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Bridging Turbulent Times:

A Survey Report on the 2009 Swedish Presidency of the European Union

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Introduction

Taking the reins of the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) offers a unique opportunity for any EU member government. For a six-month period, that government sits in the proverbial EU driver's seat by setting agendas, chairing meetings, leading negotiations, and representing the Council and the Union. Success in those roles is not guaranteed, of course; some member states over the years have been more effective than others in using those roles to leave a 'footprint' on outcomes. Following decades of stability in presidency's roles, the future of the rotating presidency as an office has been cast into doubt in the debates, which finally led to the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty. Concerned about shifting priorities and a lack of continuity in Council business, EU leaders agreed in the Lisbon Treaty to partially replace the rotating presidency with more permanent positions from December 2009, including (a) a permanent president of the European Council (heads of state and government and president of the Commission) to prepare and chair the European Council and (b) a permanent chair for the Foreign Affairs Council (foreign ministers) and its subsidiary bodies. Beyond those replacements, the rotating presidency will survive – presiding for six months over the other nine formations of the Council and exerting the roles mentioned above, albeit in a scaled back form that will clarify over time. However the future plays out, the rotating presidency, and more broadly the leadership landscape of the EU, has been fundamentally transformed.

This era of flux offers us our own unique opportunity: to take stock of the last presidency conducted under the 'old rules', the Swedish presidency in the second half of 2009. Although most EU presidencies face the challenge of managing turbulent events in both external and internal matters during their time in office, the Swedish presidency stands out. Externally, the global financial crisis was

spiralling into an economic and monetary crisis followed by recession; moreover, pressure was building for the final phase of climate change talks in December in Copenhagen. Internally, the last chapter of the Lisbon Treaty's ratification was underway and new institutional posts and procedures were being negotiated. The Swedish presidency thus faced complications arising from known and unknown events, while bridging a period of turbulence and transition in the institutional make-up of the EU.

This occasional paper reports the results of a survey of Swedish officials working in the midst of this turbulence and transition. We asked officials about their experience with the presidency, focused on three specific aspects: preparatory activities, agenda-setting efforts, coordination within and between Stockholm and Brussels, and perceptions of success. Responses to these questions provide a sweeping perspective of the last 'real' presidency of the Council of the EU, thus providing empirical evidence useful for making comparisons with past presidencies. The results will also enable us to compare pre and post-Lisbon presidencies – the central task of a larger research project of which this paper is part. [1]

The paper is divided into three sections. The first offers an overview of the academic literature on presidencies, a field which has grown in recent years owing to increasing interest in the real, and imagined, powers of the presidency as an institution. The second turns to the Swedish case and provides a brief background to the Swedish presidency. The third section reports the results of the survey of Swedish officials involved with the presidency. This section is sub-

[1] This paper is made possible by a research grant from the Riksbankens Jubileumsfond of Sweden, and is part of a project carried out in cooperation between the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, the European Institute of Public Administration, and the University of Ljubljana. The project includes the use of a similar survey carried out for the Slovenian Presidency in 2008. Ongoing and future studies, resources permitting, will complement the analysis here by focusing on the Belgian (late 2010), Hungarian (early 2011), and Polish (late 2011) presidencies.

divided into the various aspects of the presidency evaluated by the questionnaire. The conclusion of the paper extrapolates the findings to broader trends, offers policy relevant recommendations, and points the direction towards future research.

Why Study EU Presidencies?

The rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union has proven to be one of the most enduring elements of the EU political system. A rotating presidency of the EU's central intergovernmental institution, then formally called the Council of Ministers, was conceived in the Paris Treaty of 1951. Since then, and despite numerous changes to the Union, including enlargement and institutional reform, only minor changes have occurred regardless of growing concerns about regular six-month shifts in the continuity of the Council's activities. Those concerns led to efforts to enhance consistency, including a 'multiannual programme' initiative involving six successive presidencies (2004-2006) and the 'trio' concept of agenda-planning (since 2007). Under the trio format, three presidencies jointly fashion a programme, with the idea that this programme will carry through the full 18-month period.

For member states, holding the office of presidency of the Council of the European Union offers several potential advantages. Although not enjoying a specific mandate to initiate new legislative proposals or remove issues from the agenda, the rotating Council presidency can 'structure' the agenda by emphasising some issues and de-emphasising others (Tallberg 2003). It can do this by exercising a variety of levers available to a presidency-in-office, including serving as the point of contact for other EU institutions, acting as a broker in negotiations, representing the Council in inter-institutional negotiations, and

representing the Council externally (Maurer 2008). Moreover, effective presidencies can exercise such levers more effectively if they have a deft knowledge of EU institutional dynamics, political credibility amongst other member states, and pro-integration leanings amongst leadership (Quaglia and Moxon-Browne 2006).

However, the rotating Council presidency, even if it proves effective in exercising the right levers with the right combination of qualities, has anything but 'free reins' in guiding the EU. Not only do unexpected events blow even the best prepared presidencies off-course, but other actors also intervene to condition the leadership capacity of a presidency. Namely, the President of the European Commission plays a powerful role in establishing the EU's policy agenda as a result of its right to initiate and 'frame' most legislation (Rhinard 2010). With the Commission's programming cycle going over several years, the agenda of a 6-month rotating presidency is typically constructed in close collaboration with the Commission (Kajnč 2009a). In light of ever growing number of dossiers under co-decision procedure, whereby the Council and the European Parliament have to agree on the legislative proposal, the programming of the work in the Council is closely related to the work in the European Parliament. Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, on the programme of the Foreign Affairs Council, the presidency must contend with the new High Representative (given her role of a chair of the Foreign Affairs Council) and the president of the European Council drafts the agenda – and, if appropriate, the conclusions – of the European Council. And, of course, other leaders arise on the landscape depending on the issue or stage of the policy process, including powerful heads of states and the President of the European Parliament.

To academics, interested in systematically assessing what factors shape outcomes at the supranational level of governance in Europe, the rotating presidency is of keen interest. This has led to numerous studies of individual

presidencies (see Maurer 2008; Kajnč 2009a; Kaczyński 2009a; Benes and Karlas 2010), including the Swedish presidency per se (see Langdal and von Sydow 2009; Fowler 2009; and Miles 2010), along with more general findings of what contributes to making an 'effective' presidency, including knowledge and experience in EU affairs, smooth domestic coordination, and a proactive Brussels-based representation (see above, along with Schout and Vanhoonacker 2006; Bunse 2009). Such findings are in need of additional testing, however, on some key questions: (a) to what extent can a member state (especially a small one) set the agenda and see its agenda reflected in outcomes, (b) what preparatory activities are most useful for achieving success in a presidency, (c) which actors make for the best partners or worse rivals to a presidency, and (d) what coordination methods work best to ensure consistency within a government and between a government and EU institutions. To be sure, the jury is still out on a number of these questions. But studies such as this one take us further towards more generalisable conclusions about the presidency as a shaper of outcomes at the supranational level and contribute to the burgeoning field of EU agenda-setting and outcome-shaping (Princen and Rhinard 2005; Princen 2009).

Scholarly investigations grew more complicated, of course, with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty on 1 December 2009. From the start of 2010, the role of member governments in serving as a rotating 'President of the European Union' is terminated. The presidency will still continue to chair nine out of ten Council formations as well as manage much of the Council's work. The rotating presidency will thus survive the Lisbon Treaty, but will be squeezed out of its traditional high-profile leadership role by other posts, including the new permanent President of the European Council, the new 'double-hatted' High Representative/Vice President (of the Commission), not to mention the President of the Commission and the increasingly powerful President of the

European Parliament. This congested leadership table will qualify the capacities of the rotating presidency, both in managing the Union's business and in representing the Council internally and externally. An early, and enlightening, indication was provided by the struggle of the Hungarian presidency to reassert itself (early 2011) and rumours that the upcoming Polish presidency will redouble its efforts to become more involved (EPC/CEPS/Egmont 2010).

In short, studies of the presidency, which have proliferated of late, continue the effort to draw systematic conclusions on what role the rotating presidency plays in influencing EU outcomes. This study joins that effort, by looking backwards at the Swedish presidency to test assumptions and evaluate previous findings, and by looking forward in anticipation of a post-Lisbon leadership environment.

The Swedish EU Presidency: Background

Like most turns in the presidency since 2007, the Swedish government inherited a large portion of its agenda from previous presidencies. Sweden formed a part of a 'trio', following France (late 2008) and the Czech Republic (early 2009), and thus participated in constructing a shared 18-month work programme for the period July 2008 – December 2009. In that programme, the trio set out the following areas of focus: climate, environment and energy; jobs, growth and competitiveness; a more secure and open Europe; a Baltic Sea Strategy; relations with neighbouring states; the EU as a global actor; and continued enlargement as.

The French presidency adopted an ambitious set of objectives for its term in office, including immigration, energy and environment, security policy, improving the relationship with the Mediterranean countries, and agriculture. A big member state with extensive experience in EU affairs, France was able to significantly execute leadership during its presidency. The Czech Republic on the

other hand, a small new member of the EU, was arguably less influential. On the positive side, the Czechs did manage to broker a gas deal between Ukraine and Russia in January 2009, and to secure an agreement to advance the launch of the Eastern partnership (Kaczyński 2009b). On the negative side, the Czechs, despite an ambitious agenda for its presidency, faced hurdles in pushing for its own EU agenda. This stemmed, at least partially, from domestic turbulence during the course of its presidency and from a somewhat ineffective bureaucracy (see Kaczyński 2009a). As Sweden's presidency concluded the 18-month Trio presidency, this provided an opportunity to learn valuable lessons from the previous presidencies. One such lesson came in the form of knowledge about others' priorities, which allowed Sweden to navigate the agenda more effectively. Both the French and the Czech presidencies also pointed to the importance of preparing to handle unexpected events during presidencies.[2]

Like any presidency, the Swedish presidency was highly determined by externally dictated agendas and coincided with a number of challenges both at the European and international level. First, the presidency took place during the final chapter of the Treaty reform process, which required Sweden to devote considerable resources toward preparing for an eventual ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. While the role of presidencies in the ratification process of treaties is normally quite limited, Sweden played a fairly active role during the final rounds of the Treaty process and in the early steps of its implementation – particularly in handling the Czech President Klaus' reluctance to sign the Treaty (Langdal and von Sydow 2009: 8), but also in terms of brokering negotiations on nominations of the new posts resulting from the entry into force of the Treaty, being involved in finalising the rules of procedures of new and existing institutions, and in addressing budgetary issues. Though time and resource consuming, this experience also provided Sweden with additional opportunities

[2] For example, France had to deal with the escalating conflict between Russia and Georgia and the unfolding global financial crisis already from an early point during its presidency.

to set the EU agenda and to influence the outcome of these processes. Another set of uncertainties facing the Swedish presidency arose from the fact that it corresponded with the commencement of the permanent EU institution's new five-year cycle. In particular, a new European Parliament was elected in June 2009 and a new incoming European Commission was underway during the Swedish semester. This means that both institutions were only getting ready to work (indeed, the new Commission was not formed until early in 2010).

The second challenge facing the Swedish presidency was the fact that it occurred right at the time of the global UN climate change summit, held in Copenhagen in December 2009. The presidency's role during the negotiations was to uphold the EU's climate agreement and ensure joint EU action, negotiate a deal between the member states on how to distribute the costs associated with a climate agreement, and represent the Union during the negotiations with other countries during the Copenhagen summit.

Third, the Swedish presidency inherited the global financial and economic financial crisis. A preoccupation for the previous trio partners, the economic and financial crisis became a central concern for Sweden as well. Besides these three externally driven issues, other priorities of the Swedish presidency included the Stockholm Programme, the Baltic Sea Strategy, and the Eastern Partnership.[3]

By the end of the presidency, the Swedish government appeared to manage these challenges reasonably well, negotiating new leadership in the EU political system (including the new External Action Service) and promoting common EU approaches to help manage the effects of the economic and financial crisis, and crafting an EU agreement on reducing climate change emissions by 80-95% by 2050. The Swedish government claimed success (Report on the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union) as did many media outlets

[3] See also the Work Programme for the Swedish Presidency, available online at: http://www.sweden.gov.se/content/1/c6/12/88/73/9fc3303c.pdf

(see, for example, EU Observer 2009). In addition to uncovering how officials conducted the presidency, the survey reported below also asks officials for their opinions of the presidency to reveal a more nuanced picture of perceived success.

The Swedish Presidency: Survey Results

Most studies of presidencies rely on qualitative data gleaned from interviews and press reports, a type of data collection that offers rich information but limited possibilities to generalise or to understand the attitudes of officials. Our data is collected through a survey of 120 Swedish foreign ministry officials in Stockholm and Brussels, conducted electronically and focused on contact patterns with European-level actors and between central administrations responsible for a presidency and other actors, both before and during the presidency.

The questions in our survey to Swedish foreign ministry officials were constructed both (a) to elicit rich information about how a presidency is actually conducted, and (b) to evaluate common, theoretical assumptions about different aspects of the rotating presidency. For each category of issues discussed below, we offer a brief indication of the popular assumptions and theoretical perspectives we chose to test.

Setting the Agenda and Influencing Outcomes

One of the more significant aspects of a presidency is the ability to set agendas and to leave an imprint on outcomes. The results of previous studies of this aspect have been inconclusive, in the sense that it is difficult to derive a definite answer to what allows a national government to shape the agenda (Tallberg 2003). Nevertheless, it is enlightening to see whether national officials believe in

their ability to shape, or not, the EU's agenda during the presidency. Questions related to agenda setting and influencing outcomes that were posed to the survey participants tested various factors which might influence the agenda-shaping capacity of the presidency, as well as cooperation with the representatives of the Commission/General Secretariat/other member states of the Council with regards to shaping the agenda.

When it comes to setting the agenda for the presidency, about 60% of respondents included the Presidency programme among the three most influential agenda-setting factors. (see Table 3 in Annex for detailed results). It appears that neither the trio nor large members were perceived as significantly influential in setting the agenda – only 20% and 10% of respondents respectively, believed they counted among the three most influential agenda-setting factors. The lessons from the previous French and Czech presidencies about the importance of external events proved applicable also for the Swedish presidency with some 40% of the respondents including external events among the three most influential agenda-setting factors. Among the EU institutions, the Commission scores far above others, with 43.3% of respondents counting it among the three most influential agenda-setting factors.

Furthermore, cooperation with the General Secretariat of the Council and the Commission on shaping the agenda appears to have been extremely good with 84.3% and 74.1% of respondents respectively, calling it 'very good' or 'excellent' (see Table 4 in Annex for detailed results). While at the same time, 90.8% believed that the Commission has its own interests, which it seeks to pursue as opposed to, only 25.9% for the General Secretariat of the Council (see Table 5 in Annex for detailed results). About two thirds of the officials also thought that the Commission uses its advantage of procedural and contextual knowledge to pursue its own interests, and as high as 72.4% of respondents believed that

larger member states have more influence on the Commission. Furthermore, 40.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that some officials in the Commission (seconded or permanent) pursue particular interests on behalf of their member states. For the General Secretariat of the Council these figures were significantly lower (see Table 5 in Annex for detailed results).

Roughly half of the surveyed Swedish officials participated in a Council working party during the presidency. Out of those officials, over 70% agree or strongly agree that the search for solutions was the dominant working spirit in these working parties (see Table 6 in Annex for detailed results). This supports previous reports that the Swedish presidency was generally perceived as a pragmatic broker rather than a strong leader for the Union (see, for example, Langdal 2010). At the same time, about a half of the respondents also believed that the dominant working spirit in Council working parties was defending national interests. More generally, most respondents who had participated in Council working parties felt that the presidency had control over its proceedings. During the working parties, the Commission was mainly perceived as playing "a constructive role in helping to find compromise" by over two thirds of the respondents.

Preparation for the Presidency

Undertaking a presidency is typically seen to impose considerable pressure on the capacities of a national administration, both small and large. Managing an agenda, in particular, requires juggling a complex agenda comprised of specific issues of great concern to some governments and general issues of concern to all. Add to that the likelihood of unexpected events requiring immediate processing and attention (Schout 1998), along with the fact that national officials require strong skills and understanding in navigating EU processes, and it is no surprise that many studies emphasize the importance of building capacity in national

administration in preparation for a presidency. Equally, and in some cases perhaps even more important than 'hard knowledge' expertise are 'soft skills' such as communication, negotiations, rhetoric and informal networking. In a study on the Slovenian presidency, Kajnč and Svetličič found that the latter types of competences were viewed by Slovenian civil servants as especially important when running the presidency (Kajnč and Svetličič 2010). How did the Swedish presidency prepare for its turn at the helm of the EU, and what skills and competences were seen as critical?

Preparations for the Swedish presidency began in earnest in 2007. The preparatory work was carried out within the framework of the government offices' ordinary organizational forms and working methods while the Prime Minister's Office was assigned overall responsibility for coordinating the actions. The Minister of EU Affairs, Cecilia Malmström, was responsible for the coordination of the preparatory work in the government offices. At the civil servant level, this work was coordinated by the EU Coordination Secretariat of the Prime Minister's Office, working closely with the Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels and the other ministries. It was adopted as a principle that the entire Government Offices would be involved in the training for the purpose of running the EU presidency. The competence development training concentrated first on training in procedures and on the institutional frameworks, with the focal point being the role of the presidency. Since June 2008 and for the remainder of the year, the training focused on developing proficiency in negotiation and chairing techniques. In spring 2009, activities focused on competence development for ministers, state secretaries and their political staff.

In the survey we asked questions about the preparation for the presidency. Questions included "did you attend any organized training in preparation for the Presidency?" and "on which of the following topics did you attend any organized training?" [e.g. "learning about the institutions, processes and decision-making

routines of the EU", "improving my command of a foreign language", "building up personal competences like rhetoric skills, chairing of meetings, negotiation skills", and "building relationships with colleagues active in EU affairs"], as well as respondents' opinions on which personal competences they deemed most important.

About 63% (N=120) of the respondents stated that they had participated in some kind of organized training prior to the presidency. The most common training thread they received was learning about the institutions, procedures and decision-making routines in the EU (39.2%). 37.5% also took part in training on development of personal competences such as rhetoric and negotiation skills and how to chair meetings. At the same time, only 20% received training aimed at raising their command of a foreign language or to build relationships with colleagues working in EU affairs. These findings are also interesting in light of the type of skills the respondents considered to be the most important during the Swedish presidency. A vast majority of the respondents (N=87) answered that such skills as foreign language knowledge (82.7%), knowledge about European institutions (90.8%), building informal contacts (88.0%), team work, and organization/distribution of work (90.8%) were either 'important' or 'very important'.

Cooperation with EU Institutions and Other Member States

Relationships matter, of course, in the management of an EU presidency. The patterns of those relationships, their conduct and their quality, and how different sides perceive their effectiveness, can tell us not only about how a presidency takes place but whether such relationships might contribute to a smoothly running presidency (Quaglia and Moxon-Browne 2006). The questions asked on this topic focused on which other actors were seen as critical cooperation

partners, for what purposes cooperation was undertaken, what kinds of information passed between partners, and whether officials were satisfied by with the cooperation. For example, we asked such questions as, "how satisfied were you with the cooperation between you and the following actors during the Presidency?" and "how often did you receive information from the following actors in your specific area of work?" [e.g. "my ministry", "the EU department at the Prime Minister's Office", "the permanent Representation of Sweden in Brussels", "General Secretariat of the Council", and the "Commission"].

Regarding cooperation with the trio members, France and the Czech Republic, about a quarter of the respondents said they were (highly) satisfied and a quarter that they were (highly) unsatisfied with the cooperation around shaping the joint 18-month programme (see Table 7 in Annex). With the exception of the question on satisfaction with the cooperation in facilitating the handing over of the Presidency, in all other cooperation areas we examined (e.g. distribution of work, cooperation in activities such as websites and media relations, help in negotiations and with chairing) the percentages of those (highly) unsatisfied prevailed. Nor was the trio viewed as particularly important during the implementation phase (15.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed it was important; N=86). On the contrary, close cooperation with the General Secretariat of the Council was overwhelmingly viewed as more important than the trio (76.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the prevailing importance of the close cooperation with the General Secretariat of the Council; N=88). One reason for this could be that a majority of the respondents claimed that cooperation with the trio was contingent on informal contacts between individuals. Another explanation could perhaps be that more experienced members of the trio (e.g. France) were perceived to be 'dominating cooperation'.

Moving away from the trio, the survey results show distinctive levels of perceived success in cooperation with different actors with regard to the type of

cooperation. When it comes to obtaining background information on the substance of the issue, Commission and General Secretariat of the Council seem equally helpful with about three quarter of respondents assessing cooperation as very good or excellent. Cooperation with other member states in this respect was assessed as somewhat less successful. When it comes to obtaining information on the positions of other actors, however, the three actors – Commission, General Secretariat of the Council and representatives of member states – are not that far apart in the perception of Swedish officials, with cooperation rated as very good or excellent, oscillating at around 60%. Eventually, when it comes to obtaining information on procedural questions, the General Secretariat is clearly viewed as most helpful, with 87.1% of respondents assessing cooperation with it as very good or excellent, followed by 53.2% with regard to the Commission. Cooperation with representatives of other member states deemed as rather insignificant (see Table 8 in Annex).

Organising for the Presidency

A smooth presidency, it is sometimes noted, requires efficient coordination structures within a national administration, along with strong ties between a national administration and its Brussels representation and EU institutions (Bunse 2009: 64). The structures designed for coordination used during 'normal' times of EU business, however, must be capable of adapting to the pace, stress, and complexities of managing an EU presidency (Kassim, Peters and Wright 2000). During the Swedish presidency, tasks were divided up within the government, led by Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt, while the ministers and ministries retained responsibility for their respective areas of work. General government meetings were held on a regular basis to discuss cross-cutting issues. At the civil servant level, the presidency was mostly set up around the existing organizational structures. However, a forum was established within the Prime Minister's Office to coordinate and exchange information between the

government offices and the Permanent Representation in Brussels. Special secretariats for managing meetings and communications were also set up during the presidency. The Permanent Representation of Sweden in Brussels played a critical role during the presidency, leading the Swedish negotiation work for the Council of Ministers, both at the ambassador level in Coreper and at the official level in the approximately 160 Council Working Groups. It held weekly meetings to coordinate the activities at all levels in the Council.

Our questions to officials here regarded how coordination took place both within ministries and national governments, and between national administrations and Brussels partners. Such questions included "how many times did you attend a meeting in Brussels in preparation for the Presidency", "from where did you receive information regarding Swedish objectives in your area of work during the Presidency?" [e.g. "from the Trio – Presidency programme", "from the preparatory documents of the Presidency" or "from the Permanent Representation in Brussels"].

In terms of satisfaction with domestic coordination, a vast majority (91%) of respondents (as might be expected) were satisfied with cooperation within their own ministry and a bit less (76.7%) with the cooperation with the Permanent Representation. Roughly half of respondents were satisfied with cooperation with other ministries and with the Prime Minister's office (see Table 9 in Annex). Likewise, the Brussels Representation appears to also be viewed as an important source of information to Swedish officials during the presidency, both pertaining to the areas of work of the respondents (with 77.8% of respondents answering that they receive information for the Permanent Representation regularly, and another 22% receiving information periodically; N=99), and to the negotiation positions of their member state partners (72.95 of respondents receiving the information regularly and 20.8% periodically; N=96).

When asked about their personal views of the administrative changes needed to be made following the presidency, almost a half of the participants (47.1%; N=85) think that the Swedish government should reorganize for greater effectiveness when it comes to working with the EU. This applies mostly to the EU department at the Prime Minister's Office, which almost a third (31.8%; N=85) of the participants agreed is in need of reorganization. Conversely, the Swedish Permanent Representation in Brussels was largely thought of as not needing any reorganization (only 16.5% of respondents (strongly) agreeing with the need of reorganisation of the Permanent Representation for greater efficiency).

Perceptions of Success

Defining the level of success in a presidency is not an entirely straightforward task as it raises the question: success *for whom*? Of course, any country holding the presidency will be prone to report that it achieved its objectives, regardless of whether it did so or not in reality. Other member states may be more critical and define success either in terms of the extent progress was made on one of their priority areas, or whether the presidency was perceived as a helpful coordinator and facilitator of the Union's overall work. Another question any evaluation of a presidency must seek to answer is *what* success should entail? Success could equally well be defined as making progress on a number of policy issues as obtaining a higher profile either for the EU or for the presidency country itself. While measuring success based on the progress made on certain policies offers clear benchmarks, it is not an entirely fair measurement as the EU's policies also tend to be subject to uncontrollable external events. A more equitable assessment would be to ask officials involved in the presidency for their opinions of the presidency, so as to reveal a more nuanced picture of perceived success. However, before exploring our survey findings, a brief

discussion about the issue-specific outcomes of the Swedish presidency seems appropriate.

The Swedish EU presidency, taking place during a time of considerable upheaval in the European Union, had an ambitious agenda to tackle. Clearly, one of the major achievements of the presidency was its successful handling of the institutional and constitutional questions. The Irish vote in favour of the Lisbon Treaty in early October 2009 brought renewed hopes of finalizing the ratification process before the end of the year. But first one last remaining stumbling block had to be overcome: convincing Czech President Klaus to sign the treaty. Here, Sweden played an instrumental role in facilitating a deal with the Czechs, relying on low-key diplomacy, which resulted in formally paving the way for entry into effect of the Lisbon Treaty on 1 December 2009. Sweden also played a role in paving the ground for the appointments of the new positions as presidency of the Council and High Representative of Foreign Affairs (Barber 2010). However, Sweden also had disagreements, particularly with France and Germany, on how to manage the (re)appointment of José Manuel Barroso for a second term as Commission president: while Sweden favoured an immediate appointment by the European Council, France and Germany preferred to first have consultations with the European Parliament (EurActiv, 12 June 2009).

With regard to climate change – arguably the highest external priority of the Swedish presidency – things did not unfold equally well. Already during the first half of 2009 had expectations for a comprehensive Climate Deal at the Copenhagen summit gradually waned. Of course, the failure to strike a deal in Copenhagen can hardly be blamed on the EU as such; other major players such as the United States and China bear significant responsibility as well. The Swedish presidency appeared to manage other EU member states' positions during the negotiations as well as could be expected under the difficult circumstances. At the same time, the EU's influence over the overall negotiations

was apparently lacking. As the holder of the EU presidency, Sweden sought to ensure that the EU would act forcefully during the multilateral climate negotiations. This appears not to have been the case. The EU was sidelined by other actors, particularly the United States and China, but also Russia and India (NY Times, 22 December 2009).

Another priority of the Swedish presidency was the EU's adoption of a new strategic work programme for the justice and home affairs (JHA) policy area. The 'Stockholm programme', adopted by the European Council on 11 December 2009, specifies EU measures in the areas of police, border and customs issues, legal matters and asylum, migration and visa policy. Although largely seen as successful, the Swedish presidency also attracted criticism for failing to advance the rights of citizens in the Stockholm programme (Langdal 2010: 3). In addition, the Swedish presidency also successfully advocated the EU's Baltic Sea Strategy, adopted by the European Council on 20-30 October 2009. Progress was also made on the enlargement process and in taking concrete steps toward strengthened EU partnerships with key global partners, including Brazil, China, India, Russia and South Africa.

Turning our attention now to the survey, questions on the success of the presidency included "what is your personal view of the success of the Swedish Presidency?" and "how do you define success during a Presidency?" Based on the survey results, we may conclude that the Swedish presidency, on the whole, was deemed a success, with most of the respondents agreeing with the statement that the Swedish presidency was either 'very successful' (64.0%) or 'excellent' (20.2%; N=89). When asked how they define success during the presidency, about half of the respondents chose "a higher profile for Sweden in the eyes of the other EU members", whereas the options "a large number of Swedish policy priorities agreed in Brussels" or "a higher profile for the EU in eyes of the world"

(16.1%; N=87) do not figure among the definition of a success among our respondents (18.4% and 16.1% respectively; N=87) .

The presidency appears to also have been quite successful in advocating Swedish interests. Almost 40% of the participants said that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they were able to advocate Swedish interests with greater ease during the presidency. However, a vast majority (73.5%) also responded that they thought that reaching agreements took precedence over Swedish interests. Just over a half also thought that the administrative responsibilities of the presidency and general EU goals also took precedence over Swedish interests (see Table 10 in Annex). Respondents also seem to think that the Swedish interests matched the interests of other member states 54.5% of respondents (strongly) agreeing; N=88) , but not necessarily the trio partners, (29.95% respondants (strongly) agreeing; N=87) or the General Secretariat of the Council (23.3% (strongly) agreeing; N=87), while the opinion with regard to matching interests with the Commission is split with 50% of respondents (strongly) agreeing and the rest disagreeing or neither agreeing nor disagreeing (N=88).

Conclusions

The Swedish presidency was considered a success by most accounts. Previous reports have focused on the achievements that were made during the fall of 2009 (Langdal and von Sydow 2009; Miles 2010). Rather than analyse the Swedish presidency on the basis of limited case studies or specific issues, this paper reports unique findings using a survey method of actual participants. Uncovering 'subjective' opinions based on a widespread survey gives us greater explanatory depth on such important questions as how EU members prepare for a

presidency, organise coordination, perceive their effect on agenda setting, and work with European interlocutors. Our key findings are summarized below.

In terms of setting and running the EU agenda, the survey suggests that the Swedish presidency had an impact on the agenda, although fostering consensus in the EU took priority over advocating national interests. The majority of the respondents suggested the Swedish presidency was able to exercise agenda control through chairing the Council meetings. Some clear differences emerged between how the Commission and the General Secretariat of the Council were perceived, which correspond to findings in the Slovenian study (Kajnč 2009b). While cooperation with the General Secretariat of the Council and the Commission on shaping the agenda was generally viewed as successful, the Commission – but not the General Secretariat of the Council – was seen as an important agenda-shaper vis-à-vis the presidency. When asked how success of the Swedish presidency should be viewed, most respondents answered "a higher profile for Sweden in the EU". The fact that only 13% of the respondents thought "the advancement of Swedish policy priorities" was the best definition of success seems to confirm the general view of the Swedish presidency as being consensus-oriented rather than self-seeking.

When it comes to preparation, the presidency appears to have been quite successful, with a majority of the respondents (57%) saying that they received some kind of training before the presidency. However, the stated objective of the Swedish presidency that "the entire Government Offices would be involved in the training required by an EU presidency" (Report on the Swedish presidency of the Council of the European Union, 1 July – 31 December) seems not to have been fully achieved. The most common forms of training focused on learning about the institutions, procedures and decision-making routines in the EU and developing personal competences such as rhetorical and negotiation skills, and how to chair meetings. Only some 20% of officials received training aimed at raising their

command of a foreign language or learning about how to build relationships with EU colleagues. A vast majority of the participants answered that foreign language skills, knowledge about European institutions, building informal contacts, and team work and organization/distribution of work were 'important' or 'very important'[4] for the work in the EU, which suggests that including these elements into a pre-presidency training repertoire would be helpful. When preparing for the presidency, the preparatory documents produced by the presidency were also viewed as an important tool for accessing information about Sweden's objectives.

As to cooperation with EU partners, the Swedish presidency played the role of an honest broker and advocated a consensus-driven style of leadership – in stark contrast to the other trio members France and the Czech Republic. Regarding the trio and the relations with the trio members France and Czech Republic, the survey indicates that this arrangement was not viewed as a particularly successful one. For example, the trio was not perceived as very helpful in preparing for the presidency by Swedish national officials nor very instrumental in assisting Sweden in setting the agenda.[5] In particular, France was perceived as playing a dominant role within the trio. Cooperation with other member states and with EU institutional actors appears to have largely been successful.

A final aspect is the internal organization of the presidency. It appears, somewhat curiously, that the surveyed Swedish national officials were more satisfied with Stockholm-Brussels cooperation (that is, cooperation with the Permanent EU Representation and the EU institutions) than with the intra-Stockholm cooperation (that is, cooperation with the Prime Minister's Office and the other ministries). The internal organization of the Prime Minister's Office, as

[4] On the question of cooperating with the other members of the trio, a majority of the respondents claimed that cooperation was contingent on informal contacts between individuals.
[5] This observation underscores previous similar findings made in Langdal (2010).

well as the EU coordination units within ministries, comes under some criticism. When asked about whether any additional administrative changes were needed in light of the experiences from the EU presidency, a surprisingly large number of the respondents indeed thought so. About a third of the participants agreed with the statement that the EU department at the Prime Minister's Office was in need of reorganization. At the same time, the Swedish Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels was not seen to be in need of any further reorganization by most of the respondents.

The findings of this study allow us to test popular assumptions and evaluate theoretical findings, yet they also allow us to draw some general conclusions relevant for a Swedish audience and perhaps also for future presidencies. Based on the results of a survey, the following recommendations can be made to policymakers, even against the background of a shifting post-Lisbon institutional framework:

- Training could be better tailored to the demands of EU affairs, and common sense suggests this could be the case outside of an EU presidency period as well. Targeted training would help ensure that national administrators, as well as policy and political officials, have sufficient 'hard' knowledge of EU institutional dynamics, working routines, decision methods, and negotiation techniques to act efficiently in an EU context.

- Similarly ensure that national administrators also receive training in 'soft skills' such as knowledge of foreign languages, how to build informal contacts and carry out team work.

- Review the organisation and operation of the EU department in the Prime Minister's Office, in the light of a considerable degree of concern regarding its functioning during the presidency. Effective coordination amongst ministries is a perennial problem, even when a member

government is not in the EU's driver's seat, so learning from other countries' experiences may be a route towards improved practice.

- Examine closely the effectiveness of links between EU coordination efforts in Stockholm and the (EU presidency) coordination apparatus in Brussels. As discussed, the Swedish government used the 'Brussels presidency' model by which most EU business is led from Brussels rather than the national capital. The model seems to have worked sufficiently, however, for the work in times of 'normal' membership, where Swedish interests come more to the front, communication and coordination links between Brussels and Stockholm need to be improved. One measure in particular in this regard is to ensure that the EU delegation is adequately staffed and resourced.

This paper aimed to shed light on the operation of the 2009 Swedish presidency via a widespread survey of officials active during that period. The presidency has been widely hailed as a success, displaying a characteristically Swedish type of efficiency and pragmatism. Nevertheless, we have identified several areas where improvement is needed, and where additional attention could improve Sweden's role in, and approach to working with, the EU. This study should be complemented with additional research into presidencies held before and after that of Sweden, and the results of the survey compared with similar surveys conducted elsewhere.

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Annex: A note on methodology and tables with results interpreted in the report

The analysis is based on the results of a survey conducted among 120 Swedish public servants involved directly, on substantive issues, as experts or diplomats, in the conduct of Sweden's Presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of 2009. The electronic survey included 32 closed-type questions distributed via emails throughout each ministry's EU department on or near 9 April 2010. Reminders were sent in early June 2010. The electronic questionnaire remained accessible until 23 June 2010.

The response rate (120 questionnaires were answered, from an estimated distribution number of 300[6]), the even number of responses from capital and Brussels-based officials, and the policy sectors represented all suggest a fairly even distribution and fair degree of representation from which to interpret our results.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to the hierarchy in the public service

Position	**N**	**Percentage of respondents**
Ministers, State Secretaries	2	1.8
Political advisor	3	2.7
Senior advisor	12	10.9
Director	15	13.6
Deputy Director	28	25.5
Head of division/department	5	4.5
Diplomat in the Permanent Representation of Sweden in Brussels	13	15.8
Diplomat in the diplomatic and consular representations (with the exception of the Permanent Representation of	1	0.9

[6] The exact distribution figure is difficult to state with certainty; however, we know that most ministries distributed the survey via their internal email lists of EU-related officials.

Sweden in Brussels)		
Desk officer/analyst	31	28.2
SUM	120	100.0

With regard to the policy fields, it should be noted that respondents had the opportunity of marking several fields. Though there are differences in absolute numbers, those numbers roughly represent an even share of public servants working in specific fields during the Presidency.

Table 2: Representation across the policy fields

Policy field	**Number**	**Percentage of respondents**
Foreign and security policy, external relations	14	11.7
Enlargement	4	3.3
Development co-operation, humanitarian aid, human rights	4	3.3
Economy and monetary affairs	8	6.7
Agriculture, fisheries, forestry	29	24.2
Institutional matters, budget, taxation	6	5.0
Research, innovation, information society	13	10.8
Energy	7	5.8
Environment	23	19.2
Education, training, youth, employment and social affairs	19	5.8
Justice and home affairs	30	25.0
Internal market, consumer protection, enterprise	20	16.7
Transport, maritime affairs	7	5.8
Regional policy	9	7.5
External trade, customs	5	4.2
Public health, Food safety	13	10.8
Culture, audiovisual, media	6	5.0
SUM	120	100

In the following, the results referred to in the report are presented in tables. Unless otherwise stated, all results are in percentages. N refers to the number of responses to a particular question.

Table 3: Please choose the three most influential policy agenda setting factors during the Presidency?

(N = 120)	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
The agenda was determined by:		
the Presidency program	71	59.2
the trio	24	20
larger member states	12	10
external events	47	39.2
the General Secretariat of the Council	15	12.5
the Commission	52	43.3
the European Parliament	9	7.5
random factors	13	10.8

Table 4: How successful was your cooperation with the representatives of the Commission and the General Secretariat of the Council with regards to shaping the agenda?

	poor/satisfactory	**good**	**very good/excellent**
Commission (N=77)	2.6	23.4	74.1
General Secretariat of the Council (N=70)	4.3	11.4	84.3

Table 5: To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the Commission and the General Secretariat of the Council?

	strongly disagree/disagree	**neutral**	**agree/strongly agree**
It has its own interests it seeks to pursue.			
Commission*	2.3	6.9	90.8
General Secretariat of the Council	48.2	25.9	25.9
Larger member states have more influence on it			
Commission	6.9	20.7	72.4
General Secretariat of the Council	40.7	29.1	30.2
Some officials (seconded or permanently employed) pursue particular interests on behalf of their member state.			
in the Commission	28.7	31.0	40.2
in the General Secretariat of the Council	60	21.2	18.8
It uses its advantage of procedural and contextual knowledge to pursue its own interests.			
Commission	11.5	21.8	66.6
General Secretariat of the Council	43.5	30.6	25.9

**Commission N=87; General Secretariat of the Council N=85.*

Table 6: To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the proceedings of the Council working party?

N=48	**strongly disagree/disagree**	**neutral**	**agree/strongly agree**
The search for solutions was the dominant working spirit in the working party	10.4	29.2	70.8

Defending national interests was the dominant working spirit in the working party	34.0	17.0	48.9
The Presidency had most control over the proceedings of the working party	2.1	14.6	83.3
The General Secretariat of the Council had most control over the proceedings of the working party	56.3	29.2	14.6
The Commission played a constructive role in helping to find compromise	18.8	12.5	68.7

Table 7: How satisfied were you with the cooperation amongst the trio (France, Czech Republic and Sweden) on the following issues:

N=85	**(highly) unsatisfied**	**neutral**	**(highly) satisfied**
Shaping the 18-month program (N=85)	27.1	44.7	28.2
Distributing work between the trio members (N=82)	32.9	45.1	22.0
Cooperating on activities (web sites, media relations) (N=79)	40.5	44.3	15.2
Help with finding compromises (N=81)	37.0	44.4	18.5
Chairing the Council working parties (N=79)	38.0	39.2	22.8
Facilitating the handing over of the Presidency (N=80)	31.3	31.2	37.5
Providing training and expert help (N=77)	42.9	49.4	7.8

Table 8: How successful was your cooperation with the representatives of the Commission, the General Secretariat of the Council and other member states with regard to:

	poor/satisfactory	**good**	**very good/excellent**
Obtaining background information on the substance of an issue.			
Commission (N=76)	7.9	18.4	73.7
General Secretariat of the Council (N=70)	12.9	12.8	74.3
Representatives of other member states (N=75)	12.0	32.0	56.0
Obtaining information on the positions of other actors.			
Commission (N=78)	14.1	29.5	56.4
General Secretariat of the Council (N=70)	11.4	21.4	67.1
Representatives of other member states (N=74)	8.1	31.1	60.8
Obtaining information on procedural questions.			
Commission (N=77)	15.6	31.2	53.2
General Secretariat of the Council (N=70)	2.9	10.0	87.1
Representatives of other member states (N=71)	38.0	43.7	18.3

Table 9: How satisfied were you with the cooperation between you and the following actors during the Presidency:

	(highly) unsatisfied	**neutral**	**(highly) satisfied**
My own ministry (N=101)	4.0	5.0	91.0
Other ministries (N=98)	7.1	40.9	52.0

The EU Department at the Prime Minister's Office (N=97)	8.2	42.3	49.5
The Permanent Representation of Sweden in Brussels (N=99)	6.1	18.2	76.7

Table 10: Please indicate whether you agree with the following statements about the possibility to advocate Swedish interests in the EU during the time of the Presidency:

	strongly disagree/disagree	**neutral**	**agree/strongly agree**
I was able to advocate Swedish interests with greater ease during the Presidency (N=89)	36.0	24.7	39.3
reaching agreements took precedence over Swedish interests (N=87)	8.0	18.4	73.5
administrative responsibilities of the Presidency took precedence over Swedish interests (N=88)	22.7	26.2	51.1
general EU goals took precedence over Swedish interests (N=88)	18.2	26.1	55.7

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