

Presidency

Think tanks roll out recommendations to upcoming trio

By Gaspard Sebag | Wednesday 15 June 2011

The political role of the upcoming trio of rotating Presidencies of the Council of the EU has been curtailed but they still have a part to play, especially with regard to the negotiations over the next multiannual financial framework (MFF), the implementation of the internal market and, paradoxically, the external dimension, say 16 think tanks. Ahead of the Polish, Danish and Cypriot trio Presidencies, which will take over at the EU's helm at the beginning of July, French think tank Notre Europe published, on 15 June, the third edition of a report entitled 'Think global – Act European' and organised a debate with ambassadors from these three countries. The report contains an analysis of the programmes of these Presidencies and the challenges ahead with the aim of presenting concrete recommendations.

The entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and the 'top down' approach favoured by the European Council during the financial crisis has relegated the rotating Presidency's role to one of "administrative leadership," according to the report. Presidencies' agendas are more often imposed than selected. In the next 18 months, monetary stability and economic growth are likely to remain top EU priorities. Claus Grube, the permanent secretary of state at the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hopes that his country will be able to exercise "some political leadership".

"The single market is one of the domains where the trio Presidencies have the most opportunity to prove their value," reads the report. Both Grube and Jan Tombinski, the permanent representative of Poland to the EU, agree that there is "a lot of unfulfilled potential". Grube even argues that an efficient single market is "the precondition for a well-functioning euro and a stable euro area".

In their capacity as chair of the General Affairs Council, the trio Presidencies will have the delicate task of conducting the negotiations concerning the post-2013 MFF. The key role will fall upon the Danish Presidency. If all goes well, Grube hopes his country's Presidency will "be able to finish the job". He recognises that it will be "much more complicated" than the talks over the current financial framework as both expenditure and resources will be discussed this time round. "The financial crisis will not make it easier," he adds.

In spite of the shift of foreign affairs responsibility following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty from the rotating Presidency to the EU's high representative, the think tanks see a coordination role for the trio with the European Council, the Commission and the Parliament. "There's room for everybody," says the Executive Secretary-General at the European External Action Service (EAS), Pierre Vimont. Cooperation between the trio and the EAS looks like a real possibility. "We should not forget that we all agreed to it," said Grube. "Therefore we are fully committed to making it a success."

Ending on a more philosophical note, the Danish secretary of state argued that the EU "should not forget what [it has] achieved and be a bit more self-confident in that".