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# The Challenges of Implementing the 2024 Presidency from a Brussels Perspective

## Introduction

The EU Presidency and the one and a half year period preceding it impose special duties on the permanent representation of the Member State holding the Presidency, as a large part of the presidency's work will be carried out in Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg. One major tier of the 2024 Hungarian Presidency will be in Hungary and another one in Brussels, and this paper presents the Brussels aspects of the EU Presidency. Before describing the tasks of the Presidency in Brussels, it is necessary to present the EU decision-making map and the political processes planned for the summer of 2024, as well as the expected impact of the institutional transition on the 2024 Hungarian EU Presidency.

## The EU decision-making map and expected policy developments in 2024

Since 2020, the number and complexity of EU responses to the challenges posed by interacting crises that take place at the same time has grown, and the balance of EU institutions and the roles of certain bodies within each institution have changed.

Over the last three years, in addition to (or instead of) national measures, Member States have increasingly favoured a joint EU response to the challenges posed by the crises, which inevitably implied a strengthening of the political-institutional position of the European Commission. Examples include the joint procurement of vaccines during the Covid-19 pandemic, the creation of an EU digital Covid certificate to certify vaccination against the pandemic (which was then taken over by several third countries during the pandemic to restore international passenger traffic), or the creation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), a joint response to the economic crisis caused by the pandemic. The response to the Russian aggression against Ukraine was also adopted at EU level, from the first day of the war's outbreak by adopting sanctions against Russia (and later Belarus), providing financial support for Ukraine, joint financing of the transfer of military equipment, ensuring temporary protection for refugees, etc. The implementation of emergency measures, but in particular the RRF, has further increased the role of the Commission in areas where the Treaties do not confer any (explicit) powers on it. The RRF has become an important tool in the hands of the Commission, inter alia to force the implementation of the reforms set out in the European Semester (see for example the case of the French pension reform). The Commission has taken some new

types of initiatives, from tackling the Covid-19 pandemic, through measures dealing with the energy crisis in 2022, to a robust response to the war in Ukraine. The draft sanctions packages were presented by the Commission, in cooperation with the European External Action Service. The joint EU macro-financial assistance to Ukraine was also initiated and proposed by the Commission and was decided recently on the basis of this proposal, but the Commission also played a prominent role in the management of Brexit. These measures have strengthened the Commission's role in the EU decision-making process. The European Commission also pursues policy objectives it has set autonomously, and, in addition to its role as guardian of the Treaties, it has significantly reinforced its executive, coordinating and administrative roles.<sup>1</sup>

Over the past three years, it became common for the ordinary legislative procedure to be evaded<sup>2</sup> by using emergency measures, whether to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic or the 2022 energy crisis.

In recent years, the weight and role of the European Council continued to grow during successive crises. Heads of State and Government met regularly during Covid, including in face-to-face meetings. The main decisions on how to tackle or recover from the pandemic and the energy crisis were discussed by Heads of State and Government at meetings of the European Council.

As quarantine rules and health regulations during the Covid-19 pandemic did not allow for physical meetings in the Council, it became common practice to adopt acts by written vote in view of the exceptional circumstances, so that Council formations lost their importance and, during the pandemic, most substantive discussions took place in the meetings of the Permanent Representatives Committee (Coreper), the only Council body that kept meetings without interruption. Decisions on the 2020 main policy issues (such as immediate responses to Covid-19, setting up measures for economic recovery or preparing for a no-deal Brexit) were not adopted in the usual face-to-face Council meetings. Instead, they were approved by Coreper and adopted in a written procedure.

It is also important to underline that, in the context of crisis management, decision-making in the EU, especially in the Council, accelerated, but not in terms of the ordinary legislative procedures. There were occasions when EU decisions were made in a matter of hours in Coreper meetings, by adoption in written procedure, for example in the case of the first sanctions packages or support measures adopted under the European Peace Facility (EPF).

<sup>1</sup> Article 17(1) of the Treaty on European Union also confers executive and coordinating tasks on the Commission, but not exclusively, as the Council also exercises its policy-setting and coordinating functions.

<sup>2</sup> Under the first paragraph of Article 122 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the Council, without prejudice to the other procedures laid down in the Treaties, may, on a proposal from the Commission, decide, in a spirit of solidarity among Member States, on measures adequate in the economic situation, in particular where there are serious difficulties in the supply of certain products, including energy in particular.

The role of the European Parliament weakened owing to the bypassing of the ordinary legislative procedure, while the EP sought to strengthen its influence by exerting political pressure on the European Commission. For the preservation of the institutional balance, the further strengthening of the Council's role is of particular importance.

Despite the accelerated pace of decision-making and the fact that the issues on the agenda generated considerable debate due to their significance, it is important to note that, ultimately, over the past three years, the EU's unity was strengthened, as the pressure to take decisions required a better understanding of national positions and for the consensus to be built. This is true even if, in many cases, not all Member States could fully identify with the decisions taken. The question is how unity will be affected by the crisis in the Middle East, where Member States traditionally have a different perspective on the situation and response to the crisis. Due to the crisis in the Middle East, the trends of the past three years may change.

A key question in terms of preparing for the Hungarian Presidency is whether the trend of the last three years will continue in terms of the need for joint action, or whether Member States will increasingly apply national measures. Differences between Member States could already be witnessed in October 2023 in the discussions on the situation in the Middle East in international organisations. An example would be the debate on the Middle East in the UN at the end of October 2023, where Member States voted on the proposed resolution in three different ways.<sup>3</sup> The dynamics of EU decision-making would change if the crisis in the Middle East reversed the trend and Member States increasingly resorted to national solutions because of a lack of EU unity or other considerations. Part of this process is the trend that more and more Member States are temporarily closing their Schengen borders<sup>4</sup> and initiating bilateral migration-related agreements with third countries.<sup>5</sup> A change in the position of a few Member States in relation to the war in Ukraine may lead to a similar result, especially in matters related to the promotion of de-escalation. The Commission's role will also be markedly defined by breaking the trend whereby the Commission takes innovative initiatives, which results in the indirect emergence of new powers and responsibilities for the Commission.

The following, still unanswered questions are therefore of crucial importance for the Hungarian Presidency. Whether the war in Ukraine continues. The way in which the Middle East crisis develops and how the EU's unity will be affected by the EU's response. Both issues will be fundamental to the agenda of our EU Presidency, but there

<sup>3</sup> Protection of civilians and upholding legal and humanitarian obligations (A/ES-10/L.25). Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary voted against. Abstained: Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Sweden. Voted for: Belgium, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain.

<sup>4</sup> In October 2023, 11 Member States announced the reinstatement of border controls at their internal borders.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. the Italy–Albania agreement on migration cooperation signed in Rome on 6 November 2023, which provides for the concession of certain areas in Albania where Italy can set up facilities for dealing with the admission and temporary reception of migrants rescued from the sea.

is a big difference between whether we are talking about a possible peace process and reconstruction in Ukraine or the management of the debate on the financial support for Ukraine. In addition to the external aspects of the situation in the Middle East, internal security and other internal aspects may also receive a central position in the Hungarian Presidency's agenda. The question also arises as to what effects the migration situation will have on the free movement of persons. And what impact will it have on the internal market? Another question is whether any new crisis emerges during the Presidency? This is the most difficult to plan ahead, even if we may detect some signs of possible crises in the months leading up to the presidency. How quickly and effectively we will be able to act as a Presidency when EU responses or measures are needed will be crucial to the success of the Hungarian Presidency. We must develop an appropriate crisis management capacity for the Presidency to be able to convene a Coreper meeting, an IPCR (EU Integrated Political Crisis Response Arrangements) or a Council working party meeting, perhaps even immediately. Dealing with unforeseen crises also poses a challenge because it is the Commission that manages most of the EU's instruments; the European External Action Service coordinates foreign and security policy aspects, meanwhile, a unified response must be given by the Member States in the Council. IPCR, established in 2013 and activated for the first time during the 2015 migration crisis by the Luxembourg Presidency, and Coreper can coordinate crisis response actions that are, in many cases, horizontal in nature.

### **Institutional transition (new European Parliament, new European Commission)**

Our EU Presidency will take place in the period where the new EU institutional structure is established; these political developments will have to be taken into account. In a nutshell, the institutional transition will proceed as follows. The European Parliament elections will be held between 6 and 9 June 2024; the EP's inaugural session is expected to take place on 17 July 2024 and it is then at the earliest that the new EP President and committee chairs can be elected. Next comes the election of the President of the European Commission. However, this must be preceded by an agreement between the Heads of State and Government of the Member States at the European Council concerning EU leaders (President of the European Commission, the European Council, as well as the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy), on which informal discussions will start immediately after the EP elections. At the end of June, a European Council meeting is expected to take place in Brussels, where a decision regarding the top positions may be adopted, but the decision may be postponed for a few days or weeks until the beginning of the Hungarian Presidency. So either we start the Hungarian Presidency with an informal agreement between the Heads of State and Government on the top leaders, or the decision must be taken during the Hungarian Presidency at another European Council meeting in Brussels. In the latter case, the rotating presidency can also play an informal role, although formally this is the task of the President of the European Council. Following this agreement, the EP must approve the Commission President by

an absolute majority (i.e. with half of the MEPs plus one vote). Then, Member States nominate a Commissioner and the Commission President has to distribute the portfolios among the Commissioners-designate, who must be heard and approved by the European Parliament (also by an absolute majority). Once the European Parliament approves the President and Commissioners, the European Council formally appoints them by qualified majority.

Two scenarios can unfold: either 1. the EP elects the President of the Commission in July; or 2. the President of the European Commission is elected only in September. In the latter case, the nomination of Commissioners may start and the Commissioners-designate may be heard in the EP. In this case, the new European Commission is unlikely to be set up before 1 December 2024, but it may also be the case that it will not start operation until early 2025. If the EP elects the Commission President in July, there is a possibility for the Commission to be set up by 1 November 2024.

A top priority of the Hungarian Presidency will be to contribute to a smooth institutional transition. At the same time, these uncertainties need to be taken into account in the planning and running of the Presidency. It is also possible that we will work with the current Commission until the end of the Hungarian Presidency, and that a new Commission will only start operating under the 2025 Polish Presidency. Institutional dynamics will affect the Hungarian Presidency in different ways. It may be important for the new European Parliament to resume the legislative work as soon as possible, for if no trilogue is held during the Hungarian Presidency, legislative work may be suspended for up to a year, while Member States' positions will be continuously negotiated in the Council. Meanwhile, after the elections, the EP will be occupied with internal affairs. The question is how quickly the new committees of the EP will be set up. For the EP, the basic rule is legislative continuity ("rejecting the discontinuity principle" – legislative dossiers tabled in the previous institutional term and discussed by the previous EP must be carried forward as a rule). In case of the Commission, on the one hand, there will be Commissioners who will be elected as MEPs and will therefore have to give up their mandate, and on the other hand, there will be Commissioners who will not be reappointed by their Prime Minister or Head of State, so some Commissioners may want to see as much progress as possible on the priority legislative proposals they put forward, so that they can actively participate in the trilogues that will resume in October or rather in November (see more on these in the next section).

### **Criteria related to the process of developing the Hungarian Presidency Programme**

The priorities of the Hungarian Presidency must be set and the programme prepared by taking the above framework into account. The latter should only be finalised in the weeks before the start of the Presidency. (I will not cover details of the planned priorities of the Hungarian Presidency, as this is dealt with in other papers in this volume.) According to the letter of intent of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in her

September State of the Union address, only 63% of the 633 legislative proposals tabled since 2019 had been agreed upon by mid-September, meaning that 234 legislative dossiers were still open in September 2023.<sup>6</sup> This is a high number, and the Spanish and Belgian Presidencies will make efforts to close as many dossiers as possible, but it is expected that, at the end of the Belgian Presidency, a significant number of dossiers will still be pending. Due to the EP election campaign, the substantive legislative work in the EP will end in March, with the last plenary session to be held in mid-April 2024, at which preliminary political agreements can still be adopted; after this, no legislative procedure may continue. This will give the opportunity for a detailed review of the running dossiers between April and June, for the purposes of planning the Hungarian Presidency. It will be a challenge for the Hungarian Presidency that it is more difficult to prepare the presidency in terms of EP relations, as it will not be known who the new MEPs will be, what the composition of the committees will look like, nor who the rapporteurs of the individual dossiers will be. Until the end of June, the Belgian Presidency is expected to continue to develop the Council's position on the ongoing dossiers. In addition, from a planning point of view, it must be taken into account that the legislative work in the EP will restart in autumn at the earliest, so the Hungarian Presidency will not be able to negotiate with the EP on specific legislative dossiers in trilogues until October at the earliest. Legislative work, and more precisely the trilogue negotiations with the co-legislator EP, is an important responsibility of the presidencies. During the Swedish Presidency, there were approximately 100 ambassador-level trilogues where, depending on the subject, the Permanent Representative or Deputy Permanent Representative negotiated with the EP on the basis of the Council mandate with a view to building a compromise solution on legislative acts. During the Swedish Presidency, the trilogues, typically chaired at ambassador level by the Permanent Representative or the Deputy Permanent Representative, were prepared in nearly 400 technical trilogue meetings.

At the same time, setting the Hungarian Presidency's priorities cannot be delayed until the beginning of the presidency, as in many cases considerable preparatory work is needed, which has already started on several points. For example, to enable a strategic debate in areas not previously discussed in the Council, preparations must be made in an appropriate format, in cooperation with the Commission and other EU institutions and actors. Where, for example, we want to achieve legislative results during the Presidency on any issue we consider to be important, or to adopt Council conclusions setting out policy objectives on important policy matters, we must ensure that the Commission presents a legislative proposal, a communication or other document (e.g. an annual report on cohesion policy, etc.) before the Presidency term.

Hungary forms a presidency trio with Spain and Belgium. The Spanish–Belgian–Hungarian trio Presidency programme was finalised by the three countries in June 2023, before the start of the Spanish Presidency, and presented by the three countries at the General Affairs Council in June 2023, and subsequently endorsed by the Council. The trio's programme already includes the flagship priorities and objectives of the

<sup>6</sup> European Commission 2023a: 2.



Hungarian Presidency. This is why the following topics form the backbone of the Hungarian Presidency: the European Union's competitiveness, demographic challenges, the importance of cohesion policy, defence policy and the enlargement process.

Most of the Presidency programmes build on ongoing legislative proposals, prioritising them according to the criteria specified by the Presidency, and/or respond to crisis situations, but each Member State also has specific objectives that take several years to prepare. On the Hungarian side, these points have been identified and work has been ongoing since 2022 or even before that date. Strengthening the EU's competitiveness will be a cross-cutting horizontal objective in the course of the Hungarian Presidency, covering all related policy areas. This will help us push the debate on legislative acts forward in the Council, to hold trilogues with the EP contributing to the EU's competitiveness, and to try to influence the final outcome of the legislative dossiers on the agenda in a way that reinforces the EU's competitiveness. From among the specific priorities, demographic challenges will be one of the most important issues. A year before the Hungarian Presidency, we successfully achieved that the European Council, in its conclusions adopted in June 2023, called upon the Commission to prepare a demographic toolbox that outlines the demographic challenges and the relevant Member State and EU responses.<sup>7</sup> On 11 October, the Commission presented the Communication requested by the European Council,<sup>8</sup> on which the Council debate started during the Spanish Presidency.

In addition, also due to the nature of the institutional transition, the Hungarian Presidency will have the task of adopting general policy guidelines in the field of individual policies with a view to implementing the new strategic agenda for the 2024–2029 period. The development and adoption of the new Strategic Agenda is within the powers of the European Council and its preparation is ongoing; its adoption is expected in June 2024, at the end of the Belgian Presidency. In finalising the programme of the Hungarian Presidency, attention must also be paid to the agenda to be adopted by consensus, setting out the new institutional cycle's main objectives.

In line with traditions, the Hungarian Presidency Programme will be presented before the start of the Presidency, in June 2024.

Another important task in the context of the Presidency programme is to compile the Presidency calendar, which must consider not only the EU events expected during the Hungarian Presidency (European Council meetings, Council meetings, European Parliament plenary sessions, international summits), but also the most important international events (G7 summit, G20 summit, COP 28 summit, UN General Assembly, etc.). As a first step, the incoming presidency must draw up a calendar of high-level presidency events (formal and informal European Council meetings, international summits with EU relevance, formal and informal Council meetings, Coreper and PSC meetings), in close consultation with the General Secretariat of the Council, the Cabinet of the President of

<sup>7</sup> At the initiative of Hungary, the following text has been included in the European Council conclusions: "The European Council [...] invites the Commission to present a toolbox to address demographic challenges and notably their impact on Europe's competitive edge" (European Council 2023: 7, paragraph 18.g).

<sup>8</sup> European Commission 2023b.

the European Council, the EEAS and the Commission, and present a first draft to the institutions six months before the start of the presidency (i.e. in December 2023 in the case of Hungary). The full presidency calendar will be prepared next, including all EU expert and high-level meetings and presidency events. As a rule, the final presidency calendar must also be shared with the institutions before the start of the presidency term (in our case, June 2024; the calendar of planned working party meetings is to be submitted to the Secretariat General 8 weeks before the start of the presidency). Before the start of the presidency, the expected agenda for the Council meetings must be shared with the Member States and also agreed in advance with the General Secretariat of the Council, the Cabinet of the President of the European Council, the EEAS and the Commission. Consultations with EU institutions on the presidency calendar and draft agendas for Council meetings are mainly handled by Hungary's Permanent Representation to the EU (PR).

### **The responsibilities (and challenges) of the Permanent Representation in running the Presidency**

The responsibilities of the Permanent Representation to the EU (outside presidency terms) are to represent Hungarian interests in the Council of the European Union, to prepare for the European Council, to participate in the elaboration of the Hungarian position and to represent the Hungarian position in the decision-making process of the European Union. In this context, the Permanent Representation (PR) liaises with the European Commission and monitors the legislative activity of the European Parliament. Representatives and experts of the entire Hungarian Government structure are present at the Hungarian Permanent Representation in Brussels. The specialised diplomats are delegated by the Ministry of European Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the ministries in charge of coordinating EU affairs.

During Presidency terms, the PR has different roles and responsibilities than during its business-as-usual operation. The country holding the rotating presidency acts as an honest broker, ensuring the continuity of the Union's work and the smooth functioning of the EU's legislative process, as well as the regularity of the legislative process in accordance with the rules of procedure, to which the functioning of the PR must be adapted.

A key prerequisite for a successful EU Presidency is that the specialised diplomats of the PR receive the necessary training, have the requisite professional competence and experience, as well as a detailed and practical knowledge of EU decision-making processes and procedures. Indeed, one must be able to understand also those EU policies or areas where there is no particular Hungarian interest, such as the allocation of fishing quotas. During the Presidency, Hungary sets the Council's agenda, including ministerial meetings, Coreper II (Committee of Permanent Representatives) and Coreper I (Committee of Deputy Permanent Representatives) meetings, working parties and other Council preparatory bodies chaired by the Presidency.



Coreper II and Coreper I,<sup>9</sup> as well as other special preparatory committees and Council working parties, will have a key role in the work of the Presidency. We expect to chair around 152 working parties out of the nearly 180 that are in operation (the exact number can be determined before the Presidency). 28 external relations working parties and the 12 committees involved in the preparation of ECOFIN have a permanent chair, such as the Economic and Financial Committee (EFC). During the Presidency, working parties will work with the participation of at least three Hungarian diplomats, civil servants or experts: the chair of the working party, the vice-chair of the working party and the person at the Hungarian desk. The three of them will develop the essence of the dossiers in each case. With the help of the Council Secretariat and on the basis of the discussions in the working party, compromise texts will be drawn up for legislative dossiers, but also Council conclusions or other documents. The majority of the working parties will be chaired by specialist diplomats from the PR, but most of the Vice-Chair's tasks will also be carried out by diplomats in Brussels, who will be permanently based at the PR during the Presidency term.

Another part of the working parties will be chaired by officials and experts from the ministries, who will travel to the meetings from Budapest. Each working party meets with varying frequency. During the Hungarian Presidency, there will be working parties that meet several times a week and working parties that meet once a month (or even less frequently). The Presidency may convene the working parties several times a week if necessary. This is typically done when there is a legislative dossier on the agenda that the Presidency wants to close before a Council meeting or even a European Council meeting. In non-priority matters, the Presidency may even decide not to include certain legislative dossiers in the agenda. It must be noted, however, that under the Council's rules of procedure, Member States may also take the initiative to include certain items on the agenda by a simple majority, in which case the Presidency has no discretion. The rotating presidency also has to work intensely between meetings so that background consultations may be used to make headway on individual dossiers. Most of the legislative and other dossiers on the agenda can be finalised in the working parties,<sup>10</sup> so that they are included on the Coreper and Council agendas for formal adoption as non-debatable items. Issues that cannot be finalised in the working party are put on the agenda of Coreper II or Coreper I. The Presidency will include a dossier previously discussed in a working party on the Coreper's agenda for two reasons: when political guidance is needed on specific issues, or when it is not possible to resolve disputes between Member States at expert

<sup>9</sup> Coreper II is responsible for justice and home affairs, economic and financial affairs, foreign affairs and general affairs, and for preparing the European Council. Coreper I will cover agriculture and fisheries, competitiveness, education, youth, culture and sport, employment, social policy, health and consumer affairs, environment, and transport, telecommunications and energy.

<sup>10</sup> The agenda of Coreper meetings is divided into two parts: items for discussion and items without discussion. The agenda of Coreper II meetings includes on average 40–50 or more so-called “without debate” items. These dossiers have been closed at working party level, so the ambassadors do not discuss the substance of the issues at the beginning of the meeting, but adopt them formally. Coreper agendas are public, unlike those of Council working parties. For the Coreper agenda, see for example the agenda of Coreper II on 11 October 2023: Council of the European Union 2023.

level. Most disputes are resolved at the level of Permanent Representatives or Deputy Permanent Representatives, so that in general only a small number of controversial and open legislative dossiers or draft Council conclusions end up on the agenda of ministerial level meetings. This is most likely to happen regarding the most politically sensitive issues, such as certain aspects of the Pact on Immigration and Asylum or energy issues. In such sensitive matters, the ministers or the prime minister of the presiding Member State may also have close coordination and compromise-building tasks, in which case negotiations are conducted with the respective capital cities.

In case of trilogues, negotiations are conducted in a similar fashion. The vast majority of discussions with EP and Commission representatives are conducted by the Permanent Representative or Deputy Permanent Representative with the help of specialist diplomats from the Presidency, with ministers taking part in trilogues in exceptional cases only. Prior to the trilogues, the presidency must always seek a mandate from the Member States, from the relevant working party for more technical issues, and typically from the Permanent Representatives for more political issues.

The tasks of Coreper II include the preparation of Council meetings<sup>11</sup> and European Council meetings. Prior to European Council meetings, the Permanent Representatives discuss the conclusions three, four or more times, or have further preparatory discussions on the basis of other preparatory documents for the European Council. The conclusions of the European Council are drafted by the Cabinet of the President of the European Council, but the debates are held in Coreper, chaired by the Presidency. The conclusions cover the most important policy issues, and can provide guidance on legislative dossiers under negotiation, set new objectives and orient the work of the Council, the Presidency, the Commission and other EU institutions. The Presidency therefore has a key role to play in negotiating the conclusions of the European Council. In recent years, it has become standard practice for horizontal, complex or politically sensitive issues to be discussed directly by Coreper, rather than including them in the agenda of working parties. It is up to the Presidency to decide what goes on the agenda of a working party or Coreper, but, since the latest French Presidency, the final declarations of EU and third country summits are discussed by Coreper from the very beginning of the process, and the relevant geographical working parties are not involved in the drafting.

In Brussels, the Presidency is responsible for ongoing dialogue and consultation with the heads of the individual institutions. The Presidency's work is influenced by the Commission's planned initiatives, the topics to be discussed at the European Council, etc. In many cases, the objective is to close trilogues before European Council meetings. Coordination is also important because some dossiers may be taken up to the level of Heads of State and Government, and thus the compromise-building task is no longer the responsibility of the Presidency but of the President of the European Council following a certain stage of the negotiations; for example, negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework usually start at Council level (in a working party, then go up to Coreper,

<sup>11</sup> Coreper II prepares the following Council meetings: General Affairs Council, Justice and Home Affairs Council, Economic and Financial Affairs Council, Foreign Affairs Council.

and then the General Affairs Council), but in the final stage the Heads of State and Government decide on it in the European Council.

The Permanent Representative of the Member State holding the presidency is responsible for regular consultations with the Head of Cabinet of the President of the Commission, the Secretary General of the Commission, the Cabinet of the President of the European Council and the Secretary General of the EEAS. The purpose of the consultations is to coordinate the plans of the Commission, the President of the Council or the High Representative, before setting the agenda for Coreper or other Council preparatory bodies and working parties. If, for example, the Commission publishes a major initiative in the days following the consultation, it can ask for it to be put on the agenda in Coreper. The Permanent Representative will then consult the capital in order to finalise the agenda and review other operational issues.

Presidencies are also characterised by intense and multi-level contacts with the EP. Due to the institutional transition, the first period of our Presidency will be occupied by the internal affairs of the EP, but the Hungarian Presidency will also be active during the plenary sessions. The timing of the launch of the trilogues will depend on the EP, and we will be set to start negotiations as soon as the EP will be ready to do so. At the beginning of each presidency term, the ministers chairing the presidency formations meet with the relevant EP committees.

The Political and Security Committee (PSC) and the geographical and horizontal working parties in the area of foreign and security policy are presided by a permanent chair and are not chaired by a representative of the rotating presidency. However, it is also important to consult on, and, where possible, coordinate the Presidency's objectives in these areas. After the PSC, Coreper is involved in the preparation of the Foreign Affairs Council, with discussions prior to the ministerial meeting conducted directly by Coreper managed by the rotating presidency. Close consultation with the EEAS chairing the PSC and the geographical working parties is also necessary because decisions in the field of foreign and security policy are, as a rule, taken by unanimity.

Among the tasks to be discharged in Brussels, communication and regular media coverage must also be mentioned. The Permanent Representation has several spokespersons during the Presidency; in most cases there is a separate Coreper II spokesperson and Coreper I spokesperson, who communicate the decisions adopted in the respective areas with the necessary professionalism in real time. An important responsibility of the Presidency press team is to communicate the outcome of the late-night negotiations, even in the early hours of the morning, immediately after the agreement had been reached. Another important part of the relations with the media is the informal briefings before Council meetings to media representatives by the Permanent Representative and the Deputy Permanent Representative.

The PR is responsible for coordinating 20–22 meetings in the Council on a daily basis. It means arranging the simultaneous meetings of 16 committees or working parties chaired by the Presidency or the trilogue, and six committees or working parties chaired by the EEAS. It may be even more than this number if some working parties meet for half a day, allowing for additional meetings to be held in the morning or afternoon. At the PR,

it is the Presidency coordinator who is responsible for scheduling which committee/working party meetings are possible (overscheduling occurs when working party chairs indicate a need to hold a meeting but there are not enough rooms or interpreting teams, therefore, they have to prioritise between the meetings). During a 6 month presidency, there are somewhere between 1,700 and 2,400 meetings that take place in Brussels or Luxembourg. During the second semester presidencies, the number of meetings is usually lower, as there are no meetings for a bigger part of August.

In addition to organising and hosting around 2,000 meetings, presidencies also organise other professional side-events, such as when Director Generals from the capitals travel to Brussels for a Council working party meeting. These side-events are also an important opportunity for the Presidency to communicate its objectives and achievements to the wider public. (The PR expects that it shall organise nearly 100 side-events during our Presidency.)

In addition to formal Council meetings and expert events, the Presidency will also hold cultural events in Brussels. Presidencies kick off with a major opening event, accompanied by a cultural event, and also organise exhibitions, concerts and other cultural events.

The PR will temporarily take on the increased responsibilities of the Presidency with a higher staff number.

## **Conclusion**

To summarise the above, implementing the rotating presidency is a major task and also an excellent opportunity for the Member State holding it. For a fruitful presidency, successful preparation is an important prerequisite. The success of the presidencies is measured mainly by the number of cases closed, as well as their importance. In my opinion, the Hungarian Presidency will not be judged primarily on the basis of the closed legislative dossiers, due to the institutional transition and the necessarily more limited legislative work that this will entail. Instead, it will be evaluated on the basis of how the Hungarian Presidency contributes to a smooth institutional transition and the implementation of the new strategic agenda for the 2024–2029 period, the adoption of general policy guidelines in the field of individual policies, and the way it will manage current crisis situations and the EU's responses to unforeseen crisis situations. In addition, the Hungarian Presidency will continue to negotiate legislative proposals within the Council in the case of dossiers where there is no agreed Council mandate yet. In the last two or three months of the Presidency there may also be trilogues, which will give us the opportunity to play a meaningful role in EU legislation. In the EP, the necessary conditions may be in place by the beginning of November (committees will be set up, the legislative dossiers will be distributed among the committees, the rapporteurs will be appointed, etc.). So, as we are expected to have Council positions on a number of dossiers carried over from the 2019–2024 legislative period, we will be able to continue negotiating the most important proposals with the EP. All in all, we should prepare for a political presidency, where it will be impossible to shy away from criticism of Hungary,

but the principle of sincere cooperation must guide the functioning of the institutions, as it will also guide the Hungarian Presidency. Hungary held a successful Presidency in 2011, and the positive results have been felt ever since, with more than 100 dossiers closed. Among the dossiers, several were of great importance, such as the conclusion of the Croatian accession negotiations or the so-called six-pack in the field of economic governance. Hungary's Presidency 12 years ago sparked general recognition for the Hungarian administration, expected by Member States and EU institutions to repeatedly stand the test in 2024, despite the more challenging external environment. A successful presidency can yet again positively impact Hungary's image for many years to come, and thereby also the country's effectiveness in asserting its interests in EU decision-making.

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