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## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	Variables and Descriptive Statistics Pearson's and Kendall's tau correlation coefficient	viii 73
<b>1 Introduction</b>		1
<b>2 The EU Council Presidency</b>		6
2.1 History of the European Union		6
2.2 History of the Council of the European Union		7
2.3 History of the EU Council Presidency		9
2.4 Roles and Functions of the Presidency		12
2.5 What it Means for the Host Country		20
2.6 Influencing the Agenda		23
2.7 Explaining Variation		28
2.8 Approaches to Understanding the Presidency		32
2.9 Conclusion		34
<b>3 Small State Presidencies</b>		36
3.1 Qualities of Small State Presidencies		37
3.2 The Cases of Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Sweden		41
3.3 Evaluation Based on Priority Advancement		45
3.4 Priorities of the Presidencies		47
3.5 Variables and Data		66
3.6 Analysis and Results		71
3.7 Conclusions		76
<b>4 Conclusion</b>		77
<b>References</b>		81
<b>Appendix</b>		92

## List of Tables

<b>Table 3.1</b> – Variables and Descriptive Statistics	71
<b>Table 3.2</b> – Kendall's tau correlation coefficient	73

## List of Figures

<b>Figure 1.</b> Elections variable against Priority Advancement.	92
<b>Figure 2.</b> EU Support variable against Priority Advancement.	92
<b>Figure 3.</b> Experience variable against Priority Advancement.	93
<b>Figure 4.</b> Resources variable against Priority Advancement.	93
<b>Figure 5.</b> Thomson variable against Priority Advancement.	94



## Abstract

This paper examines small states holding the role of the European Union Council Presidency, a six-month rotating position and an opportunity for member states to guide policy-making in the European Union. The position is advantageous to the holder because the Presidency can levy influence over policy-making through introducing proposals for policy debates and advancing priorities in the Council. Each state creates a program of priorities in preparation for holding the Presidency, and this paper studies the advancement of priorities for three cases: Slovenia (first half 2008), the Czech Republic (first half 2009) and Sweden (second half 2009). The author carried out an assessment and evaluation of Slovenia and Sweden's five priorities and the three of the Czech Republic. The results were then compared to five other factors—how soon the next elections were, the domestic level of EU support, whether the state had prior Presidency experience, how many euros the state budgeted for the Presidency, and an average related to decision outcomes based on the Decision-Making in the European Union II dataset by Thomson et al. (2012). In comparing these factors, there appears to be a link between the support for the EU from the state's population and the successful advancement of the state's priorities.

## Introduction

This thesis will cover the history of the European Union (EU) Council Presidency position, reviewing its roles and tasks, and examining what scholars describe makes an effective Presidency. The EU Council Presidency position falls within the Council of the European Union, also known as the Council of Ministers. Along with the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union is one part of the legislature of the EU. The Council takes many different shapes: depending on which topic is being discussed, the ministers of that subject from each member state meet and are led by the representative of the member state holding the Presidency.

This paper specifically looks at small states in the Presidency, as explored previously by Simone Bunse (2009) in her book *Small States and EU Governance: Leadership through the Council Presidency* and in an article by Diana Panke (2010).<sup>1</sup> Small states are important to study in relation to the Presidency because they “have fiercely defended the rotating office” and their opportunity to hold the position, even though “critics [have] claimed that small states are overburdened” by the various tasks it requires (Bunse, 2009, p. 1). In most cases, small states face disadvantages in promoting their national position within the Council because they “lack the political power to shape EU directives or regulations in the same manner as their larger counterparts” (Panke, 2010, p. 799). The Presidency is an opportunity to gain a voice within the EU and shape the agenda. Much analysis covering the Presidency and Council of Ministers examines the power of large states in the European Union and how they affect decision-making. For example, some study how a Franco-German alliance

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<sup>1</sup> As covered later in the paper, there are many definitions of “small states” in the context of the EU. For the purpose of this paper, I will use the definition that Panke (2010) offers, states that have less than the average number of votes in the Council of Ministers.



can overpower voting on initiatives and proposals (Simonian, 1985, cited by Bunse, 2009, p. 59). The dominant focus of EU Presidency literature and the restricted latitude for smaller states to shape the EU's legislative agenda make small state Council Presidencies especially significant and worthy of closer investigation. The goal of this paper is to examine three cases from the late 2000s—Slovenia, the Czech Republic, and Sweden—and score how they advanced their priorities, while also comparing this score to other factors that can affect Presidency performance.

The role of the Presidency has evolved over time, changing with the introduction of new treaties and the addition of new member states to the EU. The Presidency gained power and prestige in 1974 when the Council of the European Union became an independent institution (Crum, 2009, p. 689). The Presidency is significant because “The strategic decisions made by the European Council Presidency are likely to trickle all the way down through the Council structure” (Crum, 2009, p. 690). The trio system of the rotating presidency was introduced in 2007, which grouped Presidencies together based on diversity in size, experience and geographic location, and increased continuity between Presidencies by coordinating priorities within the trio (Bukowski, 2009, p. 97). The most recent change was implemented in 2009 under the Lisbon Treaty, which reduced the Presidency's role. A permanent President, elected to a two and a half year term, replaced the rotating position in the European Council. Even considering the recent changes and reduction in its role, the long-standing Presidency position remains an important player in the leadership and creation of policy in the EU.

The Presidency position entails many tasks and functions for the host state, the first of which is leadership and coordination within the Council of Ministers and until

2009, the European Council. The Presidency is expected to present proposals, guide policy and arrange summits, among other tasks (Elgström, 2003, p. 3; Mix, 2010, p. 4). Another crucial role is that of the mediator or broker between member states with differing positions on proposed legislation (Elgström, 2003, p. 6). The Presidency works to coordinate agreement and cooperation on policy. Under the norm of impartiality, the Presidency is expected to put the general interests of the EU above the state's own domestic political interests. Impartiality is not always followed, however, and a country can influence the agenda in many ways while holding the Presidency. It is also important to note that pursuing national interest does not always mean pursuing specific domestic political preferences. Instead, it may be in a state's national interest to act as a more neutral Presidency because a successful, neutral Presidency can buffer a state's reputation and credibility in terms of EU decision-making.

Some Presidencies appear to perform better than others. While most measures of success are very subjective, some scholars look at the number of decisions passed or whether these decisions coincided with the Presidency state's position on the issue (e.g. Thomson & Hosli, 2006). Some Presidencies are more focused on the state's own political interests while others attempt to be more of a true neutral broker. Presidencies also vary in their configuration: for example, the 2003 Italian Presidency "relied on an informal system of co-ordination... rather than creating a formal co-ordinating unit amongst the various ministries," while the 2004 Irish Presidency took a more formal approach to organization, according to Quaglia & Moxon-Browne (2006, p. 352). Several factors can explain variation in Presidency behavior and outcomes. These

The 2009 Slovenian Presidency exceeded expectations and enhanced its reputation



include previous Presidency experience, upcoming elections, their population's support for the EU and integration, and the domestic political landscape.

I evaluated each of the three small state Presidency cases based on its relative success in advancing priorities, on a scale of zero to ten. The Czech Republic scored the lowest with 5 points, Slovenia was awarded 7 points and Sweden came in at the top with 8 points. These states' Presidencies varied in many ways including the number of priorities they created, in the relative complexity or moderacy of the priorities, in the domestic and EU political circumstances surrounding their presidency terms and the level of EU experience they have. I compared the total score of their judged priorities to five different factors including experience and upcoming elections, a factor that is related to the domestic political scene. It appears there may be a relationship between the EU support of a country and the advancement of its priorities, but further testing would be necessary to confirm this indication. Other possible explanations could include the strength of their civil service, measured possibly by the share of civil service positions allocated based on competitive examination, or cooperation with the other trio members.

Small states play a very different role from some of the major actors in the EU because they have fewer resources to put toward the Presidency. On the other hand, they also may have more to gain from the position. Small states typically benefit from holding the Presidency because the term can augment their influence and reputation among other member states in the Council. A reputation of a member that will cooperate may provide more leverage and greater trust from other states in bargaining. The 2009 Slovenian Presidency exceeded expectations and enhanced its reputation

(Bukowski, 2009). On the other hand, an unsuccessful Presidency could damage a state's reputation "and affect its future ability to successfully pursue its foreign policy objectives" (Bukowski, 2009, p. 99). Hoyland and Hansen (2013) emphasize the importance of trust and reputation: "Because of the high frequency of meetings and negotiations... reputation matters a lot" (p. 2). Small states seem to have more to gain or lose from holding the Presidency than large states. It is an important opportunity to lead EU decision-making.

According to Bunse (2009), there are "a number of gaps in our understanding of the Council presidency" because "most work... focuses on [the presidency's] legal status and formal functions" and other works are comprised of single country case studies (p. 2). This article may contribute to a better understanding of the Presidency position in general, and how small states operate within the Presidency in specific.



## Chapter 2: The EU Council Presidency

This section first covers a brief history of the European Union, its setup and the Council of Ministers over which the Presidency presides. The history of the Presidency is presented, and then topics including the role of the Presidency, its functions, how it influences the agenda and how scholars explain variation are covered.

### History of the European Union

The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) is the foundation that led to the organization of the EU over time. Six countries—West Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg—established the ECSC in April 1951. The organizational features of the ECSC included a parliamentary assembly, a court, a council and a supranational administration, which developed into many of the institutions and the general structure of the EU today (Nedergaard, 2007, p. 45).

The European Economic Community (EEC), founded in 1957, shared much of the same institutional setup as the ECSC. As European cooperation developed and progressed, much was modeled on the original ECSC (Nedergaard, 2007, p. 48). The Merger Treaty in 1965 created a common Commission and Council of Ministers for the ECSC, the EEC and the European Atomic Energy Community.

Over the years the breadth of European cooperation and the membership of these communities increased. In 1993, the Maastricht Treaty established the European Union with twelve member states. Various treaties have enlarged the number of members to 28, Croatia becoming the newest in July 2013. The administration of the EU is a mix between national and international features, and has both federalist and intergovernmental traits (Nedergaard, 2007, p. 8).

## History of the Council of the European Union

The Council of the European Union works with the European Parliament in what is essentially a bicameral legislature of the EU. The Council of the European Union is also referred to as “the Council” or the Council of Ministers. It differs from the European Council,<sup>2</sup> which is comprised of the heads of states or governments of the EU. There are many different configurations of the Council of the European Union, depending on the subject being discussed. The ministers of the specific subject from each member state meet, and are led by the representative from the member state holding the Presidency. In cooperation with the European Parliament, the Council is the main decision-making body of the EU (Nedergaard, 2007, p. 59).

Ole Elgström (2003) calls the Council of the European Union “the foremost site of intergovernmental activism in the EU,” contrasting it with the “supranational Commission and the directly elected European Parliament” (p. 3). It is important to note, though, that the Council has supranational features too: Bunse (2009) labels it “supranational in its operation and an institution in its own right,” pointing to the expectation to “broker compromises acceptable to all other decision-makers within a culture of consensus” (p. 39). The system of weighted voting, qualified majority voting, makes bargaining and compromise an essential part of decision-making in the Council, enriching the influence of the Presidency as a mediator and broker. The Council is part of a body of institutions that develop and finalize legal acts of the EU. These acts take three forms: regulations that are direct and binding at the EU level, directives that are

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<sup>2</sup> Since 1975 the European Council was an informal institution, and became an official institution with the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. It is led by a permanent President with a term of two and a half years—currently held by Herman von Rompuy—rather than being part of the rotating Presidency, as a result of the Lisbon Treaty.



legally binding but must be incorporated into the national law of member states, and decisions that are binding but more specific in their focus or application (Nedergaard, 2007, pp. 52-54).

The executive body of the European Union, the European Commission, holds the “almost exclusive right to initiate legislative proposals,” which are presented to the European Parliament and then passed onto the Council of Ministers (Thomson & Hosli, 2006, p. 14). The Council is permitted to request that the Commission introduce a legislative proposal, but the Presidency plays a larger role in setting and controlling the agenda than the introduction of topics (Nedergaard, 2007, p. 59). The Presidency may propose topics for general policy debates, however (Tallberg, 2006, p. 50). Through the co-decision process, the Council and the European Parliament work together on legislative compromises (Rasmussen, 2011, p. 44). On most topics the Council and the Parliament both have to agree for proposals to pass, but on some subjects—such as budget or home affairs—one body can decide on its own. Whereas the Council represents member states, the Parliament represents EU citizens because the people directly elect its members (Nedergaard, 2007, p. 118). While the Parliament has gained influence, it still lacks the right to initiate legislation and according to Nedergaard, most legislative powers lie with the Council (2007, p. 59).

Member state representatives in the Council of Ministers negotiate solutions and often form consensus through this bargaining and compromise. While some decisions are made via qualified majority voting, Hoyland and Hansen point to voting records that reveal “high levels of unanimous votes even in policy areas where a qualified majority of the weighted votes would have sufficed” as evidence of the culture of consensus



within the Council (2013, pp. 1-2). The weightings of qualified majority voting consider population size but are designed to over-represent small states and under-represent large ones to create a more even playing field (Bunse, 2009, p. 21). The number of votes each country is allotted is adjusted as new member states join. Overall, bargaining is of critical importance because of the number of decisions that are passed through forming consensus. The Presidency plays an important role in working to form consensus through negotiation.

### **History of the EU Council Presidency**

The Presidency position within the Council of Ministers dates back to the 1951 Treaty of Paris that “stated each government would hold the Council [of Ministers of the European Communities] chair for three months in rotation and that it would be responsible for convening meetings” (Bunse, 2009, p. 31). The 1957 Treaty of Rome designated a six-month term length for the Presidency (Alexandrova & Timmermans, 2013, p. 318). The Presidency position is an example of an EU institution that provides some equality among the member states (Bunse, 2009, p. 28). It rotates between all member states, allowing both large and small countries the opportunity to guide EU legislation. According to Elgström (2003), “holding the Presidency automatically places a country at the centre of the EU negotiation processes” (p. 3). The rotating Presidency is also important because it “has ensured non-hierarchical and decentralized leadership of the Council” (Bunse, 2009, p. 38).

In order to counter some of the disruption of the Presidency changing twice a year, the EU began in 2007 a “trio” or “troika” system of three Presidencies that work together to form coordinated preparation and work programs, with the intent of

enhancing continuity (Bukowski, 2009, p. 97; Batory and Puetter, 2013, p. 96). While the rotation set-up of the Presidency originally followed alphabetical order, member states are now arranged with consideration of a number of factors, including experience, size, geographic location and economic differences (Bukowski, 2009, p. 97) The three member states that make up each trio of Presidencies work together to form a more cohesive program for the 18-month span of their Presidency terms. Each country creates its own work program with individual priorities, but the trio group forms common themes to plan around.

The role of the Presidency has changed over time. According to Bunse (2009), it evolved from more of an administrative position to taking on a position of leadership (p. 19). The position has become more tasking with the addition of new member states. Quaglia and Moxon-Browne (2006) assert that “The functions of business manager and mediator have become more important” with such increases (p. 351). With more members, “the evolution of the EU’s voting system and increased diversity has made coalition-building more complicated,” according to Bunse (2009, p. 59). The role of the Presidency changed most recently under the 2009 Lisbon Treaty. Previously, the Council Presidency ruled over both the Council of Ministers and the European Council. This meant that the head of state of the presiding country led the European Council. The Lisbon Treaty removed some of the responsibilities of the Presidency and it now presides only over the Council of the European Union. When political leaders of larger member states proposed the permanent European Council position, smaller states were skeptical of the loss of responsibility and power the Presidency would face (Crum, 2009, p. 686). Small member states “feared that [the position]... might become an agent



of the bigger member states” (Crum, 2009, p. 686). The impetus behind the change was that the EU decision-making process appeared to have become increasingly difficult (Dinan, 2010, p. 97). Dinan notes that the changes under the Lisbon Treaty limit the role of the Presidency, but categorizes the treaty as “a reasonable balance between institutional efficiency and democratic legitimacy” (2010, p. 98). One key change is the designation of a High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, removing the influence of Presidency leadership on the topic to an extent (Batory & Puetter, 2013, p. 106).

While Batory and Puetter (2013) argue that the organization of the trio and the changes derived from the Lisbon Treaty lead to a reduction in importance and visibility of individual Presidencies, it may be too soon to determine the actual effects. The trio system enhances the coordination of planning and preparation, but each Presidency seems to add its own flavor and is known better for what it accomplished individually than what the trio as a whole achieved. This “flavor” is apparent in the priorities and interests promoted by Presidencies. For example, the 2003 Greek Presidency emphasized a Western Balkans agenda, focused at integration and reform (Bunse, 2009, pp. 167-8). The 2009 Czech Presidency is not only remembered for the collapse of the country’s government during the Presidency term, but also a colorful art display depicting stereotypes of EU member states. It portrayed “Germany as a swastika-shaped autobahn network and Romania as a Dracula theme park,” (Barber, 2009). The artwork received criticism “especially from countries such as Bulgaria [portrayed as a toilet] who felt the sculpture had gone beyond a provocative joke and was merely offensive” (Beneš and Karlas, 2010, p. 71). This “flavor” may also be observed in how countries

approach the Presidency position. For example, the 1997 Netherlands' Presidency, took a more modest, "subservient" approach to running the Presidency than others (van Keulen and Rood, 2003, p. 82).

### **Roles and Functions of the Presidency**

The Presidency has many tasks to handle in its six-month term. Provisional standing orders in 1958 designate the position's duties, which included chairing meetings, drafting minutes, signing documents and representing the Council (Bunse, 2009, p. 31). Many of its tasks today are similar to these original ones. In the book *European Union Council Presidencies: A Comparative Perspective*, Ole Elgström (2003) lists four main functions of the Presidency: Administration and coordination, Setting political priorities, Mediation and Representation (pp. 5-7). The Presidency organizes and leads meetings, establishes priorities or areas of focus, negotiates deals and solutions to coordinate agreement on legislation, and represents the Council to other EU bodies and to other countries in international forums.

While the Presidency is responsible for leading decision-making in the EU, it is expected to do so impartially. The Presidency position, in theory, is not to be used to push a state's own agenda. Instead, the Presidency is a leader and mediator, arranging meetings and guiding cooperation (Mix, 2010; Bunse, 2009; Bukowski, 2009). An EU official interviewed by Elgström (2003) explained that the position "is a chairman, not a president" and "should concentrate on 'moving things forward'" (p. 50). In leading discussion, the Presidency may highlight certain issues it feels do not receive adequate attention, but is to remain neutral and not force a side on those issues.



**Leader.** First and foremost, the Presidency serves as a leader, “providing visions of the future and guiding the integration process towards these new goals” (Elgström, 2003, p. 1). It is expected to present policy priorities and proposals, coordinate progress on legislation and arrange summits, among other duties (Mix, 2010, p. 4). One of the necessary traits for a successful presidency is a strong understanding of EU bureaucracy and configuration (Quaglia & Moxon-Browne, 2006, p. 362; Bukowski, 2009, p. 97). According to Bukowski, the Presidency position “require[s] a solid grasp of the subtleties of EU policy-making” because it chairs meetings of the Council of Ministers at its various levels including the Committee of Permanent Representatives (2009, pp. 97-98). Without such knowledge, a Presidency will struggle to organize and lead in an effective manner. The Presidency has access to a resource that can provide information and guide the Presidency state through the process: the Council Secretariat<sup>3</sup> (Thomson, 2008a, p. 597). The Council Secretariat creates a briefing book for the incoming Presidency, with an explanation of where in the decision-making process different pieces of legislation are, what topics must be debated and obstacles that may arise (Nedergaard, 2007, p. 156). Additionally, the Secretariat provides logistical support, advice and assistance in coordination (EU Presidency Handbook, 2011, pp. 12-13).

Because the three cases discussed later all began before the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, the description of the roles, tasks and functions of the Presidency will focus on those dictated through treaties such as the Maastricht Treaty, prior to the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty. For example, the Lisbon Treaty reduced the Council Presidency’s role in relation to foreign affairs policy but that change is

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<sup>3</sup> The Council Secretariat, also known as the General Secretariat of the Council, is a body of officials responsible for assisting the European Council and the Council of Ministers.

excluded from the analysis of the case studies. According to Drieskens (2011), the 2010 Belgian Presidency “experience confirmed that the rotating Presidency remains a crucial actor in EU decision-making,” confirming that even with these changes stemming from the Lisbon Treaty the Presidency remains an important position to study (p. 100).

***Administration and coordination.*** In leading the Council of Ministers and the European Council, the Presidency is responsible for organizing and running meetings in its state and in Brussels. The Presidency country “chairs meetings at all levels of intergovernmental negotiation, from working parties with member state and Commission officials, and Coreper with their ambassadors, to Council ministerial meetings and summits, involving heads of governments and states” (Elgström, 2003, p.3). Bunsie (2009) estimates the number of meetings run by a Presidency during its six-month term to be between 1,500 and 2,000 (p. 45), whereas Bukowski (2009) approximates it closer to 4,000 meetings (p. 98). Elgström (2003) also notes that the duties that fall under administration and coordination have increased with each enlargement of the EU. The Presidency has more to coordinate and holding the position has become more taxing.

***Setting political priorities.*** One of the tasks of the Presidency is to prepare a list of priorities for its term (Elgström, 2003, p. 6). These priorities are published in the form of a Work Program but are also referred to throughout speeches, reports and the Presidency websites. Priorities often evolve through preparation. For example, the 2009 Czech Republic began with five priorities in October 2007, but narrowed them down to three somewhat broader ones the following year (Karlas, 2009, p. 10). Policy



developments and unanticipated circumstances at the EU-level result in changes in what the Presidency country views as realistic, which can prompt the adjustment of priorities. The Czech Presidency dropped a priority centered around budget reform because “the EU agenda had changed and it did not seem any more reasonable to push the reform through in the first half of 2009” (Karlas, 2009, p. 11). Priorities may differ between member states along regional, socio-economic or constitutional lines (Elgström, 2003, p. 11). As examples of variation in socio-economic priorities, Elgström points to countries that emphasize the environment (e.g. the 2009 Swedish Presidency) or those that highlight gender equality (e.g. the trio group of Ireland, Lithuania and Greece). Regional variation may include highlighting issues occurring in the state’s local region, or emphasizing a region the state has interests in, such as the 2001 Belgian Presidency and its attention to conflict prevention in the African Great Lakes region (Bunse, 2009, p. 117).

In 1993, the Presidency officially received the right to “propose issues for general policy debates” (Tallberg, 2006, p. 50), which allows for more influence over policy initiation (Allerkamp, 2010, p. 7). As mentioned, the Commission almost always must introduce a legislative proposal, but the Council is permitted to request proposals. The Presidency may use these tools to set and develop policy priorities.

**Mediation.** The Presidency also acts as a mediator between member states and their representatives in the European Council and the various forms of the Council of Ministers. Decisions are often made through forming a consensus, although voting can be carried out in the Council through either unanimous or qualified-majority voting.



The Presidency coordinates member states through negotiation and coalition building within the Council to acquire enough votes to pass issues.

The Council is divided into three main levels: the ministerial level at the top, the level of the Committee of the Permanent Representative of the Member States (Coreper) in the middle, comprised of ambassadors and deputies representing the member states, and working groups at the bottom (Thomson and Hosli, 2006, p. 16).

The Presidency country representative manages meetings at all levels. Once the Commission makes a proposal that covers an area in which the Council has “decision-making competency” and the European Parliament offers a decision on it, the Council begins processing the proposal in working groups (Nedergaard, 2007, p. 164). It is then sent to Coreper and subsequently onto the ministerial level. Decision-making can be a lengthy process of negotiation because of the Council’s goal of reaching consensus (Nedergaard, 2007, pp. 166, 171). The Presidency plays a large role in facilitating negotiation and compromises. According to Nedergaard, package deals are sometimes created in which one member state may request support for a certain proposal from a second member state, in exchange for its future support on a different proposal (2007, pp. 172-173). These informal deals can be useful in forming agreement within the Council or between the Council and the European Parliament (Kardasheva, 2009, p. 3).

**Representation.** The Presidency is responsible for representing the Council of Ministers both internally and externally: within the EU to other institutions, and to represent the Council and the EU more broadly in conferences or summits with third countries (Elgström, 2003, p. 7). A task of the Presidency is to form consensus within the EU and represent this position in international forums (Bengtsson, 2003). One

aspect of internal representation is the responsibility of the Presidency to represent the Council in its dealings with the other legislative body of the EU, the European Parliament (Thomson & Hosli, 2006, p. 17). There are certain subjects on which the Presidency acts as the external representative for the EU as a whole. Prior to the changes under the Lisbon Treaty, the Presidency was responsible as the external representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy for representing the EU internationally and “acting as an EU spokesperson” on foreign policy topics (Bengtsson, 2003, p. 59). Another example of external representation is the 2009 Swedish Presidency, which was responsible for acting as the EU representative in the Copenhagen Conference on climate change. According to Bengtsson, the Presidency’s role of external representation has “developed incrementally, much more in response to political developments than to formal regulations” (2003, p. 68). Representation—both within the EU and outside it—is a crucial role of the Presidency that can help build or can damage a country’s reputation.

**Neutral broker.** In order to be a credible and trusted leader, the Presidency should also act as a neutral broker. Elgström (2003) notes, “The norm that the Presidency should be neutral and impartial is almost uncontested, among practitioners as well as among academic writers” (p. 39), although that does not mean neutrality is always obvious or present in practice. Neutrality is important because it aids in establishing cooperation, trust and credibility among member states (Bunse, 2009, p. 43). The Presidency is to distance itself from its own preferences and avoid expressing favoritism to the preferences of another member state (Bunse, 2009, p. 43). A successful Presidency can strengthen a state’s reputation in EU diplomacy (Schalk,



Torenvlied, Weesie & Stokman, 2007), and therefore many states are attentive to neutrality. Presidency states may follow the norm of neutrality because “non-compliance could compromise one’s reputation or provoke non-co-operation from other governments” (Verhoeff & Niemann, 2011, p. 1276). On the other hand, compliance with the norm may increase opportunities for cooperation and bargaining once the state’s Presidency term is over. In a survey of Swedish officials related to the Presidency by Brattberg, Rhinard and Kajnč (2011), 73.5 percent stated that reaching agreements took precedence over Swedish interests – indicating the neutral broker role seemed more important to them than advocating for their own state’s interests (p. 22). According to Elgström (2003), commission officials prefer the Presidency to be run primarily out of Brussels, rather than the host country’s capital, because it enhances coordination with the Commission and whereas Presidencies hosted in a capital city are “more prone to be attentive to their own national interests” (p. 5). Enhanced coordination with the Commission is important because it has the primary ability to introduce legislative proposals.

The struggle with the norm of impartiality<sup>4</sup> is more obvious in situations in which the issue is highly contentious or the Presidency country is in a minority position. As Elgström (2003) explains, such a situation results in a dilemma between the Presidency state either giving up its resistance to the issue or protecting national interests but not acting impartially (p. 50). This dilemma also includes the balance between protecting a state’s policy interest on a certain position versus the self-interest of earning or maintaining the status of a credible, neutral broker. There can be domestic

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<sup>4</sup> Note that while there may be distinctions between neutrality and impartiality in certain uses of the term, I am using the two interchangeably here.

consequences for giving up resistance to a certain issue, such as loss of popularity for the political party or coalition in power, but consequences exist at the EU-level in terms of reputation and cooperation prospects as well. The state must weigh the two and determine which is more important. One solution Elgström points to in this situation is for the Presidency to delay a decision on such legislation until it is out of office and the next term has begun (Elgström, 2003, p. 50). Then, the Presidency would no longer be constrained by the impartiality norm. Elgström also notes that “partiality under certain circumstances is permitted, or even expected, despite the impact of the very strong impartiality norm” (2003, p. 38). One such circumstance is when the Presidency’s national position is in alignment with the majority position. It may allowably push for the majority position in order to form consensus (Elgström, 2003, p. 50). On the other hand, Elgström adds, “A blatant advocacy of obvious self-interests is...not tolerated” (2003, p. 39). States may criticize another for instances of partiality and may be more reluctant to cooperate with that state.

Large states tend to be more partial than small states, argues Elgström, or they may at least be “more prone to intervene actively in favour of their own interests” (2003, p. 49). He points to France as an especially “outspoken proponent” of its interests (Elgström, 2003, p. 49). Large states may have less to lose in terms of credibility because they are already powerful and have a larger proportion of votes in the Council. They are more likely to attempt unilateral action than small states (Quaglia & Moxon-Browne, 2006, p. 362). According to Elgström (2003), large states typically have more precise positions on issues, whereas small states sometimes have less national interest on certain topics and a wider range of acceptable outcomes.



Even a state that is impartial overall may have certain issues that are more contentious and salient, and will work harder to defend specific positions on those issues. Bunse describes the 1998 Austrian Presidency as an example, which was “seen as a defender of national interests” on certain issues such as employment, tax and security affairs, while “a passive, honest broker” on initiatives in other areas (2009, p. 48). Another example is the 2000 French Presidency, “a genuine broker in the negotiations on the flexibility dossier... [but] strongly biased in case of extending QMV” (Bunse, 2009, p. 48). Bunse (2009) explains, “the government holding the presidency may only be a genuine neutral broker in dossiers where it has few key interests at stake or when its concerns are close to the centre ground” (p. 48). Lapses in impartiality may be expected or common on certain issues, like foreign policy. Two examples of partiality related to foreign affairs include “the 1998 UK Presidency aligned [that] itself with the American position threatening military action in Iraq without any previous consultation” of the rest of the Union, and as a “Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi [who] made little effort to play an even hand in the Middle East conflict under his 2003 presidency” because he is a strong ally of Israel (2009, p. 47). The norm of neutrality may constrain Presidencies in some circumstances, but in others the Presidency may determine that a certain policy outcome is more important than adhering to the norm, regardless of implications to cooperation or reputation.

### **What it Means for the Host Country**

Holding the Presidency provides status and an opportunity to influence the agenda, but has certain costs associated as well. Member states, especially small ones, appear to welcome the opportunity to take part in the Presidency because it is an

opportunity to lead the Council that all states receive. The Presidency position offers equality that is not attained elsewhere: it is more equal than the weighted votes in the Council of Ministers or the composition of the European Commission, according to Bunse (2009, p. 19). Major proponents for the abolition of the Presidency position in the early 2000s were French President Jacques Chirac and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, heads of large states (Bunse, 2009, p. 31). They eventually succeeded making the President of the European Council a permanent position. According to Crum (2009), small states met the proposal for a permanent president over the European Council “with considerable skepticism,” fearing the advantages it would provide the larger member states (p. 686). Small states defended the Presidency because the position is considered an “important safeguard against such a big state directorate and for the interests of the EU’s small states” (Bunse, 2009, pp. 30-31). Overall, the benefits of holding the Presidency—the opportunity to build reputation and credibility and the potential to influence the EU’s agenda or highlight certain topics—outweigh the costs, as evidenced by the importance many states place on the position.

The Presidency requires a large amount of resources expended by the host country, both in terms of financial expenditures as well as personnel and time. For administrative and policy coordination, countries hire hundreds of new staff members.<sup>5</sup> In the case of Slovenia, many of these new hires filled in as substitutes for civil servants who were busy with or relocated for Presidency work (Fink-Hafner & Lajh, 2008, p. 40). The financial burden is also high for less wealthy member states (Bunse, 2009, p.

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<sup>5</sup> The Swedish Presidency hired 200 extra staff to handle the workload, according to their post-Presidency report. The Czech Presidency hired 378 new civil servants, according to the “Czech Presidency by the numbers” press release. Over 1,500 Czech civil servants in total worked on the Presidency.



45). Bunse notes that Finland spent between 50 and 60 million euros and Ireland spent 90 million during their Presidencies in 1999 and 2004, respectively (2009, pp. 45-46). Both the financial and administrative burden can strain the foreign ministry as well as other segments of the member state, which can be a large burden for small states, according to Nedergaard (2007, p. 147).

On the other hand, the host country benefits in that it *receives* certain resources when holding the Presidency. For example, it has the aid of the Council Secretariat to provide guidance on policy and bureaucratic issues. The Council Secretariat can offer the Presidency its assessment of discussions between member states, knowledge of attitudes and proposals of alternatives (Bunse, 2009, p. 68). According to Bunse, the technical and legal advice the Secretariat can provide is especially helpful to small states (2009, p. 68). Another resource available to the Presidency is information received through “confessionals” which are confidential talks with representatives of other member states “to establish where a compromise may be found and what the margins of manoeuvre are” (Bunse, 2009, p. 54). These confessionals genuinely aid in negotiation but can also provide a clear advantage to the Presidency in knowing the positions and limits of various member states (Warntjen, 2008b, p. 317). This privileged knowledge can help Presidencies avoid deadlock in negotiation and “enables presidents to formulate proposals that are acceptable to other Member States” (Thomson, 2008a, p. 597). These resources provide an advantage to the Presidency as a mediator but also as a representative of its national policy interests. They can augment the Presidency’s ability to influence the agenda and policy outcomes.



Another advantage of holding the Presidency, especially for small countries or newer EU member states, is the potential to demonstrate reliability and build credibility in terms of EU bargaining. For example, after many financial and political scandals in Spain, the 1995 Presidency “was seen as an opportunity to try to polish the tarnished image of the government in the eyes of the public” (Morata & Fernández, 2003, p. 181). Presidencies viewed as successful by representatives of other member states and EU officials may build support or partners for future cooperation. Lastly, the Presidency is an opportunity for new member states to gain knowledge and experience in EU decision-making and bureaucracy: according to Batory and Puetter, “by co-drafting the joint programme the civil servants in Budapest ‘developed an EU perspective and learned to think like a president’” (2012, p. 104).

### **Influencing the Agenda**

While the norm of neutrality may dictate to what extent Presidency holders compete for their own domestic political interests, it is commonly accepted that the Presidency does influence the agenda overall (Tallberg, 2003; Warntjen 2008b; Schalk et al., 2007). The ability to highlight certain issues and bring proposals to the Council via the Commission is a reason the position is so valued, especially among smaller member states. For example, the Slovenian Presidency brought heightened attention to conflict in the Balkans (Slovenian Presidency of the European Union, 2007). Perceptions of the Presidency’s role in influencing the agenda vary, however. Tallberg argues, “existing literature operates with a narrow understanding of agenda-shaping which causes it to underestimate the Presidency’s means to influence EU policy” (2003, p. 18). He instead emphasizes the differences between the various ways a Presidency

can affect an agenda: through setting, structuring and exclusion (Tallberg, 2003, p. 21). According to Tallberg, through the management of meetings in the Council, a Presidency can introduce topics of discussion (agenda-setting), it can highlight or avoid certain issues that are already present on the agenda (agenda-structuring), or it can block specific topics from being part of the discussion (agenda-exclusion) (2003, p. 21).

**Advancing national interests.** Many domestic actors see the Presidency as an opportunity to advance national interests, or at least bring attention to issues that may be overlooked (Elgström, 2003; Tallberg, 2003). Advancing the Presidency country's interests can occur during early stages in legislation through presenting proposals for debate, or later during the negotiation or adoption phases of a proposal. A top-level European Commission officer, interviewed by Tallberg, argues that countries overstep the limits of the neutrality norm, and others allow it because they know one day it will be their turn to lead and do the same (Tallberg, 2003, p. 33). Neutrality is not a hard and fast rule; Presidencies are still biased toward their own interests and sometimes act upon these biases. Partiality is acceptable and even expected in some cases.

**Agenda-shaping.** A Presidency inherits its agenda to an extent: much legislation is already in process when a new Presidency state begins its term and factors like the EU political landscape or external events may affect policy focus during the Presidency term (Tallberg, 2003; Warntjen, 2008b). Bunse (2009) explains, "Unfinished initiatives have to be continued and the general Community timetable (including annual budgetary and agricultural price reviews or the renewal of external trade and co-operation agreements) has to be followed" (p. 44). Nonetheless, the Presidency can shape the agenda in many ways. Tallberg uses the term "agenda-



shaping” to cover agenda-setting, agenda-structuring and agenda-exclusion (2003, p. 21). The Presidency can designate certain topics for discussion, or request a proposal from the Commission on policy it may want to pass. Such policy proposals may stem from a common interest designated by the trio group of Presidencies, from the individual Presidency’s work program, or may instead be sparked by an external event (for example, security policy work after an international crisis). While it is possible for the Presidency to initiate or promote new policies, it can also shape the agenda by limiting policy choices or making them appear unfavorable (Bunse, 2009, p. 49). A Presidency could hinder progress by adding generally unfavorable additions to the proposal, for example. Slowing progress is a more subtle way of fighting a proposal than blocking it completely, but another way the Presidency could negatively impact decision-making would be to actively or passively leave items off the agenda (Bunse, 2009, p. 49). Neither of these options lack consequences, however. According to a British official interviewed by Bunse it would be “unwise” for a state to ignore a specific agenda request of another state (2009, p. 49). Such a decision could be costly for a state’s reputation and also could impact the prospects for cooperation in the future.

A Presidency can make positive progress on an agenda item by highlighting the issue in various settings, including the different levels and configurations of the Council of Ministers. The Presidency is in charge of chairing formal and informal meetings at all levels, settings in which it can highlight an issue and devote discussion to it (Tallberg, 2003). Another example of emphasizing an issue is to draw attention to a topic by including it in the Presidency work program. These practices fall under agenda-setting and agenda-structuring.

**Pace.** According to Thomson, the pace of decision-making is another area in which the Presidency can levy influence. He notes that the Presidency can do this by “adjusting the levels of priority given to issues and by introducing proposals for compromises” (2008a, p. 597). For example, if a Presidency ranks one issue higher than others in terms of priorities, it may work harder to finalize legislation on that issue during its Presidency. In another scenario, if the Presidency knows that the upcoming Presidency state is favorable to a certain issue and trusts the issue will pass under that Presidency, it may relax the pace on that issue while prioritizing others for the time being. Once its Presidency term is complete, the country could fight whole-heartedly for its policy preference on that issue, unconstrained by the norms of neutrality. Two or more countries could arrange an informal agreement to exchange support on topics in a similar way. Strong, effective leadership may also affect the pace of decision-making. By acting as a formidable leader, the 2002 Danish Presidency quickly formed agreement on EU enlargement, a topic that many states were unenthusiastic about moving forward on (European Stability Initiative, n.d.).

**Limitations.** There are many limitations that can affect the extent to which a Presidency guides or shapes policy. One example is the short length of the Presidency term. Six months is almost always too short a period to introduce and finalize legislation. The process to form and adopt a proposal usually passes through multiple Presidency periods (Thomson, 2008a; Elgström, 2003; Tallberg, 2003; Manners, 2003). Internal EU and external events are other factors. No Presidency can anticipate what issues or crises will arise during its term. For the 2011 Hungarian Presidency, unexpected events included the earthquake and resulting tsunamis in Japan as well as



the uprisings in Libya that prompted a wave of migration to Europe (Ágh, 2012, p. 72). These events shifted Hungary's policy attention. Unexpected events also affect a Presidency's capacity to lead decision-making. Even when preparations are strong, domestic political turmoil can derail the Presidency's work, such as during the 2009 Czech Presidency.

Another limitation is that no Presidency term is independent of others, especially now that the trio format exists. Trio members coordinate preparation and priorities to an extent. The Spain, Belgium, Hungary trio "jointly developed a common Presidency programme, painstakingly prepared in the national capitals" and sent delegations of liaisons to each capital to enhance cooperation (Batory & Puetter, 2012, p. 102). Even before the trio set-up, however, Presidencies inherited part of their agendas from the prior Presidency (Manners, 2003). At the very least, they started from where the last Presidency finished—in that legislation would still be in processing at various stages—and the new Presidency must decide how to approach the legislation. EU Council Presidencies are individual and distinct, but interconnected.

**Timing.** Studies have found that the timing of the policy process is a factor in a Presidency's ability to influence policy outcomes. Specifically, Thomson (2008a) does not view the Presidency as having great influence to shape the outcome of legislation that is *initiated* or *forming* during its Presidency term, but asserts that Presidencies have the capability to influence legislation that is being *finalized* under the Presidency. Schalk et al. (2007) and Warntjen (2008b) also find that the finalizing Presidency holds the most influence over the content of decision outcomes. This finding is significant because as one looks at a Presidency's priorities and plans for its term, it may be that

the legislation already in processing is where the Presidency will have the greatest effect.


### **Explaining Variation**

Many different factors explain variation in the performance of Presidencies.

Some are domestic, like the composition of the government (i.e. the political orientation and the stability of the coalition), while others are external, such as international conflict or crises. Not all factors described below affect each Presidency, but they are important to consider when analyzing outcomes and comparing cases. The presence of international conflict or crises can derail work on certain issues if the EU and the Presidency's attention is suddenly directed elsewhere. A change in political leadership or the governing coalition will also affect the Presidency's ability to function effectively as new ministers and officials may become in charge of leading the Council.

Characteristics of the domestic political landscape—including party orientation, and leanings of parties and leadership toward issues such as EU membership and integration—affect a Presidency's preparation as well as its behavior and opportunities while holding the position. For example, when the 2009 Czech Presidency took office there were concerns over the country's euroskeptic President and the unstable governing coalition (Král, Bartovic, and Řiháčková, 2009; Král, 2008). Domestic politics can shape the Presidency by “facilitating or rendering more difficult certain courses of action” (Elgström & Tallberg, 2003, p. 194). These courses of action could be more difficult because something that may be popular and beneficial for the Presidency at the EU-level may be opposed at the national political level (Elgström & Tallberg, 2003). As Johansson, Langdal and von Sydow (2012) point out, if two





opposing groups had fought against each other recently in elections, and then cooperated in regards to the Presidency, they “would risk alienating party members and voters at large” (p. 222). Upheaval from even purely domestic problems can challenge the Presidency’s ability to work effectively and efficiently.

Along the same lines, the composition of the government can also affect how a Presidency performs. According to Elgström, “Countries with unstable coalition governments or fragile government majorities are hypothesized to defend self-interests stubbornly in order to remain in power, and to prioritize issues that are sensitive to domestic constituencies” (2003, p. 9). While managing the presidency, at the same time the government must “avoid decisions and compromises that can be exploited by its national party competitors” (Elgström & Tallberg, 2003, p. 195). The danger of such compromises can limit progress under a Presidency with an unstable government. A Presidency with a stable government is likely to be more effective and make a better mediator than one with an unstable government that is likely to focus more on its own interests and domestic politics than brokering consensus within the Council. Coalition problems can also affect the vital preparation period for Presidencies. For example, because of support and consensus issues in the Dutch government coalition, “it became increasingly difficult for the Dutch government to present a clear and ambitious programme for its EU Presidency... [which] may have hampered domestic co-ordination processes” (Van Keulen & Rood 2003, p. 85).

Upcoming elections are another factor that can affect cooperation within a state, and thus affect the Presidency’s performance. If a governing party is concerned about the possibility of not being elected, it may be more attuned to the interests of its

population than acting as a leader and negotiator within the EU (Elgström, 2003, p. 9). Costa, Couvidat and Daloz (2003) add that concerns over re-election “inevitably result in a certain timidity” (p. 128). A choice of the German government is evidence of the concerns that countries hold over upcoming elections: although scheduled to hold the Presidency in the second half of 2006, Germany switched with Finland through a 2002 Council Decision because federal elections were scheduled for the same time (Vestring, 2002; Lesen, 2005). In the case of the 2000 France Presidency, the “EU consequently became a ground for confrontation” between Jacques Chirac and Lionel Jospin, who were both expected to run for President in 2002 (Costa et al., 2003, pp. 128-9). This competition between the two “sometimes placed obstacles in the way of solutions to problems,” and “Jacques Chirac attempted to claim credit for some of the French initiatives [of the Presidency]... which were clearly out of his *domaine réservé*” (Costa et al., 2003, p. 129). Upcoming elections will generally have a negative or neutral effect on the Presidency’s work. At times an election could be a catalyst for cooperation, but it seems that most Presidency countries are wary of holding elections near to the Presidency period and of the effect it may have on the Presidency’s work.

The presence of strong leadership and a robust civil service are other factors within a state that affect its Presidency (Van Keulen & Rood, 2003; Costa et al., 2003). Civil servants are important in terms of cooperation with other Presidencies: in the case of the Spain – Belgium – Hungary trio, civil servants in each country developed links with other civil servants tasked with the same topic, and experienced enhanced coordination (Batory & Puetter, 2012, p. 104). Large member states often have an advantage in terms of a robust civil service because managing the Presidency is so



taxing for small countries and their staff. Preparation for the Presidency requires extensive training of the top civil servant professionals (Udovič & Svetličič, 2012, p. 11). In the case of Slovenia, those designated to be liaison officials and those that would be chairing positions on committees worked in Brussels for at least a year or two before the beginning of the Presidency term (Udovič & Svetličič, 2012, p. 11). Udovič & Svetličič see this as beneficial because the officials were then more familiar with the bureaucracy and processes, and therefore “better prepared to debate, negotiate and mitigate between various interests at the EU level” (2012, p. 11). Having a small body of civil servants with little training can be detrimental to the mission of the Presidency if they lack understanding and cannot successfully maneuver the EU decision-making process.

Many exogenous factors can affect a Presidency’s ability to lead EU decision-making. These include international conflicts and crises, natural disasters and more. The state of EU internal affairs and inter-institutional relations are other additional factors (Bunse, 2009, p.5). For example, as inter-institutional relations change, like they did with the Treaty of Lisbon, the various institutions must readjust and figure out what the new relationships will look like. The relations can be unsteady at first. In terms of internal affairs, the general status of support for integration plays a role in how much a Presidency and the EU in general can accomplish. Resources allocated for the Presidency, support for EU integration and past Presidency experience are additional factors (Bunse, 2009; Bukowski, 2009; Costa et al., 2003).

In regards to economic policy, the fact that not all EU member states are members of the euro zone can influence discussion and hinder a non-euro zone

Presidency (Pomorska & Vanhoonacker, 2012). In the case of Poland, the 2011 Presidency was “handicapped” and there were “clear limits to the scope of action by the Polish chair,” according to Pomorska and Vanhoonacker (2012, pp. 77-78). German Chancellor Merkel and French President Sarkozy took charge instead, and Poland had more of a coordinating role (Pomorska & Vanhoonacker, 2012, p. 82). The 2012 Danish Presidency faced similar problems. Euro zone issues were “out of its reach,” and Manners (2013) feels more could have been accomplished by the Presidency had it been a eurozone member (p. 71). The fact that none of the three countries in the trio Poland – Denmark – Cyprus were members of the euro zone may have been a factor that hindered the Presidencies’ capabilities to act on euro-related economic topics.

### **Approaches to Understanding the Presidency**

Scholars draw upon two competing variations of institutionalism to explain actions of the Presidency. Both are convincing, but they emphasize different factors. In explaining the behavior of Presidencies, rational choice institutionalists emphasize a member state’s national interests, whereas sociological institutionalists emphasize norms and expectations of the Presidency as explanation for its behavior. It is difficult to state which approach better fits Presidency analysis because it can be hard to distinguish what behavior based on national interests looks like versus what behavior based on norms and expectations looks like. Both approaches provide insight and a deeper understanding to the Presidency institution.

**Rational choice institutionalism.** Self-interest and cost-benefit analysis are two features that rational choice institutionalists highlight when analyzing the Presidency and Council decision-making (Verhoeff & Niemann, 2011; Elgström & Tallberg, 2003).



A rational choice institutionalist approach perceives the Presidency to be a strategic actor that operates within the norms of the position to further national interests (Elgström, 2003). This approach explains the Presidency's ability to influence Council decision-making because it emphasizes the institutions that "provide the presidency with asymmetric access to information and asymmetric control over the negotiation procedure vis-à-vis other member states" (Schalk et al., 2007, pp. 230-231). The Council Secretariat—an aid to the Presidency in terms of navigating bureaucracy and forming consensus—is one example of an institution that provides these benefits. Utility maximization of resources available to the Presidency is another important part of this approach. A Presidency works to maximize its national interest, but as noted before, this can vary between domestic interest on certain policies and broader national interest to gain a stronger reputation within the EU decision-making realm. Norms like neutrality are not obeyed simply for the sake of being norms, but instead are "enacted as a result of cost-benefit calculations because non-compliance could compromise one's reputation or provoke non-co-operation from other governments" (Elgström and Tallberg, 2003, as cited in Verhoeff and Niemann, 2011, 1276). While many factors, such as the domestic and EU political situations, external crises and more, affect how a Presidency acts, the rational choice institutionalist approach emphasizes utility-maximization and national interest. Such an approach does explain the decision-making behavior of Presidencies.

**Sociological institutionalism.** The sociological institutionalist approach, on the other hand, emphasizes national identity, norms, expectations and perceptions over national interests (Elgström, 2003; Verhoeff & Niemann, 2011; Bunse, 2009). The approach "emphasize[s] the relevance of internalization of the impartiality norm and the

obligation to fulfil core leadership functions to the benefit of the Union” (Batory and Puetter, 2013, p. 100). Under sociological institutionalism, informal practices and power relations are significant (Jenson & Mérand, 2010, p. 74). Included in these informal practices is the norm of neutrality, which according to this approach weighs more heavily on a Presidency than specific national policy interests. Expectations of Presidencies also influence behavior. As Verhoeff and Niemann describe, “The behaviour of actors is determined by what they think is expected from them, or by what they themselves believe is appropriate, rather than cost-benefit calculations” (2011, p. 1276). Van Keulen and Rood (2003) point to the 1997 Dutch Presidency as an example. They argue that the political landscape affected how the Dutch perceived their Presidency potential, and in turn their behavior. This landscape included the Conservative UK government, which the Dutch viewed as a block to EU treaty reforms (Van Keulen & Rood, 2003, pp. 82-85). This perceived limitation changed how they understood their potential and in turn how they approached the Presidency, which centered around being a neutral broker rather than trying to push certain solutions (Van Keulen & Rood, 2003, p. 82).

## **Conclusion**

The EU Council Presidency is an important but often overlooked part of the EU decision-making body. The 2009 Lisbon Treaty reduced the role of the Presidency—which no longer chairs the European Council and has less involvement in foreign policy—but it remains an important position to observe and analyze because it is a major player in the EU legislative process (Drieskens, 2011, p. 100). Member states holding the position face a dilemma between addressing national interests and acting



within the norm of neutrality. It is a complex institution, but also a significant opportunity to affect EU policy and decision-making, an opportunity that small states especially value and defend.

### Chapter 3: Small State Presidencies

The EU Council Presidency is a note-worthy and understudied topic, and even less analyzed is the role of small states in the Presidency. Small state Presidencies usually have more to gain from a successful Presidency. A better reputation can foster negotiation and cooperation with other member states after the Presidency period. Although debatable, small state Presidencies are perceived by some scholars as advantaged in that they have fewer decisive self-interests and may find the diplomatic, neutral role of the Presidency easier (Elgström, 2003, p. 9). On the other hand, they often have fewer resources in terms of funding and staff, which can make running the Presidency a more difficult task. Small states are some of the staunchest defenders of the Presidency position because it provides an opportunity to influence the agenda, improve relationships with other member states and build credibility. Although the Presidency no longer leads the European Council, the opportunity to lead the Council of Ministers for six months once every several years is important, viewed as a counterweight to the power of some of the larger EU member states (Bunse, 2009, p. 61).

I chose three small state Presidencies to examine more closely: Slovenia (2008), the Czech Republic (2009) and Sweden (2009). These cases cover diversity in region and length of EU membership, and provide information on their priorities and achievements available on Presidency or government websites. There are many ways to evaluate Presidencies, depending on what one considers their primary role. I present an evaluation of the cases based on their relative success in advancing stated priorities from the countries' work programs and compare the results to factors that affect a



Presidency's operation. In evaluating the advancement of priorities, I designate progress on each priority as limited, moderate or substantial. The total scores for each Presidency are then compared to a number of factors that affect how Presidencies operate, such as support for EU integration and upcoming elections. Finally, I test for correlation between the different factors and review the results.

### **Qualities of Small State Presidencies**

Advantages of small state Presidencies include being more effective brokers because they “are believed to have fewer decisive self-interests to defend” (Elgström, 2003, p. 9). They are also seen as less prone to partiality than large states. According to an EU official Elgström interviewed, “the great power instinct is hard to get away from” and this is why Elgström views large powers as “more prone to intervene actively in favour of their own interests” (2003, p. 49). Another hypothesis for why they could be less prone to partiality is that they have more to gain or lose from holding the Presidency, in terms of reputation and credibility.

Another advantage of small states is that the smaller administrations of a small state Presidency are “Easier to coordinate than the big state's bureaucratic contacts” (2003, p. 9). Because small states' civil services tend to be more compact than large bureaucracies, these states are more likely to work closely with officials in the Commission, the European Parliament, and most of all, the Council Secretariat - a great resource of information on topics of the Presidency and Council (Quaglia & Moxon-Browne, 2006, pp. 353, 362).

Bunse (2009) agrees that states “have strong incentives to overcome their lack of resources through extensive use of Council assets, close collaboration with the

Commission, intensive preparation and efficient... coordination” (pp. 72-73). Some of the perceived disadvantages of small states can be overcome through such preparation and coordination. Such preparation may include administration and officials becoming familiar with Brussels and the process. As mentioned above, countries like Slovenia send their personnel to Brussels one or two years before the Presidency term starts in order to gain knowledge of the decision-making process and bureaucracy (Udovič & Svetličič, 2012, p. 11). Operating the Presidency also requires a large number of civil service personnel. Small states holding the Presidency likely need to train those serving the Presidency but also require additional civil servants to fill in at home while others are focused on the Presidency. Other preparation will include creating a work program of priorities, coordinating these priorities with the other members of the trio, and adjusting as needed based on changing EU and international situations.

According to Bukowski (2009), the responsibilities of the EU Presidency can be taxing on the resources—especially foreign policy resources—of smaller countries (p. 97). Small states appear to be less able to handle the burden than large states (Tiilikainen, 2003). A small state faces more pressure reputation-wise because there is more to gain or lose, according to Bukowski. Another disadvantage is that small states hold less “political clout and bargaining power, particularly needed in foreign affairs to solve major deadlocks” (Bunse, 2009, p. 63). Small size, fairly or not, is associated with many disadvantages and a perceived lack of power in EU diplomacy, both in general and specifically in relation to the Presidency.

Small member states value the institution of the Presidency because it helps equalize power differences (Bunse, 2009, p. 61). Rather than the “muscle” of some



large countries, small state diplomacy is perceived to be “the seeking of consensus, exploring possibilities for trade-offs and coalition-building” (Quaglia & Moxon-Browne, 2006, p. 362). Presidencies do not appear disadvantaged in terms of proposing and advancing policy: Bunse (2009) finds no evidence of a significant difference in terms the amount of legislation adopted under small and large presidencies.<sup>6</sup> While they face certain challenges, like that of resources, small state Presidencies can be very successful.

**Who are the small states?** There is no single accepted definition that categorizes small and large EU member states, but many of them overlap and define similar groups. For example, Bunse (2009) defines small states as those with significantly fewer than 40 million inhabitants (p. 11). This definition includes 22 out of 28 current EU member states.<sup>7</sup> Panke (2010), on the other hand, defines small states as those that have less than the average number of votes in the Council of the Ministers. At the time of writing her article, 19 out of the 27 EU member states were considered small states. After Croatia’s accession, 20 out of 28 member states fall below the average number of votes in the Council. The Czech Republic, Sweden and Slovenia all fit under both definitions of small states.

**Reasoning for case selection.** First and foremost, when organizing this paper, I wanted to study small member states. While some scholars, such as Bunse (2009), have analyzed small states, they are relatively under-explored in general Presidency

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<sup>6</sup> Bunse examined the number of Directives, Regulations, Decisions, Recommendations, Common Strategy/Joint Actions and other legislation that was adopted under each Presidency from 1999 through 2007. Upon comparing the averages of small and large state outputs, the numbers do not appear significantly different and according to Bunse, small states “generate similar levels of legislative output during their presidencies to big states” (pp. 206, 219-221). Bunse examined the total number of legislative output, but did not address the significance of the legislation, which may be a factor to consider in comparing legislative output.

<sup>7</sup> Under this definition, the large states include France, Germany, Italy, the UK, Spain and Poland.

literature. Many scholars, including Bunse, have examined Presidencies from the late 1990s or early 2000s. Instead, I wanted to study more recent cases because the European Union is a constantly-evolving body, and examining these cases may be more relevant. The case studies detailed in Bunse and Elgström's books took place before the 2004 addition of ten new member states and the implementation of the Treaty of Nice. Although the Treaty of Nice did not specifically target the Council Presidency, it did alter voting weights in the Council and decision-making in the Union. While choosing more recent cases resulted in fewer books covering the cases, and sometimes less literature overall, one additional resource was the websites maintained by each member state. The Czech and Slovenian Presidency websites are still running, which adds to the availability of sources on priorities and achievements. While the Swedish Presidency website is no longer running, many of the same resources are available from other Swedish government websites.

Small states typically have fewer resources, or at least smaller institutions and bureaucracies to accommodate the Presidency tasks, including running thousands of meetings. The limited civil service size of small states encourages closer collaboration with the Council Secretariat, which is a tremendous resource of bureaucratic, technical and legal knowledge (Quaglia & Moxon-Browne, 2006; Nedergaard, 2007). Large states tend not to take advantage of this resource as much as small states, according to Bunse (2009), because they have greater resources available and less prestige to gain from the Presidency (p. 156).

In these three cases, one finds diversity both in region and length of EU membership. As a Scandinavian country, Sweden was interested in pursuing greater



attention on the Baltic region. Slovenia is located in southern central Europe and was focused regionally on the Western Balkans because of its links to the area. The Czech Republic is also part of central Europe, but has a different regional focus and qualities than Slovenia. While Sweden acceded to the EU in 1995, the Czech Republic and Slovenia both became members in 2004. Two of these cases—the Czech Republic and Sweden—fall under the same trio with France. By selecting two Presidencies from the same trio, I remove trio membership as a source of variation.

In comparing Presidencies, it was also important to choose three cases that all generally fell under the same Treaty and number of member states (Manners, 2013, p. 70). Because the role of the Presidency has changed significantly under the Lisbon Treaty, I chose Presidencies that operated for the most under the same set of rules. All three Presidencies took office under the Treaty of Nice, before the Lisbon Treaty entered into force. Although the Lisbon Treaty was adopted on 1 December 2009, toward the end of the Swedish Presidency, it did not greatly alter the Swedish Presidency's operation as a whole.

### **The Cases of Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Sweden**

In this paper, I examine three cases—the EU Council Presidencies of Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Sweden—and evaluate them on the basis of the priorities set out in each country's work program. Slovenia held the Presidency for the first half of 2008, the Czech Republic for the first half of 2009 and Sweden followed with the second half of 2009. Presidencies lay out priorities in their work program that reveal what their plans are and what they want to accomplish during their terms. I find these

priorities a rational basis for evaluation because they detail what the Presidency state itself plans to accomplish during its six-month term.

**Slovenia.** When Slovenia took the Presidency, it had only been an EU member state for four years. Slovenia followed Germany and Portugal as the final member of the first trio Presidency group. As the first 2004 accession state to hold the Presidency position, expectations of its performance were rather low both throughout Europe and domestically in Slovenia (Bukowski, 2009, p. 101). It did request and receive assistance from its trio partners as well as other EU member states. As Slovenia had only a small number of embassies abroad, it formed an agreement with France to allow use of their embassies “for activities associated with the representation of EU interests abroad” during the Presidency term (Bukowski, 2009, p. 101). The recognition and attempt to compensate for such weaknesses was a positive sign of the preparation and thought that was put into the Slovenian Presidency.

The Presidency provided an opportunity for the state to prove its management and diplomatic ability. Slovenia had past leadership experience chairing the UN Security Council in 1998/99 and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in 2005, but this was the country’s first encounter with leading the EU. Preparations for the Presidency began in 2005, and according to Kanjč (2009b), Slovenia “prepared well” (p. 90). In October 2005, Slovenia adopted a staffing plan that increased the country’s permanent representation in Brussels and hired additional government employees to help with the Presidency (Bukowski, 2009, 100). Slovenia took a cautious approach to the Presidency, according to Fink-Hafner and Lajh (2008), prioritizing “playing it safe” over than a more ambitious agenda of priorities (p. 6). It



seemed aware of its limitations in forming priorities. Due to the limited expectations of other member states, “anything Slovenia did accomplish would count as a benefit” (Bukowski, 2009, p. 114). Bukowski points to the small size of the Slovenian “bureaucratic resources and diplomatic presence” as the reason for the Presidency’s limited scope, but being a fairly new member of the EU also probably contributed to this small diplomatic presence.

The Presidency received overall positive reactions from EU observers and diplomats in Brussels, although Bukowski (2009) attributes some of that to the very low expectations of its performance (pp. 108, 110-111). One issue the Slovenian Presidency encountered was a lack of human resources, both in quantity and quality (Kanjč and Svetličič, 2010, p. 98). In terms of quality, the depth of knowledge on fields relating to the Presidency and the EU was not strong enough. In the survey Kanjč and Svetličič carried out, Slovenian civil servant respondents also highlighted weak inter- and intra-ministerial cooperation as a problem that plagued the Presidency (2010, p. 98). Overall, the Slovenian Presidency enhanced the country’s reputation within the EU (Bukowski, 2009, p. 111), but there are areas from which the Presidency can learn and improve on in the future – such as expanding its civil service and improving intra-ministerial cooperation.

**Czech Republic.** The Czech Republic was also a newer member of the EU when it assumed the Presidency, but the prospect of its term was met with more hesitation than the Slovenian Presidency because of the Czech President Václav Klaus, a vocal euroskeptic. The Czech Republic began preparations in 2005 but did not take them seriously until 2007, according to Pehe (2008). The Czech work program assumed

a moderate approach, meaning that it was not extremely specific. It focused on practical policy initiatives on topics such as energy security (Šlosarčík, 2011, p. 28). This approach may be a reflection of the state acknowledging its lack of experience and low expectations. In March 2009, in the middle of its Presidency term, Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek's government lost a vote of no confidence. The opposition was aided by President Klaus and "sacrificed the credibility and reputation of the Czech Republic in the EU for short-term, domestic political gain" (Král et al., 2009, p. 29). A caretaker government was not installed until one and a half months after the vote of no confidence (Kaczyński, 2009a). According to Král et al, the move against Topolánek's government "was probably largely inspired by the President's intention to prevent the Lisbon Treaty from being ratified," as the Czech Senate was expected to vote on the issue in May (2009, p. 22). Mid-way through the Czech Presidency term, the downfall of the government was expected to delay items like forming a common EU position ahead of the Copenhagen Conference (Král, et al, p. 22). It is difficult to attribute any specific delay or failure to pass legislation to the fall of Topolánek's government, but the connection is conceivable. The domestic conflict "significantly weakened the performance of the Czech executive during the second half of the Presidency" (Šlosarčík, 2011, p. 9),

The political disaster during the Presidency damaged the Czech Republic's reputation and was a source of bad press: a headline of an *EUobserver* article read, "Czech presidency limps off EU stage" (Rettman, 30 June 2009). A Brussels-based ambassador explained, "Their officials were very good. Their politicians catastrophic" (Barber, 2009). Reactions were not entirely bad, as the Czech Presidency did manage to



accomplish some of its priorities and performed well as an impartial mediator during the Russia-Ukraine gas conflict (Král, Bartovic, & Řiháčková, 2009). The memory of the collapse of government left a mark, however. Even prior to the 2009 Presidency, Pehe (2008) perceived the Czech Republic as an impediment to EU integration, “a country that needlessly throws sand into the works of European integration,” (Pehe, 2008, p. 17), and its 2009 Presidency term did not better its reputation.

**Sweden.** Preparations for the Swedish Presidency began soon after Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt took office in 2006 (Miles, 2010). Nearly 200 additional personnel were hired in support of the Presidency (Swedish Presidency of the European Union, 2010). One of the state’s primary goals and accomplishments was not one of the five priorities listed in its work program, but instead the finalization of the Lisbon Treaty (Miles, 2010). The Treaty had been delayed due to opposition from a few countries, but its ratification was secured under the Swedish Presidency. Some scholars critique the lack of continuity between the France - Czech Republic - Sweden trio, although the Czech government collapse is a factor that contributed to the issue (Kaczyński, 2009b; Fabry, 2009). Although strong disapproval was expressed over the lack of international agreement on environmental issues at the Copenhagen, the Swedish Presidency is viewed as fairly successful overall.

### **Evaluation Based on Priority Advancement**

One approach to evaluating a Presidency is based on how well a member state leads the EU while holding the position. Because this concept is very broad and therefore resists measurement, a more specific focus can be set on the Presidency’s ability to advance the priorities it set out for its term. The Presidency guides the agenda

of the EU, but rather than influencing policy specifically toward its interests, it may instead focus on forming general cooperation and progress on the topic.

As Langdal (2010) notes, one drawback with reviewing a Presidency's performance based on the priorities they set is that "other actors will have a different set of expectations, which could constitute as an equally valid basis for structuring an account... but with a different content and possibly different conclusions" (p. 2). This is a good point but would complicate analysis because in choosing a different set of expectations, one would ignore yet other valid bases for evaluation. For the sake of this paper's analysis, a Presidency's priorities provide the clearest readings of its expectations and goals.

Priorities are typically outlined by Presidencies in work programs, as well as in reports and speeches. All work programs are not created equally, but that is part of the benefit of this form of evaluation. Presidencies do come from different backgrounds, levels of experience and have diverse expectations about what they can accomplish. Some appear to be more realistic in forming priorities than others.

One issue that Van Keulen and Rood (2003) point to is that it can be hard to distinguish between what was accomplished during preparation versus the actual Presidency period because some dossiers have been "thoroughly prepared ahead of time" (p. 79). On the other hand, preparation is part of what makes Presidencies successful and one should not fault or discount a state for making preparations ahead of time. Careful preparation of the agenda and staff likely is a factor that leads to a more successful Presidency. Another difficulty in evaluating Presidencies is that it "is nearly impossible to discern what specific result can be attributed to a country's Presidency" as



opposed to other factors (Van Keulen & Rood, 2003, p. 79). This, unfortunately, is something that is difficult to control for. All Presidencies take place in different environments.

The method of evaluating priority advancement is certainly subjective, but can still be useful in studying and comparing Presidencies. The sources from which information is drawn are likely to be biased in one way or another, which is why I drew from a variety of sources and viewpoints covering the Presidency's preparations and its outcome. Priorities set out in Presidency work programs, elaborated in speeches and other reports are the basis of evaluation for the three cases. I describe the priorities and make an assessment on how well the Presidencies advanced their goals. Brattberg, Rhinard and Kajnič (2011) point out that "any country will be prone to report that it achieved its objectives," or may exaggerate the extent to which it achieved them (p. 19). Reliance on that a broad range of sources including journal articles, newspapers and government reports helps to compensate for some of the self-promotion naturally present in achievement reports.

Work programs help deliver a clear message about what the Presidency intends to accomplish during its term. While some programs may be more limited or vague than others that are detailed and specific, the broad programs are no less valid. Specificity or lack thereof may reflect the Presidency taking into account its capabilities, and trying to be realistic about what it can and cannot accomplish in the six-month term. While some err on the pragmatic side, others attempt too much, like the 1998 British Presidency that set sixty-three goals and six major themes (Manners, 2003, p. 98).<sup>8</sup> A Presidency's

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<sup>8</sup> I searched for how many of the sixty-three goals the British Presidency fulfilled, but Manners (2003) does not cover it and did not find the information elsewhere.

priorities guide its preparation and work during the Presidency period, and provide a strong basis from which to evaluate the cases.

**Scale.** Each priority is judged separately on a scale of 0, 1 or 2. Such evaluation is subjective, but I attempt to make clear the reasoning behind each rating in hopes that others can understand and may concur. On this scale, 0 signifies limited advancement of priorities, 1 equals moderate progress and 2 indicates substantial progress. Zero does not signify that no progress occurred and two does not stand for complete achievement of priorities because every Presidency makes at least some advancement of a priority, and no Presidency advances a priority perfectly. Every priority would be rated at a 1 and the other two measures would be useless. So instead, in order to diversify the rankings given to the Presidencies, limited, moderate and substantial ranks of progress are used.

Because the Czech Presidency's work program contains only three major priorities, unlike the five that Slovenia and Sweden produced, I weight its performance in the three categories to match the 10 possible points that the Slovenian and Swedish performance can achieve. There were six possible points from the 3 Czech priorities. The six points were multiplied by five-thirds to reach a total of 10 possible points, and therefore the weighted Czech score is 6 points (3 points multiplied by  $5/3$ ).

### **Priorities of the Presidencies**

Before each Presidency began, the government put together a list of priorities published in their work programs and emphasized elsewhere, such as in speeches made by the country's leaders. I explore each priority, the country's progress on the topic, and make an assessment on what score the priority receives.



**Slovenia.** Slovenia's work program consists of five priorities, spanning from Lisbon Treaty finalization to enhancing intercultural dialogue. According to Bukowski (2009), Slovenia "made a realistic assessment of its capabilities" in forming its work program and planning for the six-month term (p. 114). The Slovenian Presidency seems to have taken a pragmatic approach, in that did not attempt to stretch its abilities too far. The work program also included areas of focus that were not in the five main priorities, such as goals related to justice and home affairs. Those topics are not used to evaluate the Presidency, but the Presidency's accomplishments on such issues contribute to its overall reception by EU observers and officials.

#### Slovenian Priorities

- The future of the Union and timely entry into force of Lisbon Treaty
- Successful launching of the new Lisbon Strategy cycle
- A step forward in addressing climate-energy issues
- Strengthening the European Perspective of the Western Balkans
- Promoting the dialogue between cultures, beliefs and traditions, in the context of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue

***Future of the Union and the Lisbon Treaty.*** The top priority of the Slovenian Presidency was a "successful conclusion of the ratification procedures" of the Lisbon Treaty, according to their Presidency program (Slovenian Presidency of the European Union, 2007, p. 5). Their hope, in pushing for the completion of the ratification process, was that the treaty would be adopted before the 2009 European Parliament elections. Related to the future of the European Union aspect of the priority, the Slovenian Presidency also set the goal of continuing work toward enlargement, especially for Croatia and Turkey.

By the end of the Slovenian Presidency, 19 member states had ratified the Lisbon Treaty. Slovenia was the second member state, following Hungary, to ratify the

treaty on January 29, 2008. Ireland rejected ratification in June, and several other states had yet to sign by July 2008, the end of the Presidency term. Slovenia began technical preparations for the Treaty's implementation, but overall ratification was not achieved (Slovenian Presidency of the European Union, 2008). Limited progress was made in terms of accession negotiations with Croatia and Turkey.

Although Ireland's rejection of the Lisbon Treaty was not a fault of the Slovenian Presidency, it was still one of the factors that blocked major progress on the Treaty's acceptance. Overall, progress on the priority regarding the Union and the Lisbon Treaty was limited. The assessment of this priority is a 0.

***Lisbon Strategy cycle.*** The Slovenian Presidency also focused on continuing the second three-year cycle of the Lisbon Treaty, under which work areas include strengthening competitive business and developing human capital. The Slovenian Presidency planned the addition of implementation of reform programs to this agenda (Slovenian Presidency of the European Union, 2007). Better investment in research and development was another key goal under this priority (Fink-Hafner and Lajh, 2008). The Slovenian Presidency also planned on addressing social issues, sustainability and integrating the internal market (Slovenian Presidency of the European Union, 2007).

One adjustment the Slovenian Presidency made to the Lisbon Strategy cycle was the introduction of a "fifth freedom," the free flow of information (Slovenian Presidency of the European Union, 2008). The Presidency report notes the agreement that the Lisbon Strategy process should continue after 2010 as one example of success. It also made progress on the social dimension of the Strategy: the Council formed agreement on directives regarding working conditions for temporary workers and



working hours (Slovenian Presidency of the European Union, 2008, p. 5). Lastly, discussion chaired by the Presidency led to the adoption of the Small Business Act (Fink-Hafner and Lajh, 2008, p. 48).

While this priority was less ambitious than the Lisbon Treaty priority, it was more pragmatic and the Slovenian Presidency made substantial progress on the topic. The evidence supports Bukowski's statement, "the outcome conformed to one of Slovenia's stated objectives for its presidency term" (2009, p. 104). The assessment of this priority is a 2.

***Climate-Energy issues.*** Another priority of the Slovenian Presidency work program was to further progress on the climate legislative package to form EU-wide agreement before the Copenhagen Conference in December 2009. The Slovenian Presidency was specifically trying to reach "political agreement concerning the third internal market package for energy" (Slovenian Presidency Programme website, n.d.). In addition to preparations for Copenhagen, the Presidency work program explains that it "will seek to reach an agreement on the further liberalization of the internal market for gas and electricity" for the purpose of improving competitiveness and securing the energy supply (Slovenian Presidency of the European Union, 2007).

The outcome of the climate-energy issues priority is mixed. The Slovenian Presidency was rather neutral on the climate and energy package, according to Kanjč (2009b), and was therefore a "credible mediator," which helped create an open debate between EU leaders (p. 91). The Presidency successfully coordinated and represented an EU mandate on biodiversity preservation at a conference and meeting of parties (Slovenian Presidency of the European Union, 2008). Three Directives and one

Regulation on environmental protection were approved in the European Parliament during the Slovenian Presidency, according to the Presidency's achievements website (2008). On the other hand, some were critical of certain targets and proposals related to climate and energy issues: the Environmental Bureau said that the package "lacks teeth" (Fink-Hafner and Lajh, 2008, p. 50).

Overall, the Slovenian Presidency made substantial progress in advancing the climate-energy priority, but it is important to note that there were areas that received criticism, such as proposals on bio-fuels and nuclear power which were "unconvincing and potentially even damaging," (Fink-Hafner and Lajh, 2008, p. 50). Because of the Presidency's overall progress, however, the assessment of this priority is a 2.

***Western Balkans.*** Strengthening the European perspective of the Western Balkans was listed as the fourth priority for the Slovenian Presidency. The specific goals included in this regional focus were "the review of the 2003 Thessaloniki Agenda; the conclusion of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement network; and the strengthening of regional cooperation in various areas" (Slovenian Presidency of the EU, 2007, p. 5). The Presidency work program emphasized the focus on and need for stability in the region, particularly in Kosovo.

Because member states were to make their own decisions on relations with Kosovo, undergoing crisis at the time, the Slovenian Presidency faced difficulty in organizing response to the Western Balkans as a whole. The Presidency did, however, complete Stabilization and Association Agreements with all of the countries that make up the former Yugoslavia except Kosovo (Kanjč 2009b). The Presidency also made progress on modernizing research infrastructure in the Western Balkans, including



introducing a project to help raise money for this cause (Slovenia Presidency of the European Union, 2008, p. 4).

Meeting the Stabilization and Association Agreement targets was important because these agreements would increase the level of cooperation between the EU and Western Balkan countries (Bukowski, 2009). These initiatives and programs also meant the Western Balkans would remain part of the EU agenda in future years (Kanjč 2009b). The Slovenian Presidency made substantial progress in advancing the Western Balkans priority. The assessment of this priority is a 2.

***Promoting intercultural dialogue.*** 2008 was established as the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, and the Slovenian Presidency therefore included the topic as its fifth and final priority. The Slovenian Presidency vowed to increase intercultural dialogue but was less specific on how it planned to accomplish goals like “coexistence in diversity” (Slovenian Presidency of the European Union, 2007, p. 3). The areas the Presidency planned to focus on most for intercultural dialogue were the Mediterranean and Western Balkan countries. With that focus in mind, the Slovenian Presidency planned to contribute to intercultural dialogue with the founding of a Euro-Mediterranean University in the city of Piran.

The Slovenian Presidency term began with an international conference, “Intercultural Dialogue as the Fundamental Value of the EU” that was held in the capital Ljubljana in January (Fink-Hafner and Lajh, 2008, p. 57). The Euro-Mediterranean University in Piran was founded in June 2008. According to Fink-Hafner and Lajh, the university is a “concrete form of intercultural dialogue” and should create convergence between the European, Islamic and other cultures around the

Mediterranean (2008, pp. 57-58). The Presidency also introduced initiatives on multilingualism and EU external relations (Slovenian Presidency of the European Union, 2008).

It appears that the Slovenian Presidency made moderate progress on the intercultural dialogue priority. The establishment of the university in Piran seems to be a start to intercultural dialogue, but it is one of the few substantial measures that resulted from the Presidency. It seems unclear precisely how the Presidency promoted intercultural dialogue besides the university and conference it held. The assessment of this priority is a 1.

Overall, the Slovenian Presidency appears to have been fairly successful. Although it may have been a product of initially low expectations, reactions were “overwhelmingly positive” (Bukowski, 2009, p. 110). Bukowski believes that Slovenia “may now enjoy a more productive association within the EU and better prospects of achieving its foreign policy goals” as a result of a successful Presidency (2009, p. 114). Slovenia’s preparation for the Presidency, especially in regard to their staff at home and in Brussels, is likely one factor that led to its relative success. How the Slovenian Presidency handled the prospect of upcoming elections is also important. In order to quell any potential issues, the majority of parliamentary parties signed an agreement to not attack the government during the Presidency period (Bukowski, 2009). The outcome of this agreement was mixed, but it likely helped to make the Slovenian Presidency more stable and make the elections less of a threat to management during the Presidency term. The scores on the five priorities total a 7 out of 10, achieving substantial progress on three of their priorities, and moderate and limited on one each.



**Czech Republic.** The EU Presidency of the Czech Republic was met with skepticism and low expectations (Beneš & Karlas, 2010), and was hindered by domestic political issues, including the collapse of Prime Minister Topolánek's government. While the work program originally consisted of five priorities, they were consolidated and reduced to three before the beginning of the term as the Presidency reassessed the EU political scene and its own abilities (Karlas, 2009; Král, 2008). The Presidency took a moderate approach to its priorities (Šlosarčík, 2011).

#### Czech Republic Priorities

- Economy
- Energy
- European Union in the world

**Economy.** Economic issues were the top priority from the beginning of Czech Presidency planning (Král et al., 2009). Enhancing transparency and stability, as well as developing human capital, were some of the specific goals of the Presidency (Czech Presidency of the European Union, 2009c). The more general areas of focus were regulation, coping with decline in growth and the preparation for a united EU approach ahead of international conferences – specifically the April 2009 G-20 summit in London (Czech Presidency of the European Union, 2009c, p. 2).

The Czech Republic claims in its post-Presidency report that the EU “made considerable progress in implementing the European Economic Recovery Plan... to restore economic prosperity” (Czech Presidency of the European Union, 2009a, p. iv). Legislation regarding financial services was concluded, which the Presidency asserts will lead to better regulation of markets (Czech Presidency of the European Union, 2009a). According to Král et al., the G-20 summit “can be considered the greatest success of the Czech Presidency” (2009, p. 43). A common position for the EU was

formed ahead of the summit. Although the position was general and not focused on specific figures, it included support for more regulation (Král et al., 2009, p. 45). Beneš and Karlas (2010) critique that in regards to the economic priority, the Presidency focused more on more short-term issues such as combating protectionism, than long-term ones like financial regulation (Beneš and Karlas, 2010, p. 75).

Overall, progress on the economic priority of the Czech Presidency can be categorized as substantial. The Presidency organized conferences on internal market issues and passed legislation on competitiveness and regulation. It resolved an issue on reduced value added taxes for local services, “a problem that had defied the best efforts of EU policymakers for years,” according to the Barber (2009, p. 6). While progress was not perfect, it was substantial and the assessment of this priority is a 2.

**Energy.** The energy priority of the Czech Presidency encompassed issues related to both energy and climate protection. Energy-security was a key feature of the priority, and the Czech Presidency planned to work on energy savings and completing the internal electricity and gas market (Czech Presidency of the European Union, 2009c, p. vii). The Presidency also planned to promote infrastructure, the creation of a common energy market, better coordination in foreign relations and diversification of resources (Czech Presidency of the European Union, 2009c, p. 7).

The Czech Presidency succeeded in some of its goals of the energy priority, while failing in regards to others. One positive outcome was that the Presidency created a unified EU voice and carried out diplomatic work related to the Russian-Ukraine gas crisis during January of its term. Another positive aspect was the support of the development of the Southern Corridor and the Nabucco pipeline project. The Energy



Council also reached agreement over a directive that dictates minimum stocks of crude oil that must be held by member states (Czech Presidency of the European Union, 2009a). On the other hand, progress was severely lacking in terms of climate change and the environment. While the work program revealed ambitious plans for climate change, the Presidency “left the initiative [of climate change] totally to other states,” according to Polish observers (Fuksiewicz & Łada, 2009, p 13). The Presidency failed to facilitate discussion on the issue (Fuksiewicz and Łada, 2009, p. 13). One factor may have been President Klaus, “who vocally questions any effort to tackle global environmental problems,” and therefore undermined the Czech Republic as a credible force in negotiations on the topic (Beneš and Karlas, 2010, p. 76).

Progress on diversification and energy security was positive, and the Presidency functioned well as a mediator during the Russian gas crisis. However, progress on the environmental and climate change portions of energy priority, was poor. Therefore, progress on the priority in general can be categorized as moderate. The assessment of this priority is a 1.

***European Union in the world.*** This priority embraces the Presidency’s motto, “Europe without Barriers,” which includes economic, cultural and value barriers, according to the work program (Czech Presidency of the European Union, 2009c). The priority was originally entitled “Europe open and safe” and denoted that enhanced cooperation with EU neighbors would further the goals of Europe’s stability and security (Král, 2008, p. 45). This priority covered many areas: further integration of the Western Balkans, the addition of an Eastern Partnership, an emphasis on Euro-Atlantic

relations, the Mediterranean, and preparation for a new plan for EU-Israel relations (Czech Presidency of the European Union, 2009c).

Under the Czech Presidency, the Eastern Partnership Project was approved and launched, and as mentioned under the energy priority, the Presidency's work in mediating the Russia-Ukraine gas crisis was effective (Král et al., 2009). On the other hand, little was achieved in terms of EU enlargement: Beneš and Karlas identify work on accession agreements as being met with "rather limited success" (2010, p. 78). Král et al. observe that the Presidency's work on the Gaza conflict "did not lead to any particular solution, apart from opening humanitarian corridors in the Gaza Strip" (2009, p. 7). While foreign affairs is not completely in the hands of the Presidency, the Presidency "refused to drop its priority of upgrading EU-Israel relations," and a Topolánek spokesperson made a pro-Israeli statement that "did not boost the credibility and neutrality of the EU mission" (Beneš & Karlas, 2010, p. 76). This decision hurt the Presidency in regard to neutrality and external relations.

Progress relating to the external relations priority was limited. While issues like the suspension of Croatia's accession talks were out of the hands of the Czech Presidency, it made limited progress and was not always effective: "the management of the Gaza crisis, as well as of transatlantic relations, was not free from serious lapses and cumbersome diplomacy" (Beneš and Karlas, 2010, p. 78). Czech diplomacy was affected by the fall of the government halfway through the Presidency, and the fact that a caretaker government was not installed for another month and a half (Kaczyński, 2009a). This priority was lacking and the assessment is a 0.



The Czech Presidency found some success but faced many struggles, in part due to its euroskeptic President and the collapse of Topolánek's government. Some of the Presidency's issues may also stem from being a newer member state and having little EU experience. The Czech Presidency served well as a mediator during the Russia-Ukraine gas crisis, but performed less favorably in regard to issues like climate change. The scores of its priorities total 3 out of 6. Weighted to match the possible ten points of Sweden and Slovenia by multiplying by five-thirds, the final Czech score equals 5 out of 10.

**Sweden.** The Swedish Presidency work program, published on its website shortly before the assuming the position, included five priorities over a range of issues. A sixth priority of sorts arose before Sweden took the Presidency – the finalization and implementation of the Lisbon Treaty. While this was a focus and one of the great successes of the Swedish Presidency, I defer to the five priorities listed in the work program as basis for evaluation.

#### Swedish Priorities

- Economy and employment
- Environment and climate change
- Justice and Home Affairs
- Baltic Sea
- Strengthen the EU's role as a global actor

***Economy and employment.*** Sweden selected the economic crisis and employment challenges as one of its most important priorities. The country has significant domestic experience in this policy area, which likely contributed to the planning and agenda of the priority. Goals included restoring confidence in the financial markets and creating long-term solutions for problems like employment and growth. The work program explained that a goal of the Presidency was to give “priority to

action regarding measures on the labour market that limit unemployment, reduce exclusion and return people to work” (Swedish Presidency of the European Union, 2009, p. 4). One of the main goals under the economic priority was to form a joint EU position ahead of the G20 summit (Swedish Presidency of the European Union, 2009; Miles, 2010).

The Swedish Presidency led the Council to agree to a new structure for financial oversight, “aiming to create three new authorities for the supervision of financial services in the EU” (Miles, 2010, p. 89). The Presidency made general progress on its economic priority and coordinated agreements relating to exit strategies principles—including structural reforms and strengthened national fiscal frameworks—and the banking sector (Swedish Presidency of the European Union, 2010). The Presidency report highlights work on a Directive on Consumers Rights as an important area of work related to the Internal Market (Swedish Presidency of the European Union, 2010, p. 25). On the other hand, the Presidency faced the problem that some of its initiatives lacked specificity and “were much less distinct or impressive on closer examination,” according to Miles (2010, p. 89). All in all, progress on Swedish Presidency’s economy and employment priority can be described as moderate. The assessment of this priority is a 1.

***Environment and climate change.*** In addition to the economy, environmental and climate change issues were of top importance to the Swedish Presidency. The 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference took place toward the end of the Presidency period in Copenhagen, Denmark. This conference was the culmination of efforts during the Presidency preparation period and term to form a unified EU position



to present at the conference, and then form an international agreement on reducing emissions as well as financing to help developing countries reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. Another aspect of the priority involves economic instruments like a carbon tax or emissions trading scheme (Reinfeldt, 2009). Miles (2010) notes that while the work program was careful not to include the complex issue of bringing the international scene together in agreement in Copenhagen, the Swedish government stressed high standards of success that would require agreement on major emissions reductions by international parties (p. 85).

Miles (2010) explains that the Swedish Presidency managed to bring together general agreements but there were few specific measures to highlight. He does recognize that the Presidency met one of its principle objectives, “ensuring that the Union maintained internal EU co-ordination and common positions on many complex issues” (p. 89). Success, however, did not transfer over to international agreement at Copenhagen. No legally binding agreement was formed between countries and the Copenhagen conference was viewed negatively in terms of real outcomes. Sweden cannot be blamed for the failure of the international agreement, though. While the Swedish expectations of the conference were not met, the Presidency did succeed in some of its goals under the environmental priority. Langdal (2010) argues the Presidency “must be seen as having passed the test even though the desired results failed to materialize” because coordination was maintained within the EU, and a financing deal was put together in the European Council (p. 4). On the other hand, Brattberg et al. (2011) take a more pessimistic view that “things did not unfold... well” for the Presidency in regard to environmental issues. They mostly fault the leadership of

the Presidency and point out that the EU's influence over negotiations was not strong at Copenhagen (p. 21).

Sweden successfully coordinated an inclusive EU position ahead of Copenhagen, but at the conference the Union's representation was sidelined, "lacking needed leadership, a combination of poor management of its international relations and an unconvincing internal climate/energy package," according to a European Environmental Bureau official (Miles, 2010, p. 90). While the Presidency cannot be entirely blamed for the conclusions of Copenhagen, the Swedish environmental minister referred to the conference as "a disaster" in a *European Voice* article (12/22/2009). All in all, the progress on the environment and climate change is evaluated as being moderate. The assessment of this priority is a 1.

***Justice and Home Affairs.*** The goal of the Swedish priority for Justice and Home Affairs was to develop a "more secure and open Europe" (Swedish Presidency of the European Union, 2009, p. 7). In order to do so, the Presidency vowed to "develop cooperation across borders to protect democratic values and the rights of individuals, and to meet challenges facing Europe" (Swedish Presidency of the European Union, 2009, p. 3). This included joint efforts to combat crime and form a better asylum and migration policy. The Stockholm Programme would be the body of work through which the priority would be developed. The focus of the Stockholm Programme was to specify cooperation from 2010 through 2014 in a variety of areas including police, border control and customs, criminal and civil law, asylum, migration and visa policy (Swedish Presidency of the European Union, 2009; Reinfeldt, 2009).



The adoption of the Stockholm Programme on December 11, 2009 was a success for the Swedish Presidency. Through the program, EU member states agreed they would attempt to complete a common asylum system by 2012, something that was emphasized in the work program and of specific interest to Sweden because it had been one of the largest receivers of asylum-seekers in the EU (Miles, 2010; Langdal and von Sydow, 2009a). Langdal and von Sydow (2009b) note that the Swedish Presidency has been at least partially successful in pursuing a “more liberal regimen in the area of asylum and migration” (p. 11). On the other hand, Sweden received criticism from its citizens for not pursuing the protection of human rights as fully as desired (Langdal, 2010).

Overall, the achievements of the Swedish Presidency in terms of Justice and Home Affairs were considerable. The Stockholm Programme prompted cooperation on many of the topics designated in its work program. In post-Presidency evaluation, the Swedish government expressed that it felt it had fulfilled its ambitions for the Justice and Home Affairs priority. Evidence suggests that substantial progress was made. The assessment of this priority is a 2.

***Baltic Sea region.*** The Swedish Presidency identifies the Baltic Sea area as facing challenges including a cleaner marine environment and becoming a more competitive region. The area consists of nine countries—Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Russia—of which eight are members of the EU. The Presidency hoped to address how to “transform the Baltic Sea region into a stronger engine for growth and development” (Swedish Presidency of the European Union, 2009, p. 3). It envisioned progress would take shape by “strengthening

the internal market, investing in infrastructure, and implementing a regional strategy for research, development and innovation” (Reinfeldt, 2009). The plan would be the first EU strategy for a macro-regional area, and the Swedish anticipated that not only would it benefit the Baltic region, but it could also set a precedent for future macro-regional strategies.

The adoption of the Baltic Sea Regional Strategy in October was a “relatively uncontroversial process,” and met overall success (Langdal, 2010, p. 5). Langdal and von Sydow (2009b) point to the strategy as an example of Sweden acting as a leader, an agenda-setter, and organizing broad support (p. 13). Miles critiques the strategy for not being specific enough, but praised it for being “relevant and relatively coherent” (2010, p. 91).

The Presidency succeeded at meeting its goals of the Baltic Sea regional priority as it was laid out in the work program. It raised the attention of the EU to this region and provided the means for further cooperation through the Strategy. The assessment of this priority is a 2.

***EU’s role as a global actor.*** Strengthening the EU’s role as a global actor is the broadest and least detailed of the five Swedish Presidency priorities. The work program explains that the Presidency planned to work with “a clear agenda for peace, stability and development in [its] region and around the world” (Swedish Presidency of the European Union, 2009, p. 9). EU enlargement falls under this category, a topic the Presidency views as “the most successful way to contribute to peace, democracy and prosperity in Europe” (Swedish Presidency of the European Union, 2009, p. 3). In terms



of enlargement, the Presidency planned to focus on Croatia and Turkey, but also strengthen the membership prospects of Western Balkan countries (Reinfeldt, 2009).

The Presidency's work regarding external relations was effective. Miles (2010) explains, "The work of the diplomatic corps of the Swedish Permanent Representative to the EU was regarded as 'exemplary'" (p. 91). Enlargement, in particular, was an area of success for the Presidency. Croatia entered its final phase of the accession process (Swedish Presidency of the European Union, 2009), and although the Turkish process is slow, the environmental chapter in their accession negotiations was opened (Miles, 2010). Additionally, a free trade agreement was secured with South Korea, which was another important success (Miles, 2010; Langdal, 2010). The Swedish Government points to 200 meetings held with non-EU countries as an example of its work on global action (Swedish Presidency of the European Union, 2010).

Some areas of external relations were lacking, such as improving relations with Russia and the absence of progress at the Doha Round, for instance (Langdal and von Sydow, 2009b). Overall progress was substantial, though. The assessment of this priority is a 2.

While the global economic crisis remained a major factor in European politics during the Swedish Presidency term, the Presidency was fortunate because it did not face any major new international crises during its term. The setting was somewhat unusual, however, in that a new European Parliament was taking office, a new European Commission soon to be appointed and looming uncertainty about the future of the Lisbon Treaty (Reinfeldt, 2009). The Presidency, according to Miles, "remained fundamentally pragmatic and result-oriented in practice" (2010, p. 82). As a whole, the

Swedish Presidency was successful. Unlike Slovenia and the Czech Republic, the Swedish Presidency had the benefit of prior Presidency experience and faced a more tranquil domestic political scene. The overall score for Sweden is an 8 out of 10.

**Scoring the three cases.** In evaluation, I made sure to score each category and case independently of the others. The similar scores of the Swedish and Slovenian Presidencies seem to be in accord with assessments of these Presidencies in the literature – they were both fairly successful Presidencies. One must take into consideration the low expectations of the Slovenian Presidency, which may be related to their pragmatic work program and the fact that they were able to make at least moderate progress on many topics. Sweden was viewed as a stronger leader with Presidency experience, and more was expected of the country – but it still managed to perform well on most topics. It is also sensible that the Czech Presidency was ranked at a five, lower than the others, because although some progress was made, issues with leadership and the fall of the government marked the Presidency.

### **Variables and Data**

In seeking to explain the relative success of each Presidency, I examine five independent variables against the cases' scores in priority advancement to check for correlation. Four variables are Resources, Elections, EU Support and Experience, which are all considered important factors in explaining variation in Presidencies. To those, I add a fifth variable, which is a measure of the Presidency's ability to influence decision outcomes, drawing from Thomson's "Decision-making in the European Union" datasets and conclusions (Thomson, Stokman, Achen and König, 2006; Thomson et al. 2012).



**Resources allocated.** Holding the Presidency is rewarding in many ways to countries but is also taxing, especially to small member states (Bukowski, 2009). Small states are said to have “inefficient resources” to carry out the Presidency or at least be disadvantaged by it (Tiilikainen, 2013, p. 107; Elgström, 2003). Resources used for the Presidency take many forms, including staff, funding, and meeting space. The measure for this study is how much funding was allocated toward the Presidency. Hypothetically, the more resources a country puts toward its Presidency, the more personnel it can staff and it may function more effectively.

This variable is measured in millions of euros allocated for Presidency operations. The data for resources was gathered from the work programs and other reports from Presidencies. The Czech Republic and Sweden reported their Presidency budgets in their local currency, so in order to compare the values they were converted to euros, using the rate from the final day of the Presidency period for consistency. The Slovenian Presidency budgeted 62 million euros, the Czech Republic 73.2 million,<sup>9</sup> and Sweden 94.8 million<sup>10</sup> (Slovenian Presidency Preparations website, n.d.; Czech Presidency Budget website, n.d.; Swedish Presidency of the European Union, 2010).

**Upcoming elections.** This variable measures how soon the next general elections are scheduled to take place. If a government is concerned about upcoming elections, it may face difficulty in running a well-organized Presidency program. Upcoming elections “put a mark on Presidency strategies by preventing policy initiatives that are expected to evoke negative popular bias” (Elgström, 2003, p. 9). Presidencies

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<sup>9</sup> 1.9 billion Czech koruna was equal to 73.192 million euros on June 30, 2009, according to charts from xe.com.

<sup>10</sup> 971 million Swedish krona was equal to 94.796 million euro, according to charts from xe.com.

may be more cautious (Costa et al., 2003), and less effective leaders. As explained earlier, Germany is an example of how countries take upcoming elections, when it switched Presidency terms with Finland to avoid an election while holding the position.

This variable is measured in the number of months from the end of the Presidency until the next scheduled general elections. Slovenia's Presidency ended on June 30, 2008, and their next elections were scheduled for September 2008 (3 months) (Bukowski, 2009; Fink-Hafner and Lajh, 2008). The Czech Republic's Presidency term ended on June 30, 2009 and the next elections were scheduled for May 2010 (11 months) (Czech Statistical Office website). The next elections of the Swedish Presidency were scheduled ten months after the end of its Presidency term, in September 2010 (Miles, 2010).

The proximity of elections to the conclusion of the Slovenian Presidency was a concern for the government (Bukowski, 2009). Most of the majority parties strategically agreed not to attack the government and even though the outcome of the agreement was mixed, it likely helped to make the Slovenian Presidency more stable and reduced the threat of elections to management during the Presidency term.

**Support for the EU.** The range of support of the population and the governing administration toward European integration is a factor that can affect Presidency and trio performance (Batory and Puetter, 2013). Related to integration is the support for EU membership. If a population does not feel that EU membership benefits their country, the people are not likely to be supportive of stronger EU policy. They may voice their opposition or attempt to impede measures of cooperation that the Presidency is working on.



The Eurobarometer is a semi-annual public opinion survey, published through the European Commission. One of the questions is, “Generally speaking, do you think (your country’s) membership to the European Community is...?” and the possible responses are that it is a good thing, a bad thing, neither good nor bad, or don’t know. The percent of the country’s population responding that the membership is a good thing is used as a measure of popular support for the EU. Responses from April 2008 are used for the Slovenian Presidency, June 2009 for the Czech Presidency and November 2009 for the Swedish Presidency.<sup>11</sup>

**Experience.** Whether a country has experience holding the Presidency may affect its ability to manage the position efficiently and influence decision outcomes (Bunse, 2009; Szabó, 2011). Costa et al. (2003) points to the founding member states of the EU as holding the privilege of experience and “enjoy[ing] an unquestionable advantage” (p. 127). The number of times a state has held the Presidency can provide advantages, and the variable is measured as such. Sweden has held the Presidency once, while Slovenia and the Czech Republic have no Presidency experience.

**Thomson variable.** The Thomson variable is derived from the dataset “Decision-making in the European Union,” compiled by Thomson, Stokman, Achen and König (2006), and updated in 2012. Through extensive research and interviews the authors compiled a dataset containing information on the positions and salience for each member state on 331 issues that fell under 125 different legislative proposals in the EU. They devised a 0 to 100 scale, and plotted the positions of each member state, the European Parliament, the European Commission and the decision outcome for each

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<sup>11</sup> These are dates of Eurobarometer surveys. The data was published during each Presidency term and retrieved from Eurobarometer Interactive Search System ([http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/cf/index.cfm?lang=en](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/cf/index.cfm?lang=en)).

issue designated as controversial. The group limited their research to controversial topics<sup>12</sup> because these have a wider range of positions and are more contentious in negotiation and finalization. Selecting controversial issues also gave the group an opportunity to test alternative theories (Thomson et al., 2006).

The variable is drawn from Thomson's definition of a member state's influence: "the extent to which its actions result in decision outcomes that are congruent with its preferences" (2008a, p. 594). This is operationalized by measuring how close a finalizing Presidency's position is to the decision outcome. Using the updated 2012 dataset, I categorized the data by which member state was holding the Presidency at the time of finalization of the legislation since Thomson (2008a), Warntjen (2008b) and others emphasize the finalizing Presidency as the one who bears the most influence over the outcome. Then, I pulled the data of the three Presidency cases—Slovenia, Czech Republic and Sweden. Data exists on the preferred position and outcomes of 15, 19 and 3 decisions for Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Sweden, respectively. I compared the position of the state on each decision to the outcome. The distance between the two was recorded, and then averaged for each member state. The smaller the number, the closer the decision-outcome was to the Presidency's position on the issue, on average. The fact that there is information on only 3 Swedish decisions could potentially skew results, as I address along with other weaknesses of the study later. The updated dataset included 56 post-2004 proposals, which included 155 issues. Unfortunately, Sweden's 2009 presidency took place at the end of the period covered by their research and therefore only a few issues were studied.

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<sup>12</sup> In Thomson et al.'s (2006) measure, the decision was deemed controversial through expert opinion and if it had been mentioned in the *Agence Europe* news service.



Table 3.1 – Variables and Descriptive Statistics

	Slovenia 2008	Czech Republic 2009	Sweden 2009	Mean	Std. Deviation
Elections <sup>13</sup>	3	11	10	8	4.3589
EU Support <sup>14</sup>	0.52	0.42	0.57	0.503	0.076
Experience <sup>15</sup>	0	0	1	0.333	0.577
Resources <sup>16</sup>	62	73.191	94.796	76.662	16.671
Thomson <sup>17</sup>	36.133	28.947	53.333	39.471	12.531
Priority Advancement <sup>18</sup>	7	5	8	6.667	1.528

### Analysis and Results

The variable observed as the dependent is Priority Advancement – the total scores of each country, weighted in the case of the Czech Republic. The study attempts to find which of the five factors described above are correlated with Priority Advancement. Though the sample is too small to draw conclusive findings, a significant variable may be able to point future research in certain directions.

Because of the small number of cases and observations, many standard tests will not function properly with this data. Instead of count-based models, like the Chi Square test, the small state Presidency data must be examined under a rank-based model. While some of the relationships appear to have a clear relationship (see Appendix A for graphs), others do not. One cannot use Linear Regression because the data does not meet assumptions such as normally distributed residuals, nor are there enough counts. Part of these issues stems from the fact that the number of observations is so small.

<sup>13</sup> Number of months between end of Presidency and next scheduled general elections.

<sup>14</sup> Percent of the country's population who say EU membership benefits their country.

<sup>15</sup> Number of times has held Presidency before.

<sup>16</sup> Budget allocated to Presidency, in millions of EUR.

<sup>17</sup> Average distance between the Presidency's position on an issue and the outcome, from Decision-Making in the European Union II dataset, Thomson et al. (2012).

<sup>18</sup> How well the country advanced its priorities on a scale of 0-10, each priority being worth 2 possible points, the Czech Republic weighted since it only had three priorities in its work program.

The best approach to examine this data is therefore to check for a relationship through correlation. The Pearson product moment correlation coefficient is not suitable because it requires interval or ratio level data, and many of the variable values are ordinal. Additionally, it measures linear relationships. Many of the graphs in the Appendix are non-linear, and without more robust data it is too difficult to tell what a fuller graph might look like.

The Kendall's tau test is therefore a favorable alternative. According to Field (2000), Kendall's tau is helpful evaluating correlation in small datasets. This method was used to examine which factors might influence Priority Advancement in small state Presidencies. Because I am interested in what influences an increase in the Priority Advancement score, a one-tailed test is suitable.

*Table 3.2 – Kendall's tau correlation coefficient follows on the next page.*



**Correlations**

	Experience	Elections	Resources allocated	Support for EU	Thomson average	Priority Advancement
Experience	1.000	.000	.816	.816	.816	.816
Correlation Coefficient						
Sig. (1-tailed)		.500	.110	.110	.110	.110
N	3	3	3	3	3	3
Elections	.000	1.000	.333	-.333	-.333	-.333
Correlation Coefficient						
Sig. (1-tailed)	.500		.301	.301	.301	.301
N	3	3	3	3	3	3
Resources allocated	.816	.333	1.000	.333	.333	.333
Correlation Coefficient						
Sig. (1-tailed)	.110	.301		.301	.301	.301
N	3	3	3	3	3	3
Support for EU	.816	-.333	.333	1.000	1.000	1.000
Correlation Coefficient						
Sig. (1-tailed)	.110	.301	.301			
N	3	3	3	3	3	3
Thomson average	.816	-.333	.333	1.000**	1.000	1.000
Correlation Coefficient						
Sig. (1-tailed)	.110	.301	.301			
N	3	3	3	3	3	3
Priority Advancement	.816	-.333	.333	1.000**	1.000**	1.000
Correlation Coefficient						
Sig. (1-tailed)	.110	.301	.301			
N	3	3	3	3	3	3

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

**Results.** With such a small amount of data, it is not surprising that only two variables are significant in relation to Priority Advancement. There are few cases and few observations. If this study were replicated over a larger set of cases, it is conceivable that clearer results would be established. Correlation between EU support and Priority Advancement may be discovered to still be significant.

Both the EU Support and the Thomson variables were correlated with Priority Advancement, significant at the  $\alpha = 0.01$  level. The correlation coefficient was a 1, meaning that according to Kendall's tau b, the relationships between Thomson and EU Support against Priority Advancement are extremely strong.

The possibility to extrapolate these results is clearly limited due to the small number of case studies. However, the results indicate that as EU support increases in a country's population, the small state Presidency is better able to advance priorities laid out in its work program. This conclusion is logical: if the populace is supportive of EU integration measures, it is less likely to challenge its government on such issues. When the population is supportive of the EU at large, as well as Presidency initiatives, the state can focus on EU diplomatic issues and is less torn between national and EU-level politics and duties.

The correlation between the Thomson variable and Priority Advancement is especially interesting. The Thomson variable, once again, is the average distance between a finalizing Presidency country's position on controversial issues and the position of the decision outcome. A lower Thomson average indicates that decision outcomes were closer to a Presidency state's position and presumably its national interests. A higher Thomson number indicates that outcomes were, on average, farther



away from the Presidency state's own position. Before any conclusions are considered, it is important to note that the Thomson dataset only had data on 3 decisions carried out under the Swedish Presidency. This alone probably affected the Swedish average and therefore the explanatory capability of the Thomson variable in general. More robust data would provide a clearer picture. However, if one were trying to explain why the correlation between high Thomson averages and high Priority Advancement scores—or low averages and low scores—one might consider the difference of experience. As a first-time Presidency holder, the Czech Republic may have viewed the position as an opportunity to advance its national political interests and be less cautious about impartiality. Because the average decision outcome on controversial issues was farther away for Sweden, one might believe that with the experience of having operated the Presidency position in the past, Sweden was more sensitive to the neutrality norm. While the correlation between the Thomson average and experience is not significant at  $\alpha = 0.1$  (its significance is 0.11), it appears these factors may be correlated. Further research would be necessary, of course, in order to recognize a trend.

**Potential weaknesses.** The small number of cases and therefore limited quantity of observations for each variable certainly affect the results of this study. While the study can suggest correlation between variables, a larger case study with fuller data would be necessary to indicate correlation with greater confidence. A study covering a larger range of Presidency cases could examine if support for EU integration is a significant factor in how well a Presidency advances its priorities. It would also be helpful to follow up and examine the relationship found between priority advancement and the Thomson variable, in order to determine if the link between successful priority

advancement and the further average distance from the country's policy position is significant when tested on a larger scale. The further distance potentially indicates adherence to the role of a neutral broker. The small amount of data from Thomson et al. (2012) on controversial issues during the Swedish Presidency likely affected the analysis and comparison. The correlations presented in this study should not be understood as actuality, but rather possible subjects of focus in future research.

## Conclusions

The Kendall's tau test shows that EU Support and Thomson variables are highly correlated with the countries' Priority Advancement scores. The Thomson average and Experience variables also appear to possibly be correlated, but they were not significant at the  $\alpha = 0.1$  level. These results cannot be extrapolated to small state EU Presidencies in general and are not conclusive due to the small number of cases. The results do indicate where one could expand future research, looking to the observed relationship between priority advancement and EU support in particular. It may also be important to consider testing other variables for correlation, such as the strength of a country's civil service, preparation and trio cooperation.



## Conclusion

The role of the Presidency and how the EU member states utilize it will continue to be an important subject of analysis for those studying European Union politics. Even with the changes in the Presidency position after the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, the Council Presidency plays an important role in the decision-making process and gives each member state the opportunity to lead the Council of Ministers. While the permanent president chairs the European Council, the country in the rotating Presidency still has a coordinating role. The Presidency remains an important force in EU decision-making. The priorities of Presidencies provide a strong basis from which to judge their success in advancing goals over the six-month term. There will always be unexpected external factors that affect how the Presidency leads, but how a state handles these surprises demonstrates its flexibility and diplomatic skill.

In the case studies presented, Sweden advanced its priorities with the most success. While the Presidency received criticism over environmental negotiation in the Copenhagen Conference, it performed well in terms of external relations and promoting the Baltic Sea region. Slovenia ranked second of the three countries. Its pragmatic planning, including sending officials to Brussels prior to the Presidency to gain knowledge of the EU bureaucracy and decision-making process, and others' low expectations of its capability contributed to positive receptivity. The Czech Presidency performed the most poorly out of these three cases, according to the priority rankings. Considering the state's domestic political strife, the progress it did make is remarkable in some ways. The Czech Presidency was especially successful in promoting measures related to the economic priority in its work program.

Trio coordination, or lack thereof, is a factor that may have contributed the performance of these countries. Slovenia was in the first trio—partnered with Germany and Portugal—and as the original group, these countries had no trio example to look to or base their planning on and one might expect that cooperation would not be extremely high. Udovič & Svetličič (2012) found the Germany – Portugal - Slovenia trio to be important during the Presidency planning stages but insignificant during the operation of Slovenia’s Presidency term. On the other hand, the France – Czech Republic – Sweden trio did not experience continuity and “lacked real coordination and mutual support” (Fabry, 2009, p. 29). The trio countries seemed to favor individual strategies in preparation and action during the Presidency terms (Jensen & Nedergaard, 2014). As trio coordination continues, it may play a larger role in the success of Presidencies, but for early trio Presidencies it does not appear to have been as important as factors like the domestic political situation and EU support in shaping their presidency terms.

In examining the correlation of Priority Advancement with five other factors, the Kendall’s tau coefficient indicated that EU support and the Thomson variable are highly correlated with how well a Presidency advances its priorities. These results are not conclusive, but may provide a guide for future research. Another potential area for future study on the EU Council Presidency would be to create a measure of the level of domestic political stability, as this is another factor scholars indicate affects Presidency performance. Other areas to consider are the strength of a Presidency country’s civil service. This could be measured in terms of experience or how the civil service is primarily formed, through merit- and test-based appointments or political appointees. The Presidency offers states an opportunity to lead but also is demanding in terms of



personnel and financial resources. The stronger and more knowledgeable a civil service is, the better the Presidency may perform. Strength of preparation and trio cooperation are other factors that would be important to cover. Lastly, selecting cases with a broader range of experience levels (whether measured as length of EU membership or number of times holding the Presidency) may reveal a stronger correlation to priority advancement.

Additionally, future research may examine the evolving relationship between the Commission and the Presidency. Because the Commission has the ability to deliver proposals, but the Council and its Presidency can request proposals, they have an important link. The Council Secretariat is a resource that can help facilitate closer work between the two.

In conclusion, my goal is that this paper contributes at least minimally to the study of and interest in the EU Council Presidency position, and particularly the role of small states. The Presidency plays an important role in EU decision-making through its leadership in the Council of Ministers and its work with the Commission and Parliament. While the position can be taxing, small state Presidencies can be very successful and well received. The Presidency position offers host countries the ability to guide EU decision-making and buffer their reputation and credibility. It plays an important part of the setup of the European Union. Based on Presidency literature, preparation, coordination with the General Secretariat and a stable domestic political scene (one without upcoming elections or an unstable coalition) are all factors that contribute to the relative success of a Presidency. This paper demonstrates that the level of EU support in the host country appears to be related to how well a country advances

its stated priorities, in the three cases examined here at least. This proposed relation should be examined further, and other factors such as civil service and use of the Council Secretariat would be beneficial to future research.

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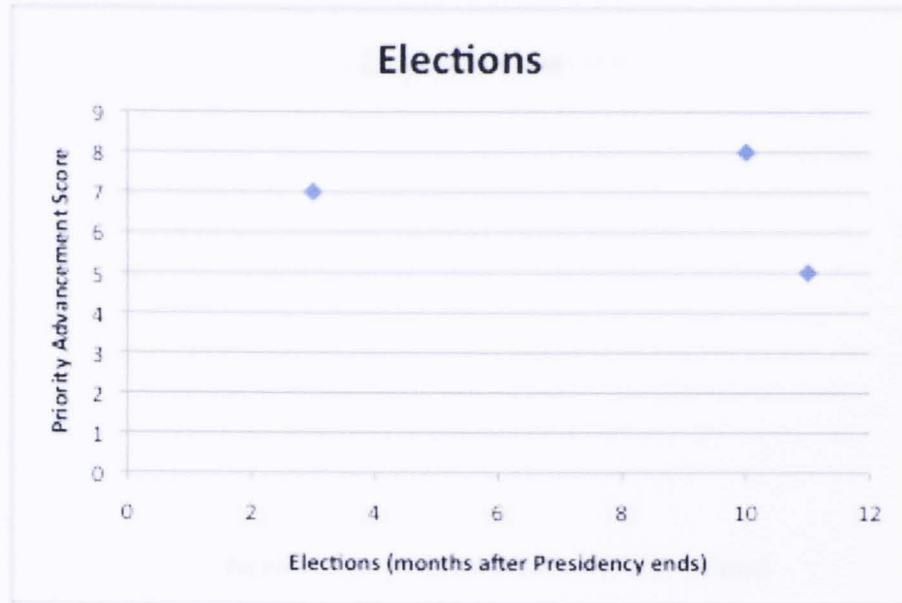


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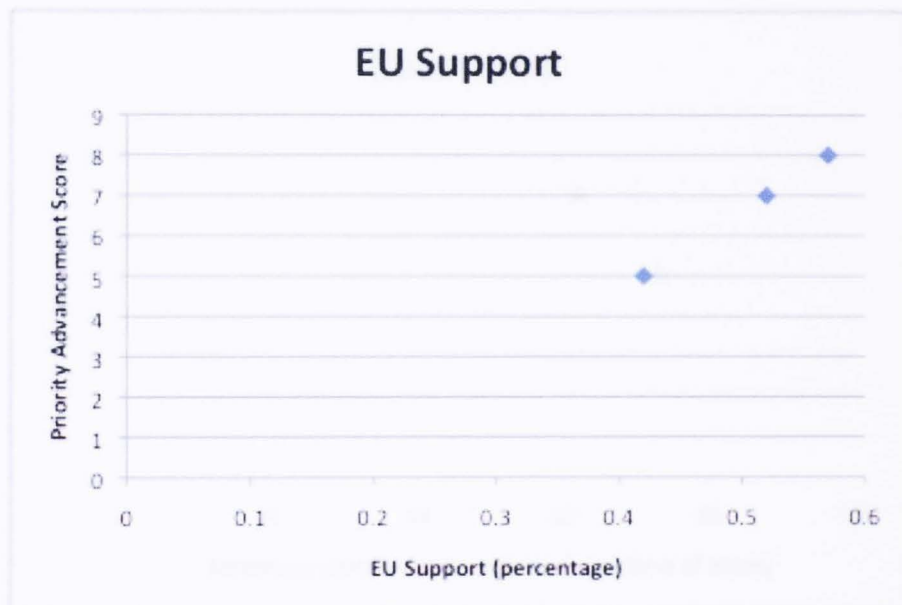
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[http://www.arhiv.svrez.gov.si/en/areas\\_of\\_work/archive\\_slovenian\\_presidency\\_of\\_the\\_eu\\_council/faq/how\\_were\\_the\\_preparations\\_for\\_slovenias\\_presidency\\_of\\_the\\_eu\\_council\\_carried\\_out](http://www.arhiv.svrez.gov.si/en/areas_of_work/archive_slovenian_presidency_of_the_eu_council/faq/how_were_the_preparations_for_slovenias_presidency_of_the_eu_council_carried_out).

**Appendix A - Graphs of the Variables**



*Figure 1.* Elections variable against Priority Advancement.



*Figure 2.* EU Support variable against Priority Advancement.





Figure 3. Experience variable against Priority Advancement.

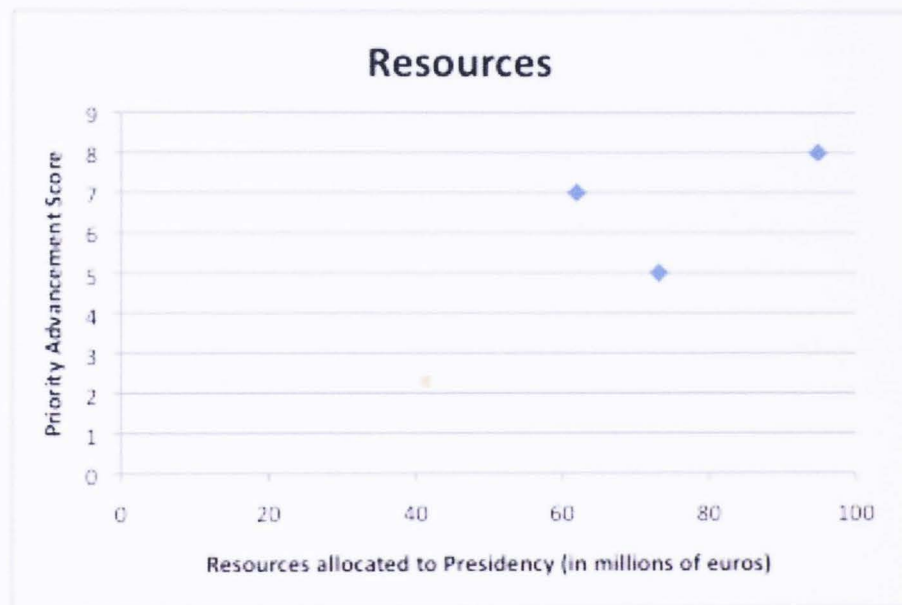


Figure 4. Resources variable against Priority Advancement.

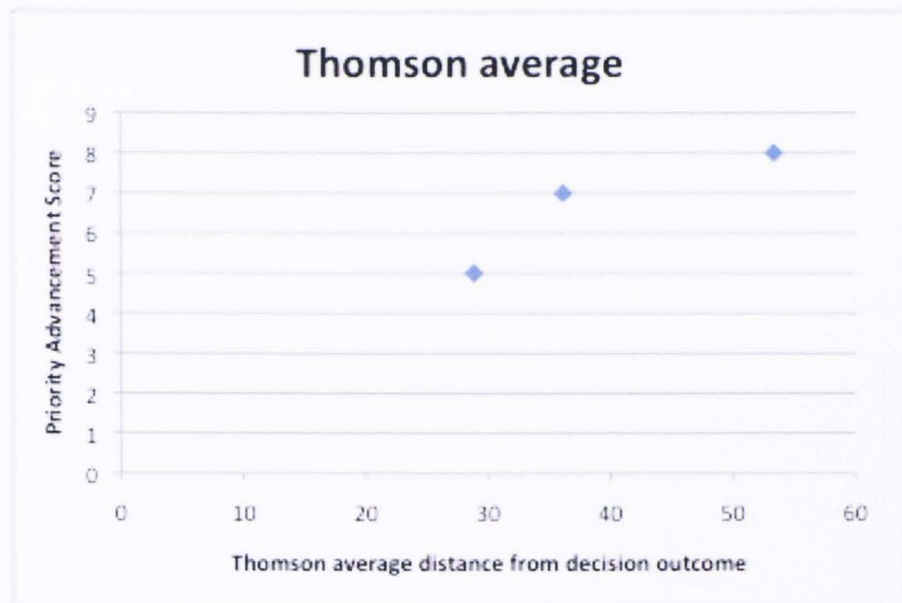


Figure 5. Thomson variable against Priority Advancement.



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