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The Danish EU Presidency: Can a Small Non-euro Member State Be Effective in Times of Economic Crisis?

***Abstract:** The seventh Danish EU Presidency of 2012 was inevitably oriented towards the imminent economic challenges faced by the EU. Although the Eurozone crisis remained the most urgent issue facing the EU, the Danish Presidency, maintained its focus on other important policy areas as well. The four key words of the Danish EU presidency, reflecting its priorities, were to make the EU more (1) Responsible (2) Dynamic (3) Green and (4) Safe. In this article we discuss to what extent and in what ways the Danish Presidency fulfilled its ambitions concerning these four focal points. In order to evaluate and understand the performance of the Presidency, we discuss the new role of the Council Presidency introduced by the Lisbon Treaty (2009), the implications of the specific domestic context of Danish politics, and the status of Denmark as a 'small and reluctant Member State'. We postulate that the Danish Presidency of 2012 was particularly successful in performing the role as mediator in important inter-institutional negotiations. Yet in terms of shaping the EU political agenda, the achievements were less significant.*

Introduction

A new Danish government, led by the social-democratic PM Helle Thorning-Schmidt (the first Danish female Prime Minister), assumed the helm of the EU's rotating Presidency on 1 January 2012. It did so in a time of unprecedented crisis in the history of European cooperation. The priorities of the Danish Presidency were highlighted under four ambitious keywords, i.e. to make the EU more *responsible*, *dynamic*, *green* and *safe*, aiming at ensuring solutions for both the economic Eurozone crisis and advancing on other important policy areas as well.

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Denmark took over the Council Presidency as an experienced leader, having already carried out six presidencies with considerable success.¹ The last time Denmark held the Presidency in 2002, the Danish government concluded enlargement negotiations with ten new Member States, mainly from Central and Eastern Europe, making Denmark the ‘protagonist’ in one of the most important moments in the history of European integration. It was with great confidence and pride that the then liberal Prime Minister of Denmark, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, concluded the Presidency with the words ‘*we got a deal*’.

Ten years later, the EU has been transformed with the widening of the Union. It now consists of 27 Member States, and there has been a significant deepening of integration, with new institutional developments and more powers transferred to the supranational EU level. The seventh Danish Council Presidency of 2012 therefore comprised in many respects a completely new exercise for the little Nordic country. Not only has the EU dramatically increased its circle of Member States, but The Lisbon Treaty (2009) brought significant changes to the institution of the rotating Presidency, introducing new assumptions about its role and functioning. Consequently, today the Presidency is considered to be much more about exercising administrative capacities than performing political leadership.² Thus it was expected that differences would be observed in the Danish way of administering the Presidency in 2012 compared to the previous Presidency held by the country in 2002.

In this article, we evaluate the performance of the Danish Presidency of 2012. We start by identifying a number of evaluation criteria. First, we explain the functioning of the Presidency and the changes introduced by the Lisbon Treaty. Second, we discuss the role of external and perhaps unforeseen precedential events, with a focus on the on-going Eurozone economic crisis. Thirdly, we turn our attention to the domestic context of the Presidency, in particular the implications of Denmark’s reputation as a reluctant EU Member State with four opt-outs from key EU policy areas. Additionally, we take into consideration the specific political climate of Denmark during the period of the Presidency. Having laid out the scope of the conditions used

¹ L. Friis, *An Emporer Without Clothes*, “Cooperation and Conflict” No. 38/2003, pp. 283–290; L. Miles, *Evaluating the Danish Presidency and Enlargement*, “Danish Foreign Policy Yearbook”, eds. P. Carlsen, H. Mouritzen, Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen 2003.

² P.M. Kaczynski, *How to Assess a Rotating Presidency of The Council under The New Lisbon Rules – the Case of Hungary*, Policy Brief, No. 323/2011, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels; D. Beach, *Fremtidens Lederløse Formandskaber*, “Økonomi og Politik” No. 85/2012, pp. 63–74.

for our evaluation, the most significant achievements of the Presidency are finally discussed under the headings of the four Danish priorities: a *responsible, dynamic, green and safe* Europe.

1. The Role and Behaviour of the EU Presidency

The rotating EU Presidencies have been a very stable feature in the institutional set-up of the EU, despite the fact that the Union has undergone significant treaty changes throughout the years. Many have interpreted the EU Presidency as an opportunity for Member States to impose their own political issues on the agenda of the Council and the European Union in broader terms, regardless of the size and other capacities of the country holding the Presidency. At the same time, Presidencies have also been expected to be neutral and impartial in their performance as chair of the Council.³

Describing the behaviour of the rotating Presidencies in terms of four different, and not always complementary, roles reflects the factual functions of the Presidency. These are highlighted in the academic literature, and can be summarised under the following headings: *administrator, mediator, political agenda-shaper* and *representative*.⁴ The ‘administrator’ role is basically to co-ordinate the work of the Council both in terms of arranging and convening meetings and handling the documents needed for work activities to run smoothly. The ‘mediator’ role refers to negotiations and the task of the Presidency to try and build consensus amongst the Member States, and resolve areas of conflicts which constitute obstacles to reaching agreements. This role has often been termed the ‘honest broker’ role of the Presidency, which is expected to demonstrate a larger degree of impartiality in negotiations in comparison to the remaining decision-making partners. The role as ‘political agenda-shaper’ refers to the possibilities of and opportunities for the Presidency to set priorities and try to influence the political agenda in order to

³ R. Adler-Nissen, J. H. Nielsen, C. Sørensen, *The Danish EU Presidency 2012: A Midterm Report*, Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, 2012, p. 1; R. Adler-Nissen, *Formandsskabets Prioriteter: Når EU's dagsorden bliver en national ambition*, “Økonomi og Politik” Vol. 85/2012, pp. 4–13; J. Tallberg, *The Agenda-Shaping Powers of the EU Council Presidency*, “Journal of European Policy”, Vol. 10/2003, pp. 1–19; O. Elgström, J. Tallberg, *Conclusions: Rationalist and Sociological Perspectives on the Council Presidency in: European Union Council Presidencies: A Comparative Perspective*, eds. O. Elgström, London 2003, pp. 191–206; O. Elgström, *European Union Council Presidencies: A Comparative Perspective*, London 2003; R. Bengtsson, O. Elgström, J. Tallberg, *Silencer or Amplifier? The European Union Presidency and the Nordic Countries*, “Scandinavian Political Studies” Vol. 27/2004, pp. 311–334.

⁴ R. Bengtsson, O. Elgström, J. Tallberg, op.cit., pp. 311–334; O. Elgström, op.cit.

bring it more into accord with national interests. The Presidency's 'representative' role has a two-fold dimension. It refers to its responsibility to represent the Member States internally in inter-institutional bargaining between the European Parliament, the Council, and the Commission, and it also refers to the external representation of the European Union in relations and negotiations with third parties and in international institutions.⁵ These four roles show that the expectations with respect to the execution of the Presidency are many and diverse, making it a multi-dimensional and complex task.

Certain EU norms and expectations of appropriate behaviour also surround the Presidency as an institution. Most significant is the impartiality norm, which prescribes that the Member State holding the Presidency should maintain a neutral position in negotiations between the Member States themselves, and between the Member States and EU institutions. Neutrality is important because it is considered to be a necessary pre-condition for living up to the efficiency norm of the Presidency. The best way of creating results is by fostering compromises and avoiding conflicts. Impartiality and effectiveness thus goes hand in hand. Hence the Presidency needs to strike a delicate balance between the different roles presented above, which sometimes leads to conflicts between the role of being an impartial mediator and the role of political agenda-maker, i.e. pursuing national interests. Empirical evidence has also shown there is a significant trade-off between the different roles and tasks of the Presidency, and that certain countries have problems living up to the impartiality aspect.⁶

Although the Council Presidency has existed since the very beginning of European integration, the role and functioning of the rotating presidencies have gradually changed over the course of time. But the Lisbon Treaty (2009) marked a substantial new transformation of the Presidency as an institution – a transformation that has called for new assessments of the Presidential roles described in the literature. In the following section we examine in more depth the changes introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, and how these may impact the Presidency as institution.

However, in addition to assessing how the different roles and tasks of the Presidency might be influenced by the Lisbon Treaty, it needs to be kept in

⁵ O. Elgström, *op.cit.*; J. Tallberg, *op.cit.*, pp. 1–19; A. Schout and S. Vanhoonacker, *Evaluating Presidencies of the Council of the EU: Revisiting Nice*, "Journal of Common Market Studies" Vol. 44/2006, pp. 1051–77; L. Quaglia and E. Moxon-Browne, *What Makes a Good EU Presidency? Italy and Ireland Compared*, "Journal of Common Market Studies" Vol. 44/2006, pp. 349–58; R. Adler-Nissen, *op.cit.*, pp. 4–13.

⁶ O. Elgström and J. Tallberg, *op.cit.*, pp. 191–206; R. Bengtsson, O. Elgström, J. Tallberg, *op.cit.*, pp. 311–334; L. Quaglia and E. Moxon-Browne, *op.cit.*, pp. 349–58; A. Schout and S. Vanhoonacker, *op.cit.*, pp. 1051–77.

mind that other factors may affect the behaviour and performance of the Presidency as well. Most important is the role of events, for example, crisis situations inside the EU or abroad, sometimes constituting external shocks to the European enterprise, as well as the role of the domestic political contexts. Events taking place during particular Presidencies must be taken into account, as they may disrupt or alter the EU political agenda, forcing the Presidency to change its agenda and priorities. The domestic political situation and political climate, for example, may enhance or constrain certain behaviour of the Presidency. General support of the government at the national level may leave more room for manoeuvre for the Presidency and enable it to take greater risks. Conversely, domestic discontent or salient issues such as sovereignty-concerns or budget contributions may restrict the government in negotiations over either the broader future of Europe, or simply within certain sensitive policy areas.⁷

2. The Council Presidency after the Lisbon Treaty

The role of the Council Presidency has been heavily debated over the past decade. The debate was initiated at the Convention for the future of Europe (2002–2003), where the drafting of the Constitutional Treaty (later to become the Lisbon Treaty) took place. Perhaps rightfully, the Presidency was criticised as for having a conflict of interest between the goal of maintaining a consistent EU political agenda and obtaining the particular goals and interests of the Member State at the helm of the EU.

Another argument against keeping the system of rotating Presidencies was that small Member States often did not have sufficient resources or administrative capacities to run an efficient and effective Presidency. Ironically, the literature on rotating Presidencies has painted the opposite picture. Smaller Member States have often been more successful, as they have proved to have strong and effective administrations, and because expertise on EU affairs and the credibility of national political leaders has proven to be more important for success than resources.⁸

After the ‘big bang’ enlargement of 2004, the picture might have looked more mixed, as the administrative capacities of some of the newer Member States were stretched to capacity when holding the Presidency. After the Danish

⁷ M. Kelstrup, M., D.S. Martinsen and M. Wind, *Europa I Forandring*, Copenhagen 2003; O. Elgström, J. Tallberg, op.cit., pp. 191–206; R. Bengtsson, O. Elgström, J. Tallberg, op.cit., pp. 311–334.

⁸ R. Bengtsson, O. Elgström, J. Tallberg, op.cit., pp. 311–33; L. Quaglia and E. Moxon-Browne, op.cit., pp. 349–58.

Presidency of 2012 ended, Denmark has, for example, been providing the successor Cyprus EU Presidency with administrative support and expertise, especially on the climate dossier.⁹ On the other hand, from a democratic legitimacy point of view the Presidencies were regarded as an important institution as they give equal weight in European governance to both small and large Member States.¹⁰ On this basis, it may be presumed that the institution of the Presidency will never be fully abolished.

The Lisbon Treaty did, however, bring about important institutional changes to the rotating Presidency. Four central features are worth highlighting. Firstly, the Council of the EU was clearly separated from the European Council. This implies that it is no longer the responsibility of the rotating Presidency to chair the important summits of the European Council, where Heads of State meet twice during each Presidency to discuss (and decide) the most difficult and pressing agenda issues. This job is now the responsibility of the new permanent President of the European Council (at present the previous Belgian Prime Minister Herman van Rompuy).

Secondly, the Lisbon Treaty weakens the Council's status in decision-making, as the European Parliament has become a co-legislator on an equal footing with the Council in the majority of policy areas. In other words, the co-decision procedure has become the most commonly used decision-making procedure in the EU, which has relabelled it the ordinary decision-making procedure. Thirdly, the Presidency no longer chairs the meetings concerning foreign affairs. This is now the responsibility of the new High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (at present the Previous British Commissionaire Lady Catherine Ashton). Fourthly, the Lisbon Treaty formally adopted the Trio Presidency framework. The Trio Presidencies have been practiced since 2007, where Member States were grouped into three successive Presidencies which were to jointly decide on an 18-month Presidency programme, having the aim of ensuring more continuity and consistency in the EU agenda and legislative process.¹¹

Despite the changes put forward by the Lisbon Treaty, the rotating Presidency is still largely left with the same tasks and roles as before. What the Lisbon Treaty is likely to imply, however, is that the performance of Member States might change. Some roles lose significance, while others will be strengthened. This should be interpreted as a result of the overall conse-

⁹ R. Adler-Nissen, *op.cit.*, pp. 4–13 .

¹⁰ S. Bunse, P. Maignette, and K. Nicolaidis, *Shared Leadership in the EU: Theory and Reality in: The EU Constitution: The Best Way Forward?*, eds. D. Curtin, A. Kellermann and S. Blockmans, The Hague 2005.

¹¹ J.C. Piris, *The Lisbon Treaty: A Legal and Political Analysis*, Cambridge 2010, pp. 209–225; P.M. Kaczyński, *op.cit.*

quences of the Lisbon Treaty, where the Presidency has lost political weight within the highly salient foreign affairs policy field and in the important European Council.

Thus the role as mediator is likely to become *the* most important task for Presidencies in a post-Lisbon context. Facilitating institutional compromises is what drives the EU legislative process forward. Particularly in light of the fact that the Union has dramatically increased the number of its Members, the task of making compromises and reaching consensus has become more difficult. The Presidency performs a unique role, as it is the only member state representing the Council (i.e. all Member State governments) during the important informal trilogue negotiations between the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament. And it is in the trilogue meetings that many of the most important steps in negotiations are taken. Trilogue negotiations are not a new feature introduced by the Lisbon Treaty. Their role in negotiations in recent years has been enhanced due to the increasing empowerment of the European Parliament. Hence, navigating between the different viewpoints of these three crucial actors in a neutral fashion has become an ever more delicate task, requiring significant mediation and negotiation skills.

Additionally, holding the Presidency has become a mega-project for Member States, since the Union now consists of 27 quite heterogeneous Member States as well as a large number of EU institutional actors. In sum, the tasks of the Presidency require more administrative capacities than ever before, making the role of efficient ‘administrator’ an increasingly important requirement for a successful Presidency.¹² The role as ‘representative’ is also likely to be enhanced, taking into consideration the requirements for representing the Council in inter-institutional affairs described above. But the external representation dimension, previously an important role for the Presidency, will probably diminish as the task is now in the hands of the permanent High Representative of Foreign Affairs.

The role which is likely to lose the most importance is that of ‘political agenda-shaper’. Neither the Head of State of the country holding the Presidency nor that country’s Minister of Foreign Affairs now plays a prominent formal role in chairing negotiations. Before the amendments of the Presidency in the Lisbon Treaty, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the country holding the Presidency chaired the meetings of the General Affairs and External Relations Council. There the minister coordinated activities between the Council and the European Council in the policy area of foreign affairs. But since foreign affairs and security policy have been moved to the separate

¹² R. Adler-Nissen, J.H. Nielsen, C. Sørensen, *op.cit.*

Foreign Affairs Council under the Lisbon Treaty, the General Affairs Council meetings have become less significant for political coordination. Consequently, the chair is now often left to the junior ministers of the Member State holding the Presidency.¹³ Additionally, as the Presidency is no longer in charge of steering the agenda in the most significant decision-making fora, the Presidency carries less political weight and has fewer opportunities to promote national viewpoints.

Since the onset of the on-going economic crisis, the European Council has grown in importance. It has become the institution where major and crucial decisions are taken. As vivid evidence of this fact it should be noted that the frequency of meetings and activities in the European Council has dramatically increased in this period. For example, no less than nine meetings took place in 2011 and seven in 2012. In comparison, the European Council under normal circumstances only meets twice during each Presidency. As a result of the new crisis management role of the European Council, the summits have become more politically salient at the domestic level as well. These developments do not mean that the Presidency's role as political agenda-shaper will completely disappear, but that it has become increasingly difficult to lead the EU agenda in the direction of national interests which might diverge from the general EU interests.

Playing a central role as mediator in inter-institutional negotiations between the most important EU institutional actors and Member States also represents a unique learning process for the Presidency countries. Being representative of the Council in the informal, but important, triologue meetings gives unparalleled access to information and represents a unique opportunity to create networks inside the EU system, which can prove useful after the termination of the Presidency as well. Having less room for the Presidencies to promote their national interest may potentially give Member States a stronger sense of ownership of the overall EU political agenda, and ultimately result in their stronger commitment towards EU cooperation. Making the Presidency less politically relevant in domestic terms could, however, increase the difficulty for a national government to use the six-month period at the helm of Europe to get praised in the national media for their European efforts. Thus the post-Lisbon Presidency institution represents less of an opportunity for closing the gap, at the national level, between domestic politics and European politics. In the following sections, we address some of these concerns, drawing on the experience of the Danish 2012 post-Lisbon Presidency.

¹³ P.M. Kaczynski and A. Byrne, *The General Affairs Council: The Key to Political Influence of Rotating Presidencies*, Policy Brief, No. 246/2011, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels.

3. The Domestic Context

The new Danish centre-left minority government, under the leadership of the Social Democratic leader Helle Thorning-Schmidt, was less than three months old when it assumed the EU Presidency on 1 January 2012. The new government came to power after a ten-year reign of a liberal-conservative minority coalition government, first headed by the liberal PM Anders-Fogh Rasmussen, who left prior the expiration of his term to assume the position as Secretary General of NATO, then by the liberal PM Lars Løkke Rasmussen.

However, the new 2011 centre-left coalition suffered a severe and dismal drop in public opinion polls almost immediately after assuming office. Denmark had not been exempt from financial cutbacks and austerity measures as a result of the financial crisis. And even though the fiscal condition of the country was better by far than some of the Mediterranean Eurozone members, nevertheless the government announced long term savings plans and adjustments to the universal welfare benefits. Additionally, the new Danish government did not achieve a majority of votes, as was envisaged by the Social-democratic and Socialist People's Party, which ran for office as a coalition. This resulted in the necessity to form a minority government, consisting of the Social democrats, the Socialist People's Party and the centre-left Social Liberal Party. The coalition proved unable to deliver on key election campaign promises, such as the payment tool for the capital of Copenhagen, and thus was punished in the opinion polls by disappointed voters. Yet these domestic troubles did not interfere dramatically with the management of the EU Presidency. The New Danish PM Helle Thorning-Schmidt had a past history in European institutions, and throughout the Danish Presidency was praised for her capacity to lead the Presidency.

3.1. Denmark: A Small Country with Euro Reservations

For some time now, Denmark has been considered as one of the more Eurosceptic EU Member States (Sørensen 2007). This was mainly due to the Danish 'no' vote to the Maastricht Treaty (1992), where a small majority rejected the treaty in a popular referendum. As a result, Denmark got four opt-outs of the European Union in the so-called Edinburgh Agreement or compromise (1993). All four opt outs are still in place in 2013. These are

⁹ Council of the European Union, *Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit...*, op.cit.

¹⁰ See especially: M. Arcipowska, *EU Visa Dialogue with Eastern Partnership Countries*, "Bulletin of the Polish Institute for International Affairs" No. 91(308), 04.10.2011.

comprised of opt-outs from: Union citizenship, the defence dimension of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, supranational cooperation within Justice and Home Affairs, and the Economic and Monetary Union's (EMU's) third phase. The latter three opt-outs still have consequences for Denmark's participation in daily EU policy-making, and they also impose ever greater challenges to Denmark's EU Membership, as they represent some of the policy areas where European cooperation has developed the most since the entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty. The Union citizenship opt-out, which technically still exists, in practice has no importance anymore as the Treaty of Amsterdam made it clear that Union citizenship can only be a supplement to national citizenship.¹⁴

Only once have any of the four Danish opt-outs been subject to a national referendum. This happened in 2000, where a small majority of the Danish population yet again rejected participation in the third phase of the EMU, i.e. the Eurozone. As a result the Danish Presidency was viewed as controversial, since it had to chair the Economic and Financial Affairs Council Meetings (ECOFIN) while simultaneously not being a full member of the Eurozone. Denmark's nonparticipation in the third phase of the EMU involves maintenance of the Danish currency (the *Danish kroner*, or Crown) as well as keeping the Danish National Bank (*Danmarks Nationalbank*). However, the Danish Crown is tied to the currency exchange rates of the Euro, leaving the country with less ability to navigate its own position vis-à-vis currency speculation. The Danish opt-out also infers that Denmark is not invited to the Eurogroup meetings (i.e. the forum preceding the ECOFIN Council where the 17 full Eurozone Members meet). The absence of formal participation in the Eurogroup meetings, where exchanges of view on items on the ECOFIN agenda also take place, naturally poses a challenge to a country that is supposed to lead and guide the negotiations which later take place at the ECOFIN meetings. Thus Denmark's position as an EU Presidency outside the Eurozone could potentially limit its possibilities to perform the role of political agenda-shaper, as it does not have a seat in the highly important Eurogroup. Additionally, it could also make its role as mediator at ECOFIN meetings difficult, inasmuch as most of the coordination of opinions has already taken place in the earlier meeting of the Eurogroup.

However, Denmark is not the only country outside the Eurozone to hold the EU Presidency since the Eurogroup meetings were formalised in the Lisbon Treaty. Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary also did not participate in Eurogroup meetings during their EU Presidencies. Furthermore, Denmark

¹⁴ Danish Institute for International Studies, *De Danske Forbehold over for Den Europæiske Union*, Copenhagen 2008.

has carried out an EU Presidency before while having four opt-outs, without it being a huge hindrance to its performance. This was the case the last time Denmark held the EU Presidency, in 2002. Despite the importance of Eurogroup meetings, formally the Danish opt-outs do not have any implications for holding the Presidency, with the exception of defence matters, where Denmark, due to its opt-out, has formally given up its right to chair Council meetings.¹⁵ Thus, with the exception of defence Denmark remains responsible for chairing the same Council formations during its Presidency as a regular Member State without opt-outs.

As mentioned, only once has the Danish government held a referendum (unsuccessfully) to abolish one of the opt-outs. This happened in 2000, when the Danes were asked to reconsider accession to the EMU's third phase, and again rejected participation in the Eurozone, i.e. formally rejected abolition of the opt-out. And the shifting governments since then have been unsuccessful in obtaining the political momentum to launch yet another referendum. Timing here is crucial. The current Danish government also proclaimed that it wanted to use its 2012 EU Presidency to kick-start a debate on abolishing two of the Danish opt-outs, on defence cooperation and Justice and Home Affairs, with the aim of holding a national referendum at the end of 2012. Towards the end of the Presidency however, this was postponed due to the negative evaluations of the government in opinion polls. As with previous referendums (and not only Danish), the outcome of a national referendum on the EU is more often a result of the current popularity of the national government than a genuine reflection of opinions about particular European issues.¹⁶ While it is not a legal requirement to have popular referendums in order to abolish the Danish EU opt-outs, throughout the years a strong consensus amongst the Danish politicians has emerged that if the opt-outs were to be questioned, the final say should belong to the Danish people.

Because the role of EU President is nothing new to Denmark, the Danish Foreign Minister prior to the 2011 November election, Lene Espersen (the Conservatives) repeatedly stated that the Ministry prepared for mainly administrative tasks. She emphasised that holding the Presidency typically consisted of 85 per cent routine tasks and administrative work and 10 per cent crisis management, leaving only five per cent for the Presidency to decide.¹⁷ As the Eurozone crisis was not new and had been the top priority of the European enterprise since the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008, the Danish

¹⁵ R. Adler-Nissen, J.H. Nielsen, C. Sørensen, op.cit.

¹⁶ C.V.D. Eijk and M. Franklin, *Choosing Europe? The European Electorate and National Politics in the Face of the Union*, Michigan 1996.

¹⁷ Speech by Foreign Minister Lene Espersen (the Conservatives), 10.06.12.

government knew in advance that its ability to engage in more than five per cent agenda-setting would probably prove difficult. The EU's focus remained on the economic crisis. And as we will see below, it also became the major focus of the Danish Presidency.

4. Achievements of the 2012 Danish Presidency

Having considered both the institutional and contextual challenges and the possibilities of the Danish 2012 Presidency, we now turn our attention to a discussion of its achievements. We will not mention all the results of the Danish Presidency, but under the heading of its four priorities we highlight some of the most significant achievements. Considering the post-Lisbon situation of the Presidency, with diminished agenda-setting possibilities, the achievements should not be seen as a result of the work of the Danish Presidency alone, but as results where the Presidency had a significant impact.

4.1. A Responsible Europe: Denmark as Mediator Despite its Opt-Outs?

First and foremost, the Danish Presidency focused on the economic challenges facing the Union. And by its adoption of the term 'a responsible Europe' as a key word for its Presidency, the Danish government had set its course. The predominant focus on an *economically* responsible Europe was shown both in the Presidency's focus on short-time adjustments to remedy the impact of the Eurozone crisis, and also in the long-term goals of increasing growth and reducing unemployment. The long-term perspective focused on the creation of a sustainable and prosperous Europe, in line with the EU 2020 agenda. Below we highlight the achievements of the Danish Presidency when it came to bolstering the economic institutions at the EU level in order to remedy the consequences of the Eurozone crisis.

All in all, the Eurozone crisis can be said to consist of three intertwined crises: *a sovereign debt crisis; a banking crisis; and a growth crisis*.¹⁸ All three crises were at the top of the agenda during the Danish Presidency. And all the Presidency's achievements to remedy these crises during the first half of 2012 can be understood as the Danish Presidency's contribution to make the EU more economically responsible.

Firstly, with respect to the sovereign debt crisis, the short-term perspective was naturally on budget discipline. The Eurozone crisis had only recently

¹⁸ J.C. Schambaugh, *The Euro's Three Crises*, Georgetown University NBER McDonough School of Business 2012.

exposed some very burdensome European economies – the so-called GIPSI countries (Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Italy). More importantly, the crisis had underlined a severe lack of institutional support for the EMU.¹⁹ Hence the focus was on the creation of pacts and treaties which would establish a strong institutional set-up that was capable of sufficiently bolstering the economic situation to avoid crises like the current sovereign-debt crisis in the future.

Consequently, at the European Council summit in March 2012, the Danish Presidency, along with 24 other EU Member States, signed the *Treaty of Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union* (the so-called ‘Fiscal Pact’). Only two European Member States - Britain and the Czech Republic – abstained from signing the Fiscal Pact. The Fiscal Pact was an intergovernmental attempt to strengthen and tighten the economic underpinnings of the European enterprise. As such, the Danish Presidency did not take a leading role in the negotiations leading to the Pact, as the negotiations took place in the intergovernmental European Council during the autumn and winter months of 2011. The Fiscal Pact builds on the requirements of the Stability and Growth Pact, forcing the Member States to adopt national legislation designed to ensure the implementation of the economic mechanisms and goals decided at the EU level to achieve budget discipline.²⁰ Hence the Pact was an important step towards consolidating unified EU answers to the sovereign debt crisis.

In addition to the Fiscal Pact, the Council also reached agreement in 2012, under the Danish Presidency, on the so-called *two-pack*. The two-pack consists of two proposals for monitoring and assessing the Member States national budgets as well as enhancing the surveillance of the troubled Member States facing current financial problems. The two-pack builds on the *six-pack*, which was the European Commission’s 2010 proposal aimed at securing economic and financial discipline through enhanced supervision and monitoring of the Member States’ macro-economic balances. Thus the purpose of the two-pack and the six-pack was to strengthen the common currency, while remaining on the reform track to help out fragile Member States and their economies.

The second crisis facing the European Union was the banking crisis. In 2007, large American banks and related financial institutions started to face problems due to a lingering crash in the housing market. And when Lehman Brothers collapsed in 2008, the world was thrown into in a severe financial

¹⁹ M. Kelstrup, M., D.S. Martinsen and M. Wind, op.cit.; J.C. Schambaugh, op.cit., R. Adler-Nissen, J.H. Nielsen, C. Sørensen, op.cit., p. 1.

²⁰ M. Kelstrup, M., D.S. Martinsen and M. Wind, op.cit.

crisis. This crisis also hit the EU strongly. The banking crisis, combined with the sovereign debt crisis and the growth crisis, created a global financial crisis which has continued to linger in the Eurozone, and has evolved into the now well-known Eurozone crisis.

One of the elements criticised in the financial crisis was the lack of supervision of the financial markets. This criticism was shared by the Danish Presidency, which considered it a success to close a deal during the Presidency on trade in financial derivatives. Financial derivatives had been highlighted as one of the key underlying causes of the financial crisis, and the regulation agreed upon under the Danish Presidency guaranteed that all trade in financial derivatives would be cleared by a third counterparty. The third party ensures the security of the deal both for sellers and buyers, and thus provides an extra safety net under the financial market. Though the agreement on the regulation of financial derivatives only addresses one aspect of the complex financial crisis, it nevertheless was an important step towards living up to the G20 talks about the causes of the Financial Crisis, including the elaboration of steps which ought to be taken to prevent future similar crises.

The last crisis facing the EU is the growth crisis. In contrast to both the banking crisis and the sovereign debt crisis, the European enterprise has for a long time been locked in a paradigm of diminishing economic growth. The Danish Presidency stressed that this was an important long-term issue which needs to be addressed. And as one of the last tasks during the Danish Presidency, in June 2012 the *Growth and Employment Pact* was signed at the European Council summit. The Growth and Employment pact contains a number of growth-oriented initiatives in relation to the common market, the EU budget etc. Notwithstanding the fact that an agreement was reached, the discussions and negotiations in relation to this pact revealed strong disagreements among the European Member States about the balance between austerity measures and budget discipline on the one hand, and growth and crisis management through expansive fiscal measures on the other. These different opinions revealed a broad dividing line in the EU between the Member States arguing for austerity and cuts as the path toward economic recovery, and other EU members advocating for government spending and focusing on ways to remedy the massive unemployment problem in the troubled EU economies, especially the GIPSI countries.

During the Danish Presidency, the gap between these two views on economic recovery was most vividly illustrated by the French Presidential elections which took in spring 2012. While the incumbent French President Nicholas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel had viewed austerity as the way forward for the troubled EU Member States' economies, President Sarkozy was challenged by the more Keynesian-inspired Françoise

Hollande, who called for a renewed examination of the plan put in place to save the troubled Eurozone. On Election Day, the French voters supported the renewed focus proposed by Hollande. Since France is one of the largest and most influential Member States of the EU, especially during the Eurozone crisis, the change of French administrations can be expected to have a significant influence on the EU's future economic measures.

All in all, many of the crucial negotiations in relation to the EMU and the Eurozone crisis during the Danish Presidency took place at the European Council meetings. i.e. in an intergovernmental setting. In this sense the previous Danish Foreign Minister, Lene Espersen (the Conservatives), was right in assuming the Danish Presidency would not have a significant say on the agenda of the EU – the Eurozone crisis was simply too overwhelming. At the same time however, the Danish opt-out did not impose a significant challenge to the Danish Presidency. Denmark again lived up to the role of an 'honest broker' when it came to the Presidency's tasks, abstaining from imposing its own agenda and views on the discussions in the Council.

4.2. A Dynamic Europe: Success as Mediator?

In close relation to the focus on a responsible Europe, the Danish 2012 Presidency also focused on creating a *dynamic Europe*. When the 2008 Financial Crisis broke out, Europe was already in recession and economic growth was declining. Thus, the Presidency aimed at generating a future dynamic Europe, which would be set on a secure long-term track to achieve the EU 2020 goals. In relation to its task of creating a dynamic Europe, the Danish Presidency focused on the getting as far as possible in the troublesome negotiations over the multiannual (2014-2020) financial framework (the MFF, where the EU budget is laid down), as well as reforms of the Common Market.

The current MFF runs from 2007-2013. Thus the Danish Presidency had to partake in the negotiations over the new MFF to run from 2014-2020. Like national budget negotiations, the budget negotiations at the EU level are tough. National interests have to be balanced against European interests, and politically sensitive issues like the Common Agriculture Policy and rebates for EU Members are likely to generate problems.²¹ The final budget requires unanimity in the Council, and has to be approved in the European Parliament as well.

Disputes in budget negotiations only expand during times of crisis. As most EU Member States have been through tough national austerity measures

²¹ S. Hagemann, *Money and Power: EU Budget Negotiations in Time of Austerity*, Danish Institute for International Studies Policy Brief, Copenhagen 2012.

in recent years, while at the same time facing high and rising national unemployment, their reluctance to give up national interests for the benefit of the common good at the European level could only be expected to be greater than in prosperous economic times. At the European Council in December 2011, Denmark obtained the necessary mandate to carry out the budget negotiations. Though the Danish Presidency remained realistic about its ability to close the budget negotiations (it never aimed to close the negotiations during the Danish Presidency), it nevertheless set the aim of closing negotiations in one of the six categories of the European budget.²² All in all, the Danish Presidency made a significant contribution by ensuring progress in the overall budget negotiations, as it was able to develop a negotiation framework compromise for an agreement on the EU budget, which provided an important platform for the future negotiations.²³

Additionally, the Presidency worked extensively on reaching agreement on a European patent reform. This also included the European Patent Court, which had lingered in the system for years without common agreement. The European patent reform minimises costs in connection with patent registration and enforcement, and thus enables the EU to be more competitive and dynamic. Patents have traditionally been extremely expensive in the EU when compared to, for example, China, where patents are dramatically cheaper to obtain. All in all, the new patent reform achieved under the 2012 Danish Presidency allows companies and private persons to obtain in one place a patent valid in all of Europe. This proposal was one of the greatest Danish achievements during the Presidency, and constituted a keystone in finalizing the Single Market Act.²⁴

While the breakthrough with respect to a unified patent court was probably the single most important piece of legislation obtained by the 2012 Danish Presidency, the Presidency also finalised many other important pieces of legislation. Focusing on making the EU more dynamic, the Danish Presidency managed to obtain agreement between the Council and the European Parliament when it came to lowering the existing prices on so-called roaming (data services like SMS and phone calls). Additionally, the Presidency also successfully obtained agreement on a set of standardization rules, ensuring that companies and organizations find participation easier when it comes to the development of standards. And as proof that Denmark fulfilled its role as

²² The European budget consists of six budget categories: (1) sustainable growth (2) preservation and management of natural resources (3) citizenship, freedom, security and justice (4) the EU globally (5) administration, and (6) compensation.

²³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, *Europe at Work: The Results of the Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the First Half of 2012*, Copenhagen 2012.

²⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, op.cit.

mediator between the Council and the European Parliament, the agreement with the European Parliament regarding a regulation concerning bilateral investment treaties between Member States and third parties, enabling the EU to focus more thoroughly on a future investment agenda, needs to be underscored.

All in all, the Danish Presidency prioritised plans to fertilise the EU to become more dynamic. Hence the Presidency placed economic efficiency high on the agenda, and took the mediating role of the EU presidency between the Council and the European Parliament very seriously. The results were clear, in particular the agreement on a unified patent court, an idea which had been lingering in the system for years. And a whole set of less important but also finished pieces of legislation show that the Danish Presidency successfully played the role of mediator and thereby obtained results. As regards the budget negotiations, as was pointed out above they are probably the most difficult of all EU negotiations, since every country, including the Presidency, has national demands and expectations with respect to the European budget. Nevertheless, the Danish EU Presidency successfully advanced the negotiations, although the end-result remained unknown when Denmark handed over the Presidency to Cyprus.

4.3. A Green Europe: Denmark as a Political Agenda-Shaper?

Denmark is one of the most energy-efficient countries in the EU. With its use of only 60 per cent of energy per unit of GDP in comparison to the EU average, the little Scandinavian country put energy and climate concerns high on the political agenda of its Presidency. Under the heading of '*a green Europe*', the Danish Presidency identified four key priorities. Firstly, it wished to finalise negotiations on the Energy Efficiency Directive with the goal of ensuring an increase in energy efficiency of 20 per cent throughout the European Union by 2020. Secondly, it aimed to prepare the EU's long-term climate and energy roadmap, with the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80-95 per cent by 2050. Third, the Danish Presidency wanted to ensure the 'greening' of the Common Agricultural Policy as part of the ongoing reform process. And finally, the fourth Danish aim was to promote a strong European voice at the RIO-20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012. Denmark wanted the EU to demonstrate global leadership in international climate negotiations.²⁵

The key word *green* thus underlined a very ambitious Presidency agenda to promote energy efficiency and climate considerations during the Presidency term. The agenda might be regarded as all the more ambitious taking

²⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, op.cit.

into account the economic crisis, where the focus tended to shift to imminent economic issues, resulting in less focus on long-term sustainable goals. Moreover, by putting sustainable growth high on the agenda Denmark made its only attempt to promote a national agenda, consisting of much higher energy and climate priorities and ambitions than those shared by a majority of the Member States. Not surprisingly, it was no easy task for Denmark to promote sustainability on the agenda. Again, this was mainly due to the lack of momentum for climate considerations in light of the difficult economic situation. As mentioned, most of the EU Member States were going through tough austerity plans in 2012.

Although, the Danish Presidency made some progress on all its key priorities, the agreement on the Energy and Climate Roadmap of 2050 and the adoption of the Energy Efficiency Directive represent two concrete and significant results, and must be considered as a 'very Danish' fingerprint on the EU agenda.

The negotiations over the Energy and Climate Roadmap had already encountered significant problems before Denmark took over the Presidency. The Hungarian EU Presidency had tried to finalise an agreement during spring 2011, but met opposition from Poland, which decided to 'pull out the veto card'.²⁶ During the Polish 2011 Presidency, the negotiations did not progress further. But the Danish Presidency managed to re-start them. The result was an agreement among 26 Member States of a commitment to long-term goals of renewable energy, energy efficiency, and greenhouse gas reductions.²⁷ The goals are of a non-binding nature, and can therefore only be seen as initial steps towards later decisions on binding climate goals.²⁸ The performance of both Poland and Denmark show that the Presidency as an institution still enjoys some room for manoeuvre in shaping the political agenda, even though the Lisbon Treaty has watered down the political weight of the Presidency. While Poland managed to keep the negotiations on ice, the Danish Presidency found the issue salient and was able put it back on the Council agenda.

Notwithstanding, the negotiations over the Energy Efficiency Directive also proved very challenging for Denmark. Not unsurprisingly, a large number of Member States raised concerns about the economic consequences of the directive. And there was a general wish to make the energy efficiency goals more flexible, which in practice meant less binding. During the six-month Presidency, Denmark had to lead important tripartite negotiations

²⁶ P.M. Kaczynski and A. Byrne, *op.cit.*

²⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, *op.cit.*

²⁸ R. Adler-Nissen, J.H. Nielsen, C. Sørensen, *op.cit.*

between the Council, the Commission, and the European Parliament to reach a final compromise on the Energy Efficiency Directive. These three institutions had very divergent preferences with respect to the directive. The Commission and, in particular, the European Parliament were much more ambitious than the Member States in the Council. Therefore, the role of Danish Presidency was first and foremost to facilitate a compromise between the Council and the Parliament without watering down the overall goals of the directive too much.

The Danish Presidency was finally able to reach a compromise which resulted in an agreement of 17 per cent improved energy efficiency by 2020, bringing the EU considerably closer to its previous target of 20 per cent energy savings by 2020. While the initial goal of the Presidency was not met and the result did not fully meet Danish ambitions, Denmark was again able to use its role as mediator in the negotiations to further its climate interests.²⁹ The reason for the Danish 'success' however does not only lie in Denmark's skills in facilitating inter-institutional negotiations, but also results from the fact that the Danish interests matched the preferences of the Commission and the Parliament. Denmark was thus able to promote its national climate agenda under the disguise of being an 'honest broker'. Here it is worth mentioning that the EU Climate Commissioner, Connie Hedegaard, is Danish and well known for promoting an ambitious EU climate agenda. Thus it cannot be denied that the presence of a Danish Climate Commissioner had a positive impact on the Presidency's ability to manage the negotiations, even though the Commissioners on paper have to act independent from national supervision.

Reaching an agreement on the Energy Efficiency Directive was one of the most important priorities of the Danish Presidency, and showing leadership in promoting a European climate agenda went hand-in-hand with the domestic political agenda of the government, which had already taken far-reaching measures at home. This led to results when the Danish government was able to reach a historic national energy agreement in March 2012.³⁰ The agreement contains a wide range of ambitious initiatives, bringing Denmark a good step closer to the target of 100 per cent renewable energy in the energy and transport sectors by 2050. Together, these factors made it possible to combine the Presidency's mediator role with that of political agenda-shaper, thereby succeeding in promoting national interests while also appearing as the 'honest broker' expected of the country holding the EU Presidency.

²⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, op.cit.

³⁰ *Accelerating Green Energy Towards 2020*, The Danish Energy Agreement of March 2012, Ministry of Climate, Energy and Building, <http://www.ens.dk/en-us/policy/danish-climate-and-energy-policy/political-agreements/sider/political-agreements.aspx> (last visited 08.02.13).

4. 4. A Safe Europe: The Difficult task of Mediating between Powerful EU Institutions

The ambition of the Danish Presidency of ensuring a more *safe* Europe consisted of a number of priorities, related mainly to migration policy and Schengen cooperation. The key priorities were to ensure better control over the EU's external borders and to finalise the Common European Asylum System by 2012.³¹ From a mediator perspective, Denmark had from the outset a rather delicate position in the negotiations due to its opt-out from supranational cooperation in Justice and Home Affairs, which could potentially make it more difficult to lead and build consensus in the Council. Additionally, the ambition of the Danish Presidency was to support the new European External Action Service to become a strong and effective actor.³² This ambition can be interpreted as a new way of understanding the Presidency's role as external representative of the Union as a consequence of the Lisbon Treaty. The role of the Presidency has been diminished to that of supporting the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs, rather than promoting one's own foreign policy objectives.

The Danish Presidency was able to reach a number of agreements between the Council and the European Parliament on the development of a common asylum system, enhancing the Schengen cooperation, and providing evidence that the Presidency was able to perform its role as mediator with significant success despite its opt-out from the actual policy area.³³ During the Schengen negotiations, the Danish Presidency did, however, run into severe problems with its role as mediator and representative of the Council in the negotiations with the European Parliament. These problems were not a direct result of the Danish opt-out in the policy area, but have to be seen as part of an on-going institutional power struggle between the Council and the Parliament. The problems quickly escalated, and eventually led to an actual crisis between the European Parliament and the Danish Presidency in June 2012 - the last month of the six-month Presidency period. All in all, the crisis left a rather black mark on the Presidency's reputation, despite its overall successful performance during the first five months.

The European Parliament was upset with the agreement of the Council on a new mechanism which would allow Member States to reintroduce internal border controls under exceptional circumstances. While the Commission was pushing for greater oversight by the EU institutions on how the Schengen rules should be evaluated and applied, the Council agreement underscored

³¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, op.cit.

³² Ibidem

³³ Ibidem.

that evaluation should remain in the hands of the Member States. The European Parliament felt that it had been side-lined by the Council in the negotiations, and threatened to boycott the Danish Presidency as representative of the Council. Statements of MEP's during parliamentary debates over the agreement show just how strongly abandoned they felt: *'From now to June 30 at midnight, we shall address ourselves only to the European Council or the next Presidency of the Republic of Cyprus'*, said French MEP Joseph Daul, while the German MEP, Rebecca Harms followed suit by adding: *'This is the saddest day in your whole Council presidency'*.³⁴ A boycott of the Danish Presidency would have had serious consequences. It would not be able to move forward on any legislative dossiers without the consent of the Parliament. Luckily for Denmark, the European Parliament decided to suspend relations with the Danish Presidency only in legislative negotiations concerning Justice and Home Affairs. Notwithstanding, the crisis with the European Parliament shows that the performance of the Presidency as mediator has not only become crucial in the context of the Lisbon Treaty, but it has also become more difficult for Presidencies to manage, due to the intensification of inter-institutional struggles taking place within the EU system.

The increasing inter-institutional struggles between the Council and the European Parliament can mainly be interpreted as part of the process of implementing the new Lisbon treaty, whereby the European Parliament is now much more powerful vis-à-vis the Council than before. It does not seem unusual that ordinary policy-making becomes subject to post-Lisbon constitutional politics where uncertainties about the interpretation of the Treaty arise. The dispute over the Schengen negotiations shows that what should have been regarded as an ordinary policy outcome was suddenly turned into something much more politically significant, as it threatened to create a precedence for later interpretations of the role of the Council vis-à-vis the Parliament.³⁵

Although the role of the Presidency as external representative of Union has been significantly watered down, the Danish Presidency still managed to make its presence felt vis-à-vis the enlargement negotiations. During the Presidency, Serbia was granted candidate status despite the controversies surrounding its application. Enlargement negotiations with Serbia have been very controversial mainly due to the country's sheltering of war criminals from the International Criminal Court of Justice, together with a number of internal political problems involving corruption and threats to the independence

³⁴ EU Observer, *Danish Presidency in Firing Line over Schengen Decision*, 12.06. 2012.

³⁵ C. Roederer-Rynning, *While Public Attention Is Focused on the Eurozone Crisis, EU Member States and the European Parliament Are Locked in a Struggle over the Common Agricultural Policy*, European Politics and Policy – London School of Economics, 11.10.2012.

of the judiciary. Moreover, the question of Serbia also became part of broader post-enlargement battles. Romania was sceptical of granting candidate status to Serbia at the same time as the Netherlands was vetoing Romania's entry into the Schengen cooperation scheme. The Danish Presidency also helped ensure progress in the enlargement negotiations with Iceland.³⁶ This being said, the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs played a much less significant role in external affairs than in the case of previous pre-Lisbon Presidencies. Buying-in on specific foreign policy issues to shape the EU agenda is no longer a possibility, and this may have consequences for the public visibility of the Presidency, particularly with regard to the way it is perceived by its national citizens.

Conclusions

In this article we posed the question whether a small non-euro Member State holding the EU Presidency can make a difference in times of economic crisis. Our evaluation of the Danish EU Presidency 2012 shows that it can. We began our evaluation by stating a number of criteria for evaluating the performance of Danish EU Presidency, including the role of the Lisbon Treaty, the Eurozone economic crisis, the Danish opt-outs, and the domestic political climate.

The Lisbon Treaty of 2009 brought significant changes to the EU Presidency as an institution, making its role as impartial mediator in inter-institutional negotiations more important than ever before. The performance of the Danish Presidency shows that the Council Presidency as an institution still has important consequences for the pace and outcome of negotiations. From an EU political perspective, it is extremely important that the brokerage role of the Presidency is prioritised, as this is paramount for the legislative process to move forward. From the perspective of domestic politics, holding the Council Presidency represents, since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, a less prominent political opportunity for promoting national interests and priorities. This may negatively impact on how many resources national political leaders are willing to spend on an EU Presidency. More importantly, these changes may lead to less political interest in trying to engage the public and use the six-month leadership position for promoting EU politics within the national political arena.

³⁶ R. Adler-Nissen, J.H. Nielsen, C. Sørensen, *op.cit.*; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, *op.cit.*

Evidence of the increasing importance of the mediating role for the new EU Presidency is clear when a concrete assessment is made of the behaviour and achievements of the Danish Presidency. In our work we focused on the four key priorities of the Danish Presidency: *Responsible, Safe, Dynamic and Green*. And while the Danish Presidency was able to reach significant results within each area subsumed by these key words – while remaining predominantly focused on the economy – our conclusion is that only in climate and energy negotiations did the Danish Presidency advance a specific Danish agenda. And even in this case it was able to do so primarily because its national interests were in accord with the wider EU goals of both the European Commission and the European Parliament. Thus, in terms of shaping the political agenda the achievements of the Danish Presidency were less significant.

The Danish opt-outs, especially its opt-out of the Eurozone, which from the outset appeared to be a major obstacle to leading negotiations and brokering compromises in times of EU economic crisis, did not in the end significantly hinder the performance of the Presidency. In sum, the Danish Presidency carried out the roles as honest broker as well as mediator and moderator between the now powerful European Parliament and the Council with considerable success, advancing the EU agenda in areas related to both the economy as well as other important legislative dossiers.