

Faculty of Political Sciences and Sociology

BACHELOR'S DEGREE FINAL PROJECT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title:

"The EU Single Voice after Lisbon:
implications of the permanent presidency of the Council preparatory bodies"

Author:

Marta Paricio Montesinos

Tutor:

Oriol Costa Fernández

Date: 03/06/2020

Bachelor in: Political Science and Public Management and Law

In 2002, the former French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in his introductory speech of the convention on the Future of Europe expressed that “the world would feel better if it could count on Europe, a Europe which spoke with a single voice [...].” Giscard was indeed expressing a common belief in the EU: to be effective in the international fora a strong EU Single Voice is needed. This link between internal cohesiveness and external influence has been present in the analysis and speeches of many politicians and authors and this assumption was a motivation behind some of the modifications brought by the Lisbon Treaty.

More than a decade after the reforms introduced by Lisbon, this contribution aims to study the implications for the EU Single Voice of one specific institutional change: the replacement of the system of rotating presidencies in the Council with permanent ones, specifically in the Common Foreign and Security Policy. Since then, the Foreign Affairs Council, the Political and Security Committee and some of its Council Working Groups stop being chaired by a member state for six months. Now the FAC is chaired by the High Representative and the PSC and the CWGs by EEAS officials.

Considering that the intention behind it was to build a more continuous, coherent and effective European Foreign policy, this paper tries to answer if the permanent presidency has been a successful system to ensure the continuity on the agenda and a more internal cohesiveness in the organs in which has been implemented. Reviewing the existing literature and analysing the interviews carried out in recent studies with PSC ambassadors, Permanent representations, national delegates in CFSP WGs and EEAS officials, this work is structured as it follows. First it is going to define what means to have a single voice, which main changes brought Lisbon and which critics had the rotating president. After seeing that this system was told to lack continuity, relied too much on the interests and capacity of the country at the helm and its organisation and preparation was insufficient and chaotic, the next section investigates if the new formal system of the permanent chairmanship has overcome these obstacles.

To analyse its success, it is going to compare the consequences of the permanent president in the PSC and its CWGs with the ones of the informal system used in the Multilateral Environment Agreements called “Lead negotiator”, in which the rotating presidency is still present.

With that comparison it will be shown that even though the EEAS as a permanent president has greater resources, facilitates a general and longer-term perspective of the issues on the agenda and enhances more coherence and visibility of the EU in international fora, it has had some countereffects that have not appeared in the “lead negotiator” system. The most striking one could be that the elimination of the rotating system has seemed to provoke a disaffection of the member states. In the pre-Lisbon period, the code of conduct in the CFSP preparatory bodies was the consensus building practice which means that all member states tried to keep everyone on board, they had a big pressure to get agreements and there was a great empathy among them and the president at the helm. Since Lisbon, they show a more passive and reactive attitude, the level of ambition has decreased, and less council conclusions have been reached. On the other hand, the study of the informal “lead negotiator” system demonstrates that to improve the continuity on agenda was not necessary to remove the rotating presidency. In this system the tasks are divided among different negotiators for a longer period and for a particular set of issues, but always under the authority of the rotating presidency. Not only guarantees continuity and an optimal use of the actors’ expertise of all, but also enables the member states to be fully involved. It overcomes the critics of the rotating presidency without losing its benefits.

Finally, taking everything into account, the conclusions are drawn. In them, it is argued that, contrary to what was expected, the permanent presidency has not strengthened the EU Single Voice and other informal solutions could have been more beneficial. Even though it can enhance the visibility of the EU in the international negotiations, the EEAS presidency has damaged the internal cohesiveness of the organs it chairs making difficult to get agreements, to reach common positions and, therefore, hindering the formation of a strong EU single message.