

REFLECTIONS ON THE BULGARIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE EU IN 2018 IN THE MEDIA

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Abstract

This paper present Bulgarian presidency of the European Union on 1st January to 30 June 2018, policy and good practice on EU. For our country, this is an honor, but a great responsibility. For six months, Bulgaria will be a major driver of the Union's agenda, combining the functions of an honest mediator, political leader, representative and coordinator. The aim of the Presidency is to meet the real needs of European citizens, to turn challenges into opportunities. Europe now needs more: security (because the migration crisis and terrorist acts in recent years have shown how vulnerable it is), solidarity (because the main challenges affect all Member States and can only be resolved by common action, not national or local level), stability (because citizens want to know that the European Union takes care of their prosperity and prosperity). The government is opting for consensus, competitiveness, cohesion to achieve the goals, and a successful presidency.

Keywords: *European Union, policy, practice, presidency.*

Introduction

The presidency of the Council rotates among the EU member states every 6 months. During this 6-month period, the presidency chairs meetings at every level in the Council, helping to ensure the continuity of the EU's work in the Council. Member states holding the presidency ***work together closely in groups of three, called 'trios'***. This system was introduced by the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. The trio sets long-term goals and prepares a common agenda determining the topics and major issues that will be addressed by the Council over an 18 month period. On the basis of this programme, each of the three countries prepares its own more detailed 6-month programme. The ***current trio*** is made up of the presidencies of the Estonia, Bulgaria and Austria. The presidency is responsible for driving forward the Council's work on EU legislation, ensuring the continuity of the EU agenda, orderly legislative processes and cooperation among member states. To do this, the

presidency must act as an *honest and neutral broker*. The presidency has two main tasks:

1. Planning and chairing meetings in the Council and its preparatory bodies. The presidency chairs meetings of the different Council configurations (with the exception of the Foreign Affairs Council) and the Council's preparatory bodies, which include permanent committees such as the Permanent Representatives Committee, and working parties and committees dealing with very specific subjects. The presidency ensures that *discussions are conducted properly* and that the Council's rules of procedure and working methods are correctly applied. It also organizes various formal and informal meetings in Brussels and in the country of the rotating presidency.

2. Representing the Council in relations with the other EU institutions. The presidency represents the Council in relations with the other EU institutions, particularly with the Commission and the European Parliament. Its role is to try and reach agreement on legislative files through *trilogies*, informal negotiation meetings and Conciliation Committee meetings. The presidency works in close coordination with: the President of the European Council; the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. It supports their work and may sometimes be requested to perform certain duties for the high representative, such as representing the Foreign Affairs Council before the European Parliament or chairing the Foreign Affairs Council when it discusses common commercial policy issues.

The tables 1 present Council presidencies up to 2020:

Table 1. Council presidencies

Estonia	July-December	2017
Bulgaria	January-June	2018
Austria	July-December	2018
Romania	January-June	2019
Finland	July-December	2019
Croatia	January-June	2020
Germany	July-December	2020

Exposition

Preparation of Bulgaria for the EU Presidency in 2018. „Съединението прави силата“ (United We Stand Strong).

In the period 1 January – 30 June 2018, Bulgaria will take over the presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first time. The Presi-

dency of the Council of the European Union rotates among the EU Member States every six months. To ensure continuity and consistency in the work of the Council, the Member States holding the presidency work closely in “Trio”. The Trio of Presidencies prepares the agenda for an 18-month period (Table 2).

Table 2: Calendar of events

 BULGARIA 2018	237	Events
	32	Meetings of the high level
	20 000	Delegates
	1 600	Events abroad
 ESTONIA 2017	200	Events
	22	Meetings of the high level
	20 000 – 30 000	Delegates
	1 600 – 2 000	Events abroad
 MALTA 2017	200 events	Events
	16	Meetings of the high level
	20 000	Delegates
	Over 1 500	Events abroad

The main obligations of the Presidency are the following:

- to organize and direct the work of the Council of the EU;
- to chair meetings at all levels in the Council and drive forward the Council’s work on EU legislation;
- to promote cooperation among the Member States;
- to ensure the continuity of the EU agenda and the attainment of the common objectives;
- to play an active role in formulating policy priorities;
- to represent the EU Council in its relations with other EU bodies and institutions, third countries and the community.

With the Council of Ministers amendments and supplements to the Council of Ministers Decree № 85 of 2007 on the coordination of European Union affairs a national coordination mechanism on the preparation of the Bulgarian Presidency is created within the existing coordination mechanism

on EU affairs. On 29 July 2015 the Council of Ministers adopted the Plan for the Preparation of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2018. The plan consists of five sections of the Bulgarian Presidency:

- Administrative Capacity (quantitative, qualitative and systematic improvement);
- Infrastructure, Logistics and Security;
- Communication Strategy and Cultural Program;
- Financing and Public Procurement
- Priorities and Program.

The main principles guiding the preparation and implementation of the Bulgarian Presidency are as follows: **Transparency** – the stages of the preparation of the Presidency will be implemented in full transparency with regard to the decisions made, actions taken and the results achieved. Informing and communicating with the civil society will be of key importance; **Effectiveness** – The Bulgarian Presidency will strive to achieve maximum effectiveness in meeting the objectives which in turn requires timeliness, balance and focus of the activities in line with the commitments under the Presidency and limiting the costs for their funding; **Efficiency** – the preparations for the Presidency have to be carried out with optimal use of the invested funds and good resource planning and management; **Flexibility** – The Bulgarian administration should be able to respond adequately and promptly to unforeseen circumstances in the preparation stage, both in terms of planning and priorities as well as in terms of the Presidency budget and its coordination mechanism; **Neutrality** - The Presidency must be neutral and impartial; it may not favor its own preferences or the preferences of a Member State. Bulgaria will take into account all positions in an adequate manner and according to their own merits and will combine the obligation of neutrality with the political dimension in managing the affairs of the Union, which consist in particular in setting the order of priority when selecting and working on the dossier.

Taking over the Presidency of the Council will allow Bulgaria to place in the focus of the EU agenda clear priorities which are of key importance for the country and for the European Union. Bulgaria will try to find a balance between the specific priorities of the Member States and the strategic priorities of the European Union to achieve real, visible results in active dialogue with citizens on European issues and responding to their expectations for greater security, employment, sustainable growth and a stronger EU presence on the world stage. During the Presidency of the Council of the EU, the Republic of Bulgaria will address three main messages for: **consensus**,

competitiveness, cohesion, a Europe of consensus. Bulgaria will seek a broad **consensus** among the Member States on issues of importance to the citizens of the European Union.

Bulgaria's Presidency has four priority areas, which reflect these reforms:

- **Economic and social cohesion** with a focus on the next EU multiannual financial framework, future Cohesion and Common Agricultural Policy, and a deeper Economic and Monetary Union.

The future of Europe and of the young people – economic growth and social cohesion. There is some good news for the Union in the forecasts – the European economy is speeding up, more jobs are being created, investment is growing, public finances are becoming stronger. Still, there are some challenges – high levels of debt, small increase in salaries. We shall overcome these challenges together. It is important that the member states' economies continue to grow, it is important that all EU states participate in the debate on the reforms of the Eurozone as equals, regardless of whether they are members of the latter or not.

The future of the Union is to continue the efforts for **social cohesion**. The Cohesion Policy provides a real added value for EU citizens and is a proven example of a working instrument for reducing the differences between us, which guarantees the success of the European model. This is why our Presidency will work for an active and constructive debate on the Multiannual Financial Framework.

- **Stability and security** of Europe: common decisions on more security on the EU's external borders, more efficient migration management, laying the foundations of a Defence Union, including through implementation of the first EU Permanent Structured Co-operation.

The Bulgarian Presidency will work towards long lasting and fair solutions in the area of asylum policy, for efficient policies for return and re-admission, for a balanced approach between short and long-term measures aiming at the source of migration, not only at the consequences thereof. European citizens need security and stability and without these, European values are difficult to attain. This is why great emphasis in our efforts will be given to security, whereby we will focus on strengthening the border controls, on the exchange of information between the various bodies, and on prevention. It is important to work towards efficient, fast and fair justice.

- time the Presidency will work to provide more geopolitical and economic support for **the Western Balkans** through improving their road, railway, air, digital, educational and energy connectivity to the EU.

When talking about united Europe, we should not forget that the Western Balkans need a clear European perspective and connectivity between them and with the member states. The ambition of the Bulgarian Presidency is to achieve a clear action plan with each of the countries, without creating unrealistic expectations, but with concrete steps. This is the way to have long lasting peace, security and prosperity in the region. The goal is to provide connectivity to the Western Balkan countries – transport, air, energy, educational and digital. Bulgaria invests consequent efforts in this direction, for example by promoting the digital policies of the EU among the countries in the Western Balkans through gradual reduction of roaming charges and by increasing the possibilities for broadband internet access.

- **Digital economy** and skills for the future: with a focus of completing the EU digital single market and development of digital economy and skills. This file includes the cyber security package, the copyright directive, the free flow of non-personal data, the e-communications code, e-privacy etc.

Europe's role in the rapidly developing world is directly linked to the competitiveness of the European economy. The single digital market, the access to innovation, the link between education and the requirements of the future labour market are at the basis of technological development. It is not by chance they are a major element of the programme of the Trio of the Presidencies – Estonia – Bulgaria - Austria and a priority of the Bulgarian Presidency. Electronic communication, providing transboundary services particularly to the SMEs, copy rights, e-privacy and cyber security are some of the items on the agenda that need to be decided upon. Linking the education of the young people with learning “the skills for the future” is the way to achieve a competitive, flexible and successful Europe. The focus of all our action will be young people.

The Bulgarian Presidency will make an effort for an open debate on the future of Cohesion Policy and its role in the implementation of the EU's priorities after 2020, working to preserve its leading role in the EU budget after 2020. Taking into account the need for simplification of legislation, rules and procedures widely identified by Member States, we will work to optimize the model of shared management and effective implementation of the principle of proportionality with a focus on results.

Culture is one of the main drivers of the future development of the European Union, based on a new look at its past. In the current political, social and cultural processes in the EU, we will focus our efforts on common values and the unifying links between European citizens. During the Bulgarian Presidency, we will strive to build on what has been achieved so far and

promote better inclusion of culture in the Multiannual Financial Framework post - 2020 and in the new Work Plan for Culture 2019 - 2022, as well as the enhancement of cultural diplomacy of the European Union as a tool for the EU's foreign policy.

For example:

Table 3: Main parameters on Lithuania and Bulgaria

<i>Parameters / Country</i>	<i>Lithuania</i>	<i>Bulgaria</i>
Capital	Vilnius	Sofia
Geographical size	65 286 km ²	110 370 km ²
Population (2016)	2 888 558	7 153 784
Population as % of total EU - 2016	0.6 %	1.4 %
Gross domestic product (GDP) - 2016	€ 38.637 billion	€ 47.364 billion
Official EU language(s)	Lithuanian	Bulgarian
Political system	parliamentary republic	parliamentary republic
EU member - since	1 May 2004	1 January 2007
Seats in the European Parliament	11	17
Currency	Euro(€).Member of the <u>eurozone</u> , 01.01.2015	Bulgarian lev -BGN
Schengen area member	Yes, 21.12.2007	No
Presidency of the Council	01.07 – 31.12.2013	01.01 – 30.06.2018
Total EU spending in 2015	€ 0.877 billion	€ 2.730 billion
Total EU spending as % of gross national income (GNI)	2.45 %	6.38 %
Total contribution to the EU budget	€ 0.316 billion	€ 0.424 billion
contribution to the EU budget as % of its GNI	0.88 %	0.99 %

Budgets and Funding - How much does Lithuania/Bulgaria contribute and receive? - Member countries financial contributions to the EU budget are shared fairly, according to means. The larger your country's economy, the more it pays – and vice versa. The EU budget doesn't aim to redistribute wealth, but rather to focus on the needs of all Europeans as a whole. This is clearly visible from the data in Table 3.

Conclusion

- The presidency of the Council rotates among the EU member states every 6 months. During this 6-month period, the presidency chairs meetings at every level in the Council, helping to ensure the continuity of the EU's work in the Council. In the period 1 January – 30 June 2018, Bulgaria take over the presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first time.
- During the presidency of the Council of the EU Bulgaria will make three main messages for: consensus, competitiveness and cohesion.
- Bulgaria will be a balancing player and will promote a competitiveness environment that is important for the economic prosperity of the citizens of the European Union. Bulgaria will work to increase the welfare of all citizens of the European Union by promoting cohesion that creates the conditions for unity and solidarity. The Bulgarian Presidency will make efforts to seek the most appropriate solutions not only for the future of cohesion policy but also for the overall cohesion of the European society. And the finally Eastern Europe (Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro), its future and place of map in the EU. During the Bulgarian Presidency, we will strive to build on what has been achieved so far and promote better inclusion of culture in the Multiannual Financial Framework post-2020 and in the new Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022, as well as the enhancement of cultural diplomacy of the European Union as a tool for the EU's foreign policy.
- Bulgaria will work to increase the welfare of all citizens of the European Union by promoting cohesion that creates the conditions for unity and solidarity. The Bulgarian Presidency will make efforts to seek the most appropriate solutions not only for the future of cohesion policy but also for the overall cohesion of the European society.

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