2&isAllowed=y>

<sup>61</sup> See European Parliament 2023: Point 11.

<sup>62</sup> Anna Lührmann, German Minister of State for EU Affairs: “I have doubts about Hungary’s ability to lead a successful Council Presidency” (SORGI 2023).

<sup>63</sup> I would like to thank my colleagues, Lilla Kövesdi, Krisztina Száraz and Dávid Kojcsa for their contribution in data collection and compilation of references and sources.



- HANKE VELA, Jakob (2023a): France, Germany, Portugal Pitch EU Levies and Ukraine ‘Marshall Plan’. *Politico*, 31 August 2023. Online: [www.politico.eu/newsletter/brussels-playbook/france-germany-portugal-pitch-eu-levies-and-ukraine-marshall-plan/](http://www.politico.eu/newsletter/brussels-playbook/france-germany-portugal-pitch-eu-levies-and-ukraine-marshall-plan/)
- HANKE VELA, Jakob (2023b): EU Membership Talks with Ukraine and Moldova. *Politico*, 08 November 2023. Online: [www.politico.eu/newsletter/brussels-playbook/eu-membership-talks-with-ukraine-and-moldova/](http://www.politico.eu/newsletter/brussels-playbook/eu-membership-talks-with-ukraine-and-moldova/)
- KACYŃSKI, Piotr Maciej (2013): The Hungarian Council Presidency: *How Well Did it Do?* – *European Integration*. Brussels: Heinrich Böll Stiftung. Online: <https://eu.boell.org/en/2013/12/03/hungarian-council-presidency-how-well-did-it-do-european-integration>
- MTI (2015): Izland mégsem akar EU-tag lenni. *HVG*, 12 March 2015. Online: [https://hvg.hu/vilag/20150312\\_izland\\_megsem\\_akar\\_EUtag\\_lenni](https://hvg.hu/vilag/20150312_izland_megsem_akar_EUtag_lenni)
- RÁCZ, András (2011): Túl a csúcson. A Keleti Partnerség elhalasztott csúcstalálkozója. *Magyar Külügyi Intézet, MKI-Elemzések*, 6. Online: <https://kki.hu/tul-a-csucson-a-keleti-partnersseg-elhalasztott-csucstalalkozoja/>
- SORGI, Gregorio (2023): Germany Questions Hungary’s Ability to Hold EU’s Rotating Presidency in 2024. *Politico*, 30 May 2023. Online: [www.politico.eu/article/germany-hungary-viktor-orban-eu-presidency-democracy-backsliding/](http://www.politico.eu/article/germany-hungary-viktor-orban-eu-presidency-democracy-backsliding/)
- TESIJA, Vuk (2022): Croatia Poised to Join Schengen Zone and Eurozone. Analysis. *Balkan Insight*, 08 December 2022. Online: <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/12/08/croatia-poised-to-join-schengen-zone-and-eurozone/>
- TÜRKE, András István (2011): A Keleti Partnerség – A lengyel „nagyhatalmi politika” és az EU szomszédság-politika kudarcának eredménye? *Europa Varietas Intézet, EuVI Elemzések*, 3(4), 1–15. Online: [www.academia.edu/5918733/A\\_Keleti\\_Partners%C3%A9g\\_A\\_lengyel\\_nagy-hatalmi\\_politika\\_%C3%A9s\\_az\\_EU\\_Szomsz%C3%A9ds%C3%A1g\\_politika\\_kudarc%C3%A1nak\\_eredm%C3%A9nye\\_EP\\_and\\_ENP\\_Eastern\\_Partnership\\_and\\_European\\_Neighborhood\\_Policy](http://www.academia.edu/5918733/A_Keleti_Partners%C3%A9g_A_lengyel_nagy-hatalmi_politika_%C3%A9s_az_EU_Szomsz%C3%A9ds%C3%A1g_politika_kudarc%C3%A1nak_eredm%C3%A9nye_EP_and_ENP_Eastern_Partnership_and_European_Neighborhood_Policy)
- VIDA, Krisztina (2011): Evaluation of the First Hungarian EU Council Presidency. *ARI*, 134. Online: <https://media.realinstitutoelcano.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/ari134-2011-vi-da-hungarian-eu-council.pdf>
- VON DER LEYEN, Ursula (2019): *Opening Statement in the European Parliament Plenary Session by Ursula von der Leyen, Candidate for President of the European Commission*. Online: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/hu/SPEECH\\_19\\_4230](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/hu/SPEECH_19_4230)
- VON DER LEYEN, Ursula (2022): *Speech by President von der Leyen at the Closing Event of the Conference on the Future of Europe*. Online: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/hu/SPEECH\\_22\\_2944](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/hu/SPEECH_22_2944)
- VON DER LEYEN, Ursula (2023): *2023 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen*. Online: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech\\_23\\_4426](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_23_4426)

### Primary sources

- Danube Region Strategy* (s. a.). Online: [https://dunaregiostrategia.kormany.hu/Decision\\_9/2018\\_\(VII.9.\)\\_AB\\_of\\_the\\_Constitutional\\_Court](https://dunaregiostrategia.kormany.hu/Decision_9/2018_(VII.9.)_AB_of_the_Constitutional_Court). Online: [https://public.mkab.hu/dev/dontesek.nsf/0/fd1f9b7e8c54e0d7c1258162002ecc58/\\$FILE/9\\_2018%20AB%20határozat.pdf](https://public.mkab.hu/dev/dontesek.nsf/0/fd1f9b7e8c54e0d7c1258162002ecc58/$FILE/9_2018%20AB%20határozat.pdf)
- Economic Governance Review* (s. a.). Online: [https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-and-fiscal-governance/economic-governance-review\\_en](https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-and-fiscal-governance/economic-governance-review_en)

- European Commission (2011): *An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020* (2011/173). Online: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0173>
- European Commission (2019): *The Working Methods of the von der Leyen Commission*. *Press Release*, 04 December 2019. Online: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/hu/ip\\_19\\_6657](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/hu/ip_19_6657)
- European Commission (2020): *A Union of Equality: EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation* (2020/620). Online: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ENALL/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0620>
- European Commission (s. a.a.): *Linking the European Semester and the Recovery and Resilience Facility*. Online: [https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/european-semester/european-semester-timeline/linking-european-semester-and-recovery-and-resilience-facility\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/european-semester/european-semester-timeline/linking-european-semester-and-recovery-and-resilience-facility_en)
- European Commission (s. a.b.): *The Unitary Patent System*. Online: [https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/industry/strategy/intellectual-property/patent-protection-eu/unitary-patent-system\\_en](https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/industry/strategy/intellectual-property/patent-protection-eu/unitary-patent-system_en)
- European Council (2011): *European Council Conclusions on an EU Framework for National Roma Inclusion Strategies up to 2020*, 19 May 2011. Online: [www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/122100.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/122100.pdf)
- European Council (s. a.): *List of Presidencies of the Council of the European Union*. Online: [www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/presidency-council-eu/timeline-presidencies-of-the-council-of-the-eu/](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/presidency-council-eu/timeline-presidencies-of-the-council-of-the-eu/)
- European Parliament (2011): *Resolution of the European Parliament of 9 March 2011 on the EU Strategy on Roma Inclusion* (2011/2276). Online: [www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-7-2011-0092\\_EN.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-7-2011-0092_EN.html)
- European Parliament (2023): *On the Breaches of the Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights in Hungary and Frozen EU Funds* (2023/2691). Online: [www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0216\\_EN.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0216_EN.html)
- European Parliament (s. a.a.): *The Programme of Activities of the Hungarian Presidency of the Council (debate) (2011)*. Online: [https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/webstreaming/the-programme-of-activities-of-hungarian-presidency-of-council-debate\\_20110119-0900-PLenary-5](https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/webstreaming/the-programme-of-activities-of-hungarian-presidency-of-council-debate_20110119-0900-PLenary-5)
- European Parliament (s. a.b.): *Review of the Hungarian Presidency (debate) (2011)*. Online: [https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/webstreaming/review-of-hungarian-presidency-debate\\_20110705-0900-PLenary-3](https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/webstreaming/review-of-hungarian-presidency-debate_20110705-0900-PLenary-3)
- EUSBSR (s. a.). Online: [www.eusbsr.eu/about/about](http://www.eusbsr.eu/about/about)
- EUSDR (2021): *Az Európai Unió Duna Régió Stratégia (EUSDR) 10 éve* [10 Years of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)]. Budapest: Publication of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Online: <https://online.fliphtml5.com/qhzkv/sgsi/>
- Government of Hungary (2012): *Report No. J/7413 on Issues Related to Hungary's Membership of the European Union and the State of European Integration* (2011), May 2012. Online: [www.parlament.hu/irom39/07413/07413.pdf](http://www.parlament.hu/irom39/07413/07413.pdf)
- Stability and Growth Pact (s. a.). Online: [https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-and-fiscal-governance/stability-and-growth-pact\\_en](https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-and-fiscal-governance/stability-and-growth-pact_en)
- Treaty on European Union (2012). Online: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12012M%2FTXT>