

Zoltán Kovács

# Operational Implementation of the 2024 Hungarian Presidency

## Introduction

Hungary's second EU Presidency – officially referred to as the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union – in the second half of 2024 is a challenge in operational preparation and implementation, but it is also a rich seam of opportunity. While we have a wealth of experience and knowledge gained from Hungary's first Presidency of the Council in 2011, in certain ways the situation and range of opportunities we face today are radically different.

The following is a brief summary of our first Presidency. The Second Orbán Government was formed on 29 May 2010, shortly after its first two-thirds victory in the 2010 election. This left only six months to prepare for its EU Presidency starting on 1 January 2011. Despite the short time available to it, Hungary performed well and delivered a successful Presidency. “The Presidency has made Hungary more visible as an EU Member State both inside and outside the EU, and has raised public awareness of the European Union, its advantages and its potential.”<sup>1</sup>

By contrast, there has been considerably more time to prepare for the 2024 Presidency. This has made it possible to create a structure that can offer the necessary flexibility, while preparing as thoroughly as possible. Preparations for the Presidency, in line with the tasks, will proceed on two parallel tracks related to the main priority locations of Hungary and Brussels, with the range of events spread across several sites in Hungary.

Veszprém and the Lake Balaton region were the European Capital of Culture last year, while in the second half of 2024 Budapest will become the political centre of the European Union. Hungary has been a Member State for twenty years, and will be at the EU's helm again after thirteen and a half years. The period of our Presidency will serve as a great opportunity to showcase Hungary's achievements accomplished since our previous presidency, as thousands of high-level and expert delegates will be visiting the country – many of them for the first time in years, or even decades.

Despite the many similarities, in 2024 there is one specific element that will be fundamentally different from our earlier Presidency. This will be the institutional transition. After its elections in June 2024, the European Parliament will be enlarged by 15 seats to comprise 720 delegates. It will also elect a new leadership, and during our Presidency there will also certainly be a new President of the European Commission. We will draw on the

<sup>1</sup> Government of Hungary s. a.



collective memory of the EU institutions and on the experience of our earlier Presidency to ensure that the new situation – and the transition towards it – is properly managed.

In order to ensure that the events during the Presidency are adequately attended by all parties involved, when planning the calendar of events we will pay particular attention not only to our national events in Hungary, but also to other major international events expected or planned during this period.

The more than ten years since our first EU Presidency have brought progress and new challenges in communication, technical and many other operational fields. My paper, however, is not independent of the environment surrounding us, and so I will focus on the specific areas of security, protocol and culture as observed in the period from the start of our preparations for the second Presidency up until the delivery of the manuscript at the end of October 2023.

## Security

There are many disturbing current events in the sphere of international relations linked to my area of responsibility, and increasingly we can see that the issue of security is of paramount importance – not only the security of countries, but also the security of individuals and other forms of protection. For the Hungarian Presidency to be administered successfully, it will be of paramount importance to prepare for the elimination of – and, if necessary, the appropriate active response to – various security threats, to guarantee the safety of foreign and domestic guests, participants and the Hungarian people, and to ensure the professional performance of the various organisational and logistical tasks.

Hungary's EU Presidency will organise and coordinate several summits, and numerous informal ministerial and high-level meetings, conferences, cultural events, as well as specialist and policy discussions and meetings. This will involve the arrival in Hungary of a large number of important guests and persons for whom heightened security provisions will be needed: high-level officials, and heads of state and government. Preparing, organising and physically securing the various events will be a major task, requiring effective planning and implementation.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, events in Hungary related to the Presidency will also be held in several locations outside Budapest. We will also place particular emphasis on the choice of venues, the accommodation of delegations and other guests, and the logistics and security of transport for participants. Ensuring that venues meet strict security standards while at the same time being easily accessible for participants is a complex logistical task.

To this end, a core group of Presidency venues has been identified that meet the highest protocol requirements, while at the same time being suitable in terms of security and accessibility. Accommodation for high-level delegations can be provided in the immediate vicinity of each, so that delegates' transport arrangements cause as little disruption as possible to traffic in the capital city. In addition, the selected venues can showcase the

developments in Budapest since 2010, by demonstrating both the preservation of our historic heritage and its modern, innovative use. In this way, the venues themselves will also be physical evidence supporting our advocacy for the Presidency's priority of securing the future of cohesion policy.

In order to ensure the smooth and safe running of the Presidency, Government Resolution 1433/2023 (X.6.) declares that the events related to the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2024 shall be high-priority events. In accordance with this, as Government Commissioner responsible for the preparation and implementation of the operational tasks, I will be organising the events in cooperation with the National Events Organisation Agency and the competent ministers: the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Energy, and the Minister in charge of the Prime Minister's Office. The Hungarian Defence Forces, the Hungarian Police, the National Directorate General for Disaster Management, the Counter Terrorism Centre and the National Protection Service will be involved in the provision of security for events related to the Presidency. Health care at the events will be provided by the healthcare services attached to the Ministry of the Interior. The National Meteorological Service, the Special Service for National Security and the Constitution Protection Office will also contribute to the safe organisation of the events.

The Operational Group, which will comprise the above-mentioned bodies, will carry out its tasks according to a well-established system, which over the past ten years has contributed to the secure and smooth organisation and implementation of events on various commemorative days and national holidays. In accordance with the provisions of the Fundamental Law of Hungary, the latter are the following: the memorial day for the 1848–1849 Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence on 15 March; commemoration of the foundation of the Hungarian state and the state founder King Saint Stephen on 20 August; and commemoration of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and Freedom Fight on 23 October.

In August 2023 we were able to gain invaluable experience informing our preparations for the organisational, logistical and security tasks of the Hungarian EU Presidency. At that time the World Athletics Championships overlapped with events linked to Saint Stephen's Day. In addition, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán played host in Budapest to several distinguished guests, including the presidents of Türkiye and Serbia, the Emir of Qatar and the leaders of several Central Asian countries. Thanks to the excellent cooperation between the relevant governmental organisations, the World Championships organisers and other contributors, all three organisational projects ran smoothly and without any disruptions. Hungary showed that it is capable of tackling even such complex and large-scale organisational, logistical and security challenges. This will also be our goal in the second half of 2024.

As in the past, during our second EU Presidency we will endeavour to limit traffic restrictions to the minimum time period and smallest area necessary for each event, thus helping to ensure that the events run as smoothly as possible and that the public has the easiest possible access to the Presidency events that are open to them.

Thousands of people will be working to ensure that the security and logistical challenges are properly managed and that the 2024 Hungarian Presidency of the EU runs smoothly. I am confident that after a successful six months, the sharing of our experiences and good practices will provide a model for future presidencies.

## **Protocol**

During the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2024 protocol and diplomatic contacts will not be fundamentally different from those of the first Presidency in 2011. Our goal is an ambitious, visible Hungarian EU Presidency in 2024, and in this respect it will present both opportunities and challenges. Our diplomatic protocol will make a major contribution to the smooth running of the event and also to a strong Europe – which we believe can only be based on strong Member States.

In terms of protocol and diplomatic events, the duality of the two venues previously mentioned, i.e. Hungary and Brussels will also be apparent, but the clear emphasis will be on the Hungarian venue – not least because of the informal summits and Council meetings. In terms of diplomatic contacts in Brussels, we will give a similarly prominent role to our Permanent Representation there and to our diplomats abroad, whose numbers will be adjusted to cope with the increased tasks involved. At the time of writing, the European Union comprises twenty-seven Member States (EU27), just as it did during the first Hungarian Presidency. With the departure of the United Kingdom and the accession of Croatia, to which our 2011 Presidency made an effective contribution, the diplomatic focus has shifted away from the Anglo-Saxon world towards continental Europe.

Protocol is another area where we are building to a significant extent on the experience and lessons learned from 2011 – and, of course, on the experience of Spain and Belgium: the other two countries in the trio of presidencies. And while we will be a part of that trio, working towards the next presidency, we will also be engaged in discussions with Poland. In this respect, preparations will naturally include targeted training for individual staff members – both on Member State and wider EU topics, as well as in general diplomatic matters.

Of particular importance from a protocol point of view will be the several Council meetings to be held in our country, together with related bilateral or group negotiations. We will pay particular attention to the informal European Council meetings, which will provide the heads of state and government of the Member States an important opportunity to discuss the main challenges facing the EU. Here, in addition to the general diplomatic protocol, the overall picture is completed by a number of other aspects: from gastronomy – which is a separate section – to security, logistics, etc. For reasons of space these are only touched upon in this paper. Similarly, we shall not address the issue of possible guests from third countries here, except to say that, based on our experience, we must prepare for that eventuality. The area of protocol is considered by some to be a genuine “defensive” function, in the sense that if everything is done properly it

is almost invisible, but in the event of unexpected challenges it can quickly come to the fore. In connection with challenges, priority is given to the security aspects briefly mentioned above. Our fundamental aim is to ensure that visitors are safe and can work without disturbance at every event. Logistics is primarily linked to security in order to ensure that persons requiring heightened security can arrive at meetings not only safely but also on time, while simultaneously ensuring that the related measures do not affect everyday life to a greater extent than is necessary.

As regards protocol, the Operational Group will also act to ensure that unforeseen developments can be dealt with appropriately. In addition to the appropriate reception of guests, communication will cover both their briefing and the interpretation of talks.

Last but not least, the 2024 Hungarian Presidency is also preparing to present protocol gifts to our guests, in line with the established practice of EU presidencies.

Together with our experienced colleagues and diplomats, we shall work to ensure that, from a protocol point of view, the success of the “diplomatic blockbuster” achieved during the days around the celebrations for 20 August 2023 will be repeated for this “EU blockbuster” over several months.

## Culture

During the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2024, another priority will be culture. We see this as a means of strengthening our ties with other Member States, and – beyond the traditional realm of politics – of providing insights into an important part of our essential character.

Perhaps the most important role for culture will be in cultural diplomacy. A particularly important role in the aforementioned Hungary–Brussels pairing will be played by the Hungarian Cultural Institute in Brussels, where the international public will be able to gain a personal insight into the 2024 Hungarian Presidency. As a result of their experience there, some may be encouraged to visit our country, and thus to get to know us first-hand. At a single location throughout the Presidency, the Institute in Brussels will have the task of presenting the highlighted cultural aspects forming the backbone of the cultural programme in Hungary. In both locations the message will naturally be adapted to the local surroundings, but in order to ensure a coherent message the main elements will be the same.

Hungary is a nation with a rich and diverse culture, which has formed a state in the heart of Europe for more than one thousand years. As pointed out in the summer of 2023<sup>2</sup> by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, this culture includes, for example, our unique and richly resourceful language, our creativity, our music and our cuisine. This list is far from exhaustive. The Presidency’s cultural programme is also an opportunity to present to Europe Hungary’s talent and the workshops that nurture it.

Of course our nation also includes Hungarians beyond our borders. An important role in facilitating our contacts with them is played by our membership of the European

<sup>2</sup> Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister 2023.

Union. Their culture is also our culture, and the cultural programmes of the Hungarian Presidency will also include the display of this.

In presenting our culture, we need to find the right balance between elements that are of interest to a wider audience and elements that may be less well known, but which similarly reflect the Presidency's priorities. The Presidency is a very good opportunity to showcase the diversity of Hungarian culture to the whole of Europe.

Similarly, in terms of culture it is important to take into account other major international events expected or planned for this period. From a protocol perspective, however, the situation is different in that one must accommodate events involving not only politicians but also artists.

Culture, and more specifically physical culture, also includes sports. Our achievements in the Olympic Games and other sporting events surpass those of countries of similar population size, and we can be justifiably proud of our athletes. I would also like to take this opportunity to announce that my colleagues and I will be taking part in a run to mark the twentieth anniversary of our country's membership in the EU. This will be the perfect opportunity to introduce our country's Presidency to the sport-loving public even before it begins.

Our history has also profoundly influenced our culture and uniquely shaped us into who we are today. It is important to show and explain the unique Hungarian perspective on developments at home and around the world to those also involved in many of the events. By presenting the Hungarian point of view to those who are open to it, we can add nuance to the events of history and contribute to a better understanding of one another in European politics.

To sum up, our key objective is to make our unique view of the world – reflected, for example, in our culture – known as widely as possible, in a safe environment and with well-functioning logistics. We aim to communicate this not only to the politicians and experts visiting Hungary, but also to members of the general public in Hungary and Europe who will be following reports of the Presidency's events. Unfortunately it is my experience that across much of Europe there are media outlets which routinely fail to present the Hungarian reality in a way that the Hungarian electorate – as repeatedly expressed in elections – thinks it should be presented. Our aim is to show interested observers – both in Hungary and Brussels – a European Hungary which contributes to a strong Europe with its unique vision and values.

## References

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