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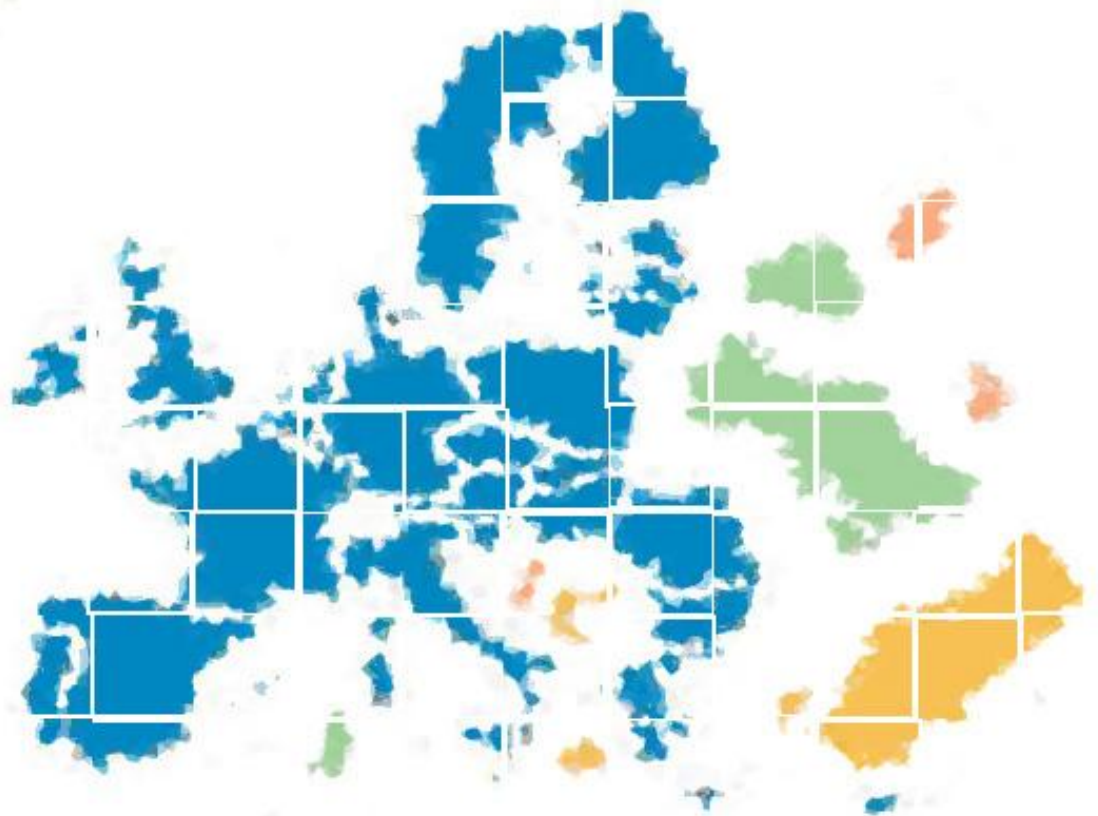
Achievements of the first Hungarian EU Council Presidency

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Policy Paper

Achievements of the first Hungarian EU Council Presidency



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The first Hungarian EU Council Presidency

With the closing session of the European Council on the 24 June the first ever Hungarian Presidency of the EU Council has come to an end. A few working-level meetings are still taking place, and, of course, unexpected events might take place at any moment (until the end of the semester at 30th of June). A first evaluation of the achievements of the Hungarian EU Presidency is, however, a feasible undertaking.

Upon making a short overview of the international press about the closing meeting of the European Council, one can observe three main issues attracting attention. First and utmost, the Greek economic crisis and the conditions set by the Euro-zone for paying the next 12 billion Euro installment from the overall package of 110 billion. The whole EU and the outside world is following the internal political situation in Greece with tense attention: whether the small and fragile majority in the Parliament would be able to approve the biggest ever austerity package of the country. The Euro-group will decide on further details on the 3 July, among others on the involvement of private investors (which would – in my personal opinion – add further, market related risk factors to the already very high political risks of the operation). A “Plan B” should be ready for implementation (as the German Minister of Finance, Wolfgang Schäuble mentioned it in an interview to the Bild am Sonntag, and George Soros warned the Euro-zone at a conference in Vienna over the week-end). The second main topic was the nomination of the new Head of the European Central Bank, Mario Draghi. The last theme of interest was welcoming of Croatia as a potential new member of the EU by the middle of 2013. The end of the Hungarian Presidency did not make the news. On the very day of the EU Summit, the 24th of June, the Financial Times published an article about Hungary with the title “Tax cut fails to lift consumers” . Inside, there wasn’t a word about the EU and the achievements of the country holding the Presidency for the past 6 months. Seemingly, this brought a sigh of relief to both sides. Obviously, in Budapest the end of the heavy task of chairing various EU Council meetings meant a good reason for joy and relief. As far as Brussels was concerned, leaders of EU institutions and Member States felt better that a Presidency of an unpredictable and sometimes surprising government in the chair of the Council was coming to an end.

The Program of the Hungarian Presidency

Firstly, an EU Presidency can be evaluated by the accomplishment of its own program. From this aspect, the Hungarian Presidency set realistic goals in advance and could almost entirely achieve its agenda. The program of a six month EU Presidency should be subdivided into three parts: carrying on longer term tasks of the EU, achieving own ‘priorities’ and handling unexpected events.

In the first category, of longer term tasks, the dominating issue has been undoubtedly the promotion of EU economic governance. In this area, the Hungarian experts chairing various meetings of the EU Member States did a good job. The whole package of the very complex economic governance issue had progressed during the Hungarian Presidency period, including the six new regulations, which are already before the European Parliament. However, Hungary had three handicaps. First: the country is not a member of the Euro-zone, as is the case of its two successors: Poland followed by Denmark as well. Second, Hungary has no Minister of Finance in the government, as the former Ministry of Finance has been amalgamated with other government offices into the super structure of the Ministry of National Economy. Third, Hungary has been among those four EU Member States that did not join the new initiative of the “Euro Plus Pact” uniting the Euro-zone and six non-Euro-zone countries, an alliance forging the basis of a joint economic governance in the EU. Due to the above reasons stated above, and in spite of the good professional work of the experts, Hungary has not been a real player at top level decisions concerning the stabilization of the Euro-zone.

Another long term issue of importance has been the EU enlargement. The Hungarian Presidency made great efforts in order to accelerate and achieve the accession negotiations with Croatia. Of course, the most sensitive issues are always left to the end phase of such negotiations. Successful mediation, and problem-solving abilities of Hungary have facilitated the closing of talks between the candidate country and the EU Member States. In the last month of the Hungarian Presidency an important and positive turn happened in another neighboring country: the Serbian Government captured and extradited to the ICTY the long researched war criminal Ratko Mladic. This action opened the way for a quicker rapprochement between Serbia and the EU. Hungary, as a direct neighbor, could have initiated an immediate reaction to this positive event and suggested the taking of a united position at the closing summit meeting in June. To doing so, the country in the chair of the Council needs imagination, courage and supporting friends. Hungary may have lacked some of these ingredients and did not make use of the historic opportunity. The State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs promoted the case of Montenegro and Macedonia without even mentioning the name of Serbia which is the key of all positive solutions on the Western Balkans. The complex and sensitive issue of the accession talks of Turkey did not progress under the Hungarian Presidency either. At the same time, Hungary insisted on the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the Schengen Zone, whereas it looked unrealistic from the outset.

In the category of personal priorities, Hungary had set ambitious goals, which have been achieved for the most part. The Danube Strategy has been approved at the closing summit meeting. This macro-regional

project is the second of its kind after the successful model of the Baltic Sea Strategy. EU Member States had started the preparatory work on the basis of a Romanian-Austrian initiative from 2008. Hungary joined the idea by 2009 at the Danube meeting in Ulm (Germany) and invited the participants to a high level meeting to Budapest. This meeting took place in February 2010 in parallel with a stakeholders' conference organized by the European Commission. The double event in Budapest indicated a turn in the Danube Strategy: from the mountain of ideas, the most supported priorities were selected and further developed by the Commission. In the end, six EU Member States on the Danube – Germany, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria – joined by two other interested EU countries, the Czech Republic and Slovenia, shall participate in the project. At the same time, six neighbors of the larger Danube area – Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Moldavia and Ukraine – could join the strategy. The new project of the EU is promising increased dynamism of cooperation in key areas like transport, environment, security or cultural exchange in a new and appropriate dimension of integration.

The Roma Strategy is another new development which took shape during the Hungarian semester of the EU. A major contribution to its content came from the excellent report of the Hungarian MEP Livia Járóka, discussed by four committees of the European Parliament. The new Roma Strategy has recognized the importance of the increased Roma population of the EU reaching 12 million people after the last enlargements of 2004 and 2007. It suggests coordinated action in the Member States in order to solve fundamental problems of the Roma people like housing, health care, education, employment and social integration. The Roma Strategy asks the EU Member States to proceed to action, to nominate government representatives and establish national contact points. A mechanism of yearly reports would assure the political control at the EU level.

Hungary also intended to promote the integration of the EU energy sector. The building of interconnectors between the gas pipelines of neighboring states like Hungary and Romania, Hungary and Slovakia or Hungary and Croatia would ease the one-sided dependence of every country on the East-West directed pipelines inherited from earlier times. Also the long awaited Nabucco project showed some progress during the Hungarian EU semester. At the same time, the enthusiastic support by Hungary of the AGRI project (transport of liquid gas from Azerbaijan through Georgia across the Black Sea to Romanian ports) was not shared in EU circles with regard to the unrealistic high costs of this solution.

The major foreign policy event of the Hungarian EU Presidency should have been the second summit meeting between the EU and the six Eastern Partnership countries (Ukraine, Belarus, Moldavia, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan). However, this solemn event has been shifted to the second half of the year and will take place under Polish Presidency.

In the official communiqués the reason of the postponement was a series of timing and coordination problems with other international events. However, the Hungarian government did not make a thorough preparatory work in time and, for that reason, was seemingly afraid of a failure at the top level meeting. Consequently, there was not a single opportunity for the European Council to hold any meeting in Hungary during the Presidency time with the participation of Heads of State or Government.

In the category of unexpected events, during the Hungarian EU Presidency, the “Arab Spring” was the highest on the agenda. In Tripoli (Libya) the Embassy of Hungary was the only one among all EU representations that remained active, in spite of dangerous conditions. It has acted on behalf of the EU Presidency and in the name of the whole EU. Otherwise, representatives of the Hungarian Presidency did not play a major role in the conflict. Leaders of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs paid a few fact finding visits in the border regions of Libya. The Hungarian Prime Minister was totally left out from the meeting of the biggest EU members in Paris on Libya. The most ambitious initiative did not come from EU Member States that were either in the chair or belong to the Mediterranean region. Denmark and Holland drafted a plan with the view of deepening the Mediterranean Strategy of the EU and proposing solutions to the hardest economic problems of the countries with continuous political unrest.

The image of Hungary after the EU Presidency

Assuming the tasks of the EU Presidency sheds more light to the country in the chair of the Council in general. How has the external image of Hungary been formed as a result of her performance as president of the EU? According to the press echo – and my personal impressions – the general view in Brussels and other EU capitals has given good notes to the Hungarian experts, those invisible hundreds, or may be, thousands of government officials working behind the scene. There has been quite a different judgment about the performance of the Government of Hungary. The surprisingly small cabinet with extra large ministries established after the 2010 Parliamentary elections in Budapest did not meet the requirements of the structure of the EU Ministerial Council formations.

More specifically, half of the Hungarian Ministries could find their homologues in the EU Council formations and the other half not. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs assumed a double task: participating in the Foreign Affairs Council (chaired by Mrs. Ashton) and chairing the General Affairs Council. The Ministry for Public Administration and Justice and the Ministry of Interior attended the meetings of the Council of Justice and Home Affairs in the EU. (The Ministry of Defense has no role in the EU.) The other four Hungarian Ministries (National Economy, National Resources, National Development, Rural Development) had to face seven different EU Ministerial Councils which are holding meetings

in even more sectoral formations. The real test of the over-centralized Hungarian Government system were the 16 hearings at the Committees of the European Parliament in January. Several State Secretaries were promoted overnight to “State Ministers” in order to respond to the obligations of the Presidency in the EP. Sectors such as employment policy, social inclusion, environment, health, energy, research, infrastructure, transport, education, sport, culture etc. are not represented at ministerial level in the Hungarian Government. During the last six month this discrepancy has been, first of all, a structural problem of the EU Presidency. On the longer run, this is a deeper problem of democracy, transparency, good governance, distribution of work and inter-ministerial coordination in Hungary.

On the home front, most informal ministerial meetings which were held in Hungary took place in the renovated castle of Gödöllő. The place reveals some strange memories of the history of Hungary: after the 1867 “Ausgleich” establishing the dual Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Gödöllő castle was offered to the Habsburg Emperor family. After the First World War it was the summer residence of Regent Horthy. After the Second World War the Soviet Army occupied the building. None of those was a glorious time for the country. Anyhow, the reconstruction of the castle was successful and the organization and logistics during the EU Presidency were excellent thanks to the well prepared protocol service. This latter was really needed as Gödöllő has no hotel accommodation capacities.

All delegates had to stay in Budapest based hotels and they were transported to the meetings with the efficient help of traffic police. Two only ministerial meetings took place at other locations (Debrecen and Balatonfüred). Following the wish of the Prime Minister, the EU Presidency as such, was banned from the capital “in order to avoid traffic jams”. Mr. Orbán himself attended one single informal ministerial session in Hungary (Family Ministers) and addressed the Europe-Asia (ASEM) meeting of Foreign Ministers which had to be interrupted, because of a thunder storm and lack of electricity. As a result, EU delegates could hardly see Hungary, and Hungary could hardly meet EU delegates during the six month.

Hungarian diplomatic missions in third countries, outside the EU would have had important tasks as well during the Presidency. However, too many political changes of diplomats, including well established Ambassadors, before and even during the Presidency weakened the diplomatic staff. There were still a few exceptions, for example the UN Mission of Hungary in New York did a good job in the name of the EU Presidency.

The overall technical performance of the Hungarian EU Presidency gave a mixed but mostly positive image. The goals set by Hungary for her own Presidency period have been overwhelmingly attained. Achieving the

accession negotiations with Croatia and bringing the Roma Strategy and the macro-regional Danube Strategy under roof are undoubtedly masterpieces of those six months. In spite of all that, the general impression about Hungary is negative as a result of surprising developments in internal politics during the Presidency time. The two thirds government majority in the Hungarian Parliament reached by one single political party at the last elections in May 2010 has provoked strange phenomena. Instead of solving long standing problems of the country (like health care, education, public services etc.) this strong majority has been used for monopolizing and ‘eternalizing’ the power and political influence of the governing majority. In fact, in governance the Government itself is playing a secondary role as MPs are frequently circumventing government competencies and obligatory coordination mechanisms with individual draft laws submitted directly to the Parliament. In addition, the parliamentary majority has tried to extend to the maximum its political maneuvering margin. In the economy, it challenged first the EU rules on the maximum of budget deficit, afterwards it collected various new taxes and confiscated the private pension funds. In politics it has abolished – or occupied – several fundamental control functions of democracy (Constitutional Court, Budget Committee, Public Prosecutor, courts, press etc.). In the external dimensions, the parliamentary majority has tried to step over the limits of sovereignty of the country. The extended citizenship rules with the clear promise of voting rights, concrete provisions and the whole spirit of the new Constitution and some symbolic actions (like the famous ‘historical’ carpet in the Justus Lipsius building in Brussels) provoked to various extents all the neighbors of Hungary.

Prime Minister Orbán could not decide whether the EU was a friend or an enemy. After his entry into office he proclaimed war against the IMF but remained uncertain towards the EU. At the yearly conference of the Hungarian Ambassadors by the end of August 2010 he did not mention at all the near EU Presidency as the major challenge of Hungarian diplomacy. He spoke publicly about the task of the Presidency for the first time by the end of October. After his introductory speech in the European Parliament as the President of the Council on the 19 January 2011 he had to face serious critics of the new Hungarian Media Law, a masterpiece of his one-party power offensive. In his first reaction, instead of taming the situation, he blew up the conflict and declared himself ready for “defending Hungary”. On the 15th of March, in Budapest in his speech on the commemoration of the 1848 revolution, he compared the influence of the EU to the oppression of the Habsburg Empire and Soviet dictatorship. All his appearances in Hungary were accompanied by an avalanche of national flags (copying the arrangement of Chinese party congresses) where the EU flag was completely missing (it was added to the national flags only when Mr. Van Rompuy, Mr. Barroso or other dignitaries of the EU visited Hungary). Apart from symbolic anti-European gestures, his political message is dangerously misleading for

Hungary: it is suggesting that alone we are stronger, then together with our EU partners.

As a result of this basic political attitude, the EU Presidency of Hungary could not be a real 'holiday of Europe', a time for mutual rapprochement. The historical occasion was missed and the general image of Hungary in the outside World is worse after the EU Presidency than it used to be before. This outcome may have negative effects in the political, economic or cultural fields in the future. For the EU, the biggest sin of Hungary is having created doubts about the validity and the strength of its values and norms in one of the Member States. With this background, external EU conditionality could be weakened as well.

The European Union Strategy for the Danube Region

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region, also simply called the Danube Strategy is an ambitious project with the aim to include fourteen European countries under the umbrella of the Danube macro-region. The Strategy represents a common approach agreed on by these countries to achieve certain specific objectives, since these objectives cannot be reached by traditional means at the national level. Flooding, transport infrastructure, energy links, environmental protection and economic disparities are joint challenges and common denominators of the Danube region. They have impacts beyond administrative borders and therefore demand a united approach.

Based on the request of several Member States and active support of Romania, Austria and Hungary in particular, the European Commission has developed the Communication and Action Plan, which was published on 8 December 2010¹. According to official documents, the aim of the Strategy is to exploit the potentials of the longest river that runs through the EU and the second longest river of Europe. The Danube crosses 10 countries: Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine and four capitals: Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest and Belgrade. We could say that it is one of the most international rivers of the world, a true axis of Europe. The Danube Delta is also rich in biodiversity and hosts a unique ecosystem. Moreover, the Rhine-Main-Danube waterway connects industrial centres of Western Europe and provides a direct link between the North Sea and the Black Sea. But the volume of traffic on the Danube is presently very low and it is also to be noted that the Danube is one of the most polluted rivers in Europe.

Given the challenges that the region is facing, the Danube Strategy has identified four priorities, called pillars²: (1) connecting people and goods in the Danube region, (2) protecting the environment, (3) building prosperity and growth in the context of inclusion and (4) strengthening institutions, the rule of law and security across the region. Every pillar contains several priority areas which identify detailed action and projects. If successful, the Strategy can facilitate the removal of the obstacles that still exist and prevent the smooth transit of goods, services, capital and persons across the borders. It would enable better exploiting of alternative energy resources, a higher degree of environmental cooperation, ensure security, fight against organized crime and corruption and help overcome socio-economic disparities.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/danube/documents_en.htm

² http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/danube/action_plan_danube.pdf

Hungary took over the six-month rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2011 and the Danube Strategy has been one of its top priorities. This is also reflected in the statement of the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, János Martonyi, who, after the meeting of the General Affairs Council on 13 April 2011, where the Council's conclusions about the Danube Strategy were adopted, said that the first part of the Presidency's agenda has been reached³. Afterwards, the Presidency organized a coordinators' meeting on 9-10 May 2011 in Gödöllő, to enable the national contact persons of the 14 countries participating in the Strategy and their coordinators responsible for 11 action areas to prepare for the implementation of the Strategy.⁴ The coordinators have been previously appointed by Johannes Hahn, European Commissioner for Regional Policy and János Martonyi, Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs in February in Budapest. The Danube Strategy as such has formally been endorsed by the European Council on 24 June in Brussels at the end of the Hungarian Council Presidency. The task for the incoming Polish Council Presidency will be to start the full implementation of the Strategy. But to fulfill its expectations, in addition to high speed implementation it will also demand clear and communicable evidence of the succeeded impacts. Therefore, among over 100 possible projects that the Action Plan drafted by the Commission contains, the first ones should be selected in the upcoming months in order to achieve the first tangible results that are expected for the next year.

Potential problems

(1) The region lacks socio-economic homogeneity and is very diverse, with Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg being among the richest regions in the EU and, going downstream, with Romania, Bulgaria or Ukraine being on the poorer end of the economic spectrum. Furthermore, it includes areas belonging to old Member States, new Member States, candidate, pre-candidate countries and also countries falling under the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy. However, as long as the challenges remain common and relevant themes or topics are addressed, the Danube macro-region may exist regardless of strictly defined boundaries and can involve disparate territories in terms of socio-economic indicators and third countries. Several experts actually consider the different degrees of integration with the EU as an advantage - in their opinion the Strategy can serve as a communication channel between the EU and countries aspiring for membership⁵. In addition, by making the region stronger as a whole, all its constituent countries will benefit.

(2) As in the case of the Baltic Strategy, the Communication document of the European Commission stresses the principle of "three no-s" – no new

³ <http://www.eu2011.hu/news/council-gave-green-light-danube-strategy>

⁴ <http://www.eu2011.hu/news/martonyi-key-element-danube-strategy-central-europe-belongs-together>

⁵ <http://www.zahranicnapolitika.sk/?id=1287&id=1260>

institutions, no new legislation and no new instruments. Instead of the principle of three ‘no’-s, the Hungarian Presidency is an advocate of the principle of “three yes” – yes to better alignment of funding, yes to more efficient coordination of instruments and yes to new ideas. This definitely has a better impact in terms of marketing purposes, however, from the principle of “three no-s” expressed in the Communication of the European Commission it becomes evident that the elaboration of the Danube Strategy needs to fit into the existing dynamics and initiatives within the region as well as the policy framework of the EU. The position of the EU on the issue of funding is therefore clear – no additional funds will be allocated to the Danube Strategy at EU or Member State level. However, it can theoretically count on the use of existing resources – apart from already available EU Structural Funds, TEN-T funds in the field of transport provide further opportunities. Moreover, for countries aspiring for EU membership funds withdrawn from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance are available. For projects engaging Moldova and Ukraine some resources are available under the European Neighborhood Policy Instrument. International financial institutions such as the European Investment Bank or the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development could also be involved. Concerning future funding, the debate about the budget of the next multi-annual financial framework for 2014 – 2020 will already start in the autumn and coordinators of the priority areas should therefore decide about the programs and projects intended to be supported under the aegis of the Danube Strategy.

(3) Complementarity with other EU regional initiatives also raises some question marks, in particular with the Eastern Partnership and the Black Sea Synergy. Some concerns concerning the involvement of the Eastern Partnership countries (Moldova and Ukraine) into the Danube Strategy were voiced by Poland, which considers itself as co-founder of the Eastern Partnership initiative, since these countries are part of both the Danube Strategy and Eastern Partnership. Potential disharmony could occur in relation to the Black Sea Synergy, which is similarly oriented as the Danube Strategy. The Danube Strategy also overlaps with the Europe 2020 Strategy which includes quantified targets for creating jobs, reducing poverty, raising education levels and investing in research and development.

To conclude, the effectiveness of the Strategy cannot yet be measured but there are already tendencies within the EU to create other macro-regions (Black Sea Synergy, Mediterranean region, North Sea-English Channel area). The Danube Strategy will therefore have a key role in determining whether or not this method of working is functioning and if successful, it could serve as a model for other macro-regional strategies.

The energy issue in the Hungarian EU Council Presidency

The Hungarian EU Council Presidency had unexpectedly much to do in the field of energy. One reason was Budapest's rather low initial expectations. At the beginning of 2010, when most of the priorities had been finally set, energy did not seem a high-profile issue. Energy has been a popular topic during the previous presidencies. They have collected the most of the "low-hanging fruits", achieved the visible and easily attainable targets. The calendar for the first half of 2011 seemed to be business-as-usual, without any particular and highly visible event.

Budapest also tried not to address the topic of energy too much publicly. Due to the patterns of the EU energy issue, it has a relatively high conflict potential mainly along old-new members cleavages. New member states, mainly because of their inherited energy patterns, have significantly different emphases and priorities, than their Western European partners. The Hungarian Presidency had already put one, characteristically new members' priority, the Eastern Partnership Summit into its program. Another complex East-West issue in the program might have damaged the image of Hungarian Presidency by overrepresenting regional interests. Of course this did not mean that the emerging Visegrad 4 energy agenda was not important. But the best way to represent these interests was not to prioritize energy, but rather to speed up and increase the efficiency of the decision making process. The February 4 Brussels Summit was the first time ever when the presidents and prime ministers discussed energy in this new format. The first Council conclusions on the five dimensions of the 2020 Strategy were made in the field of infrastructure and North-South corridor became one from the seven priorities of infrastructure-development – these are major achievements for all new members without too much noise.

At the same time, during the last months of the preparations and during the Hungarian Presidency term itself, a lot of new developments significantly increased the workload for Budapest. The Commission's Communications on Energy Strategy came out relatively late, in early November 2010, and all further work was transferred from Belgium to Hungary. Budapest had to speed up the process of strategy making. Accordingly, Hungarian Presidency started with an expertal consultation related to energy, four meetings were organized only on the Ministerial level in addition to the February 4 Summit. To further complicate, things two of the "expected surprises" – the Libyan crisis and Fukushima – had strong sectoral implications, forcing Budapest to organize an extraordinary Ministerial meeting on nuclear security on 21 March.

Consequently, the energy dossier became much bigger than expected during the preparations. The Hungarian administration was nevertheless

capable of managing this increased burden. However, these achievements did not enter the spotlight. Other, more pressing issues, like economic governance, the conflict in Northern Africa or complications around the Eastern Partnership Summit overshadowed progress in this field. Even the relatively fast adoption of nuclear stress-test criteria was not communicated as a success, despite the initial European and intra-EU differences. Energy was a generally underrepresented issue on the elite political level. Much of the activity remained at the expert level. Based on the achievements on this level, the activity of the Hungarian energy Presidency can be qualified as a technocratic success.

The Presidency's agenda consisted of three different items. The major task was the launch of negotiations on the Energy Strategy 2020. Strategies belong to the category of "soft acquis". Accordingly, consensus can be achieved more easily: nation states show more flexibility than with other legal acts. This made the Presidency's work a bit easier. Council conclusions were accepted on time: on energy infrastructure in late February and on the overview of energy efficiency directive by early June. The former was a major step ahead: the Council approved the priorities of network and regulatory development that also determine the future allocation of common funds in the sector. Energy efficiency is a more complicated issue. Having already many other mandatory targets, nation states are usually much less eager to further bind their hands in this field. Stricter and binding energy efficiency targets, proposed by the Commission, are more likely not to find approval at the national level in the coming years.

The second group of tasks was legislation, mainly related to the third energy package. This was the "hard nut to crack" for the Hungarian Presidency. In this respect, market integrity and transparency rules are of particular importance. Nation states collided on the question of whether and what information should be provided to the newly established Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER). The alternative solution, very much propagated by major energy companies and many Council members, was a limited package of information provided only indirectly to ACER via national regulators. A political agreement between the Council and the Parliament is expected by the end of the Hungarian Presidency, paving the way for the Polish Presidency to have the act accepted.

The last group consists of preparatory negotiations where the Council started informal discussions on some important issues. On the informal Ministerial meeting at the beginning of May, the energy-related aspects of Roadmap 2050 (on low-carbon economy) was thoroughly discussed, setting guidelines for further work with a deadline for final decision in the next semester. The Council also started negotiations on the EU External Energy Policy, while the Commission's communication is only due to September 2011.

Not surprisingly, the Extraordinary meeting on 21 March was the meeting where ministers showed up in the highest number. The single item on the agenda was the analysis of implications of the Fukushima disaster on the global energy industry, particularly on the nuclear sector. The Council reacted relatively rapidly and acted swiftly amid feverish public discussions on nuclear security. On the Meeting the ministers expressed the need for stress-testing European nuclear plants, and in two months the Hungarian Presidency was able to deliver a nation state consent to the criteria. This would have been impossible, had Hungary not had significant expertise and expert capacities in the field of nuclear energy. The post-Fukushima stress test consensus would have been much more difficult to achieve under the Belgian Presidency or the next Trio, where none of the member states has nuclear power stations or related institutions and expertise. Mirroring a diverse expert know-how, other, less important topics, related to nuclear waste management and security, were also in the Presidency's program.

Hungarian Presidency of the EU: Goals and achievements towards the Western Balkans

EU enlargement was one of the priorities for the 2011 Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The starting event in achieving this goal was the second ministerial meeting of the foreign ministers of the Visegrad Group held on 22 October 2010, which was dedicated to the Western Balkans. It was preceded by the first ministerial meeting in Budapest on 6 October 2009 when the ministers firmly stated that the future of the Western Balkan countries⁶ lies within the European and Euro-Atlantic community, in line with the Thessaloniki Agenda and the Stabilization and Association Process, confirmed by the EU-Western Balkans High-Level Meeting in Sarajevo on 2 June 2010.

Today there are many obstacles for the enlargement process in the Western Balkans. Due to the economic crisis and “enlargement fatigue” in the EU, the majority of Western Balkan countries (with the exception of the Republic of Croatia) are not very optimistic about their eventual integration. In addition, the region is facing continuous domestic obstacles on the way to the Euro-Atlantic integration: first, internal disagreements; second, reforms which must be accelerated and consolidated; third, fragile democratic foundations in some of the countries; fourth, political leaders bearing huge responsibility to overcome differences in order to steer their countries and the region towards better governance; fifth, frequent ethnic turmoil.

In spite of these pre-existing obstacles, the agenda of the first Hungarian EU Council Presidency was designed in accordance with several central topics which were based on both the European program and Hungary’s understanding of the key issues that needed to be addressed in the six months of the Presidency. One of the priorities was the integration of the Western Balkans into the EU with a specific focus on closing accession negotiations with Croatia. The Presidency showed commitment to the promotion of the Western Balkan countries by engaging the region in the activities in which these states could be involved, as well as by enhancing cooperation in specific fields between the EU/Central Europe and the countries of the region, specifically the European Danube Strategy and the EU Framework Strategy on Roma Inclusion. Concerning the Presidency’s contribution to the EU integration process of single countries, the key priority was closing accession negotiations with **Croatia** by 30 June 2011, when the country would sign the accession treaty with the EU as the 28th member state as of 1 July 2013. The Presidency did its best efforts to gain full support from the member

⁶ Today the term “Western Balkans” is more of a political than geographic definition for the region of Southeast Europe that is not yet in the EU. It includes the following countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia.

states in order to achieve this during its term. Special attention was paid to closing Chapter 23 (Judiciary and fundamental rights) and Chapter 8 (Competition policy).

Regarding the other Western Balkan countries, no significant results were achieved, although there were no aims set either. The Presidency welcomed the reiteration by the European Commission of the recommendation for opening negotiations with **the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** which is in a stalemate position regarding the ongoing “name issue” contested by Greece. The issue has not only generated a great deal of political and academic debate on both sides, but it also prevents Macedonia from commencing EU accession negotiations. There were attempts by the Presidency to turn this open bilateral issue into a condition for closing accession negotiations with Macedonia. However, the Greek government was firmly committed to its initial stance of resolving the issue before even starting the process. The Presidency also welcomed a recent decision to grant candidate status to **Montenegro**, which provided the right encouragement not only for Podgorica, but for the whole region. The Presidency strongly supported **Serbia’s** integration efforts, whose membership application was recently accepted and there is a good chance that Serbia will be granted candidate country status by the end of 2011. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary has emphasized the significance of arresting Ratko Mladic, a Bosnian Serb military general indicted almost 16 years ago for the 1995 genocide in Srebrenica and other war crimes. Should the European Commission give a positive evaluation on Serbia’s progress, Hungary would advocate setting an exact date for starting the accession talks, along with granting candidate country status to Serbia. For **Albania**, the main goal for 2011 should be achieving candidate status. The Presidency hopes the Albanian authorities will engage in a constructive political dialogue in order to settle the long-standing political deadlock. Unless Albania resolves internal disputes and keeps up the necessary reforms, the country cannot make progress in further integration. When it comes to **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, an accelerated formation of a new government is urgently needed, whose program and actions should focus on the issues of European integration. A positive improvement is the fact that Republika Srpska cancelled a controversial referendum questioning the legal basis of the High Representative’s decisions. **Kosovo**, which is neither candidate nor pre-candidate, faces tremendous challenges in getting EU membership. The Belgrade-Pristina dialogue is important for the stability of the entire region. Starting in Brussels on 8 March 2011, the ongoing dialogue between the two capitals received much praise.

Even though scarce results have been achieved as for the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries (with the exception of progress with Croatia), the Hungarian Presidency has gathered candidate countries’ competent ministers to all the informal meetings of the Council during the last six months. This Presidency initiative was

intended to recognize the candidate countries as future members of the EU. The success story of Croatia can be an incentive and a motivating factor for the rest of the Western Balkan countries towards Euro-Atlantic integrations.

In conclusion, it is important to note that the achievements of the first Hungarian EU Council Presidency were relatively successful with an uneven distribution towards the Western Balkan countries, to a great extent due to the disparate conditions among the countries and a changing regional environment. Looking at the same issue from a different perspective, one could argue that the Presidency had no alternative than to set enlargement as its key priority. Hungary wanted to send a favorable signal to the Western Balkan countries simply because the region is a priority of its national foreign policy. Croatia was identified as an accessible target whose accession negotiations did not matter as much as setting it as the priority did.

Apart from bringing accession negotiations with Croatia to an end, there were some crucial developments during the Hungarian EU Presidency which might prove to be beneficial for the more prosperous future: first, the arrest of Ratko Mladic; second, motivating Serbia to cooperate with the ICTY and to continue the on-going dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade; third, the improvement of regional cooperation; fourth, the reform related to the visa liberalization. Regarding the enlargement process towards the other countries, it has to be noted that no new chapters have been opened with Turkey. However, Hungary played a more active role towards Iceland. The Presidency held an inter-governmental conference on Iceland's accession on 27 June, opening four new chapters (Public procurement, Information society and media, Science and research and Education and culture).

The Hungarian EU Presidency and Schengen Enlargement

Due to the large number of ethnic Hungarians living in the region, Hungary has a strong vested interest in the enlargement of the visa-free Schengen zone, as well as in the liberalization of visa regimes vis-à-vis neighboring countries. Corresponding to the fundamental EU principle of the free movement of people, Bulgarian and Romanian membership in the Schengen area was an obvious and justifiable priority for the 2011 Hungarian EU Council Presidency. However, what seemed like a feasible goal in mid-2010 quickly became one of the most contentious policy issues of 2011, due to the ongoing migration crisis in the wake of the North African “Jasmine revolutions”. Though initially, the priority of Bulgarian and Romanian accession, similarly to the Danube strategy and the Eastern Partnership, had a distinct regional Central and Eastern European edge, the Hungarian Presidency eventually got locked side by side with the European Commission in a new crisis of the European project, initiated by the Franco-Italian bid for a “renationalization” of Schengen acquis.

Curiously, the Presidency’s handling of Schengen enlargement and the wider question of migration policy were less marred by controversial Hungarian domestic policies than was the Roma strategy, for example. Nevertheless, migration policy attitudes were heavily influenced by domestic politics throughout Europe, with national governments struggling under pressure from nationalists and populists to manage the refugee crisis. Thusly, migration introduced yet another cleavage between intergovernmentalism and the Commission’s federalist approach, as governments tried to “renationalize” parts of the Schengen regime, most importantly border control. These attempts, framed by a general crisis of the European Union and a general enlargement fatigue reaching the Schengen group, were detrimental to Hungarian plans and eventually made the Presidency fall short of securing Bulgaria’s and Romania’s planned entry into the Schengen zone. Labeling Hungarian attempts as failure would however be far too simplistic, and would mask the intricacies of Brussels politics. Hungary could in fact secure a number of small, but very important victories by acting as a mediator in a series of bi- and multi-lateral negotiations with the opposing parties, and could thereby keep the enlargement issue on the Council’s agenda, with a binding final decision due September 2011. As Hungarian Interior Minister Sándor Pintér emphasized, “there is no such thing as a lost cause”.

Romania and Bulgarian joined the EU four years ago on 1 January 2007, but shortcomings remained with regards to judicial reform, the fight against corruption and, in the case of Bulgaria, organized crime. These problems carried the risk that the two countries would not be able to

thoroughly apply Community Law. To assist and monitor the two countries in adapting Schengen acquis and various other EU standards after their accession, a Cooperation and Verification Mechanism was set up. No other candidate country before Bulgarian and Romania was placed under such a monitoring system. Due to the generally slow pace of progress, in September 2010 EU European affairs ministers decided to extend the monitoring period for an additional year, foreshadowing the postponement of the March 2011 access date Bulgaria and Romania had hoped for. Last year's tensions around intra-EU Roma migration and the surprisingly harsh response of Western European states (especially France) brought the problem of Schengen accession again to the fore, just before the official launch of the Hungarian Council Presidency. Interlinkages are obvious here as most of the EU's Roma population lives in these two countries. The fact that Hungary could separate the Roma issue (itself being an additional priority on the agenda) from the issue of Schengen enlargement is one of the mentioned small, but crucial victories of the Presidency.

Yet Roma migration was not the only pre-existing concern about Romania's and Bulgaria's Schengen accession. Western leaders raised concerns about the contested border between Romania and Moldova, as well as about the potentially disastrous access of the Bulgarian mafia to Schengen police data. But the primary concern has been the fact that enlargement would directly link Western Europe with Greece's porous border with Turkey. In December 2010, France produced new arguments that supported its position that Romania and Bulgaria are not ready for accession, citing poor border and immigration controls. The French position was supported by Germany, Finland and the Netherlands. On December 21 2010, the interior ministers of France and Germany, Brice Hortefeux and Thomas de Maiziere, issued a joint letter declaring that they would block Bulgaria and Romania's Schengen accession.

With these known obstacles ahead, the Hungarian Presidency emphasized the efforts the two candidate countries had already made in terms of acquis internalization, as well as the Presidency's strong commitment to rapid accession. Seeing the impossibility of the planned spring enlargement, Hungary moved to calm German and French fears. At the January 2011 launch of Hungary's Presidency term, Mr. Pintér said: "I think the least we need to accomplish before June the latest is the formulation of a declaration that specifies the tasks the two countries need to complete along with the respective deadlines in order to change the views of Germany and France". This rhetoric already signified a more modest goal, one that seemed short of actual accession during Hungary's EU Presidency.

By early April 2011, the effects of the quickly escalating migration crisis in Southern Europe again forced the Presidency to reinterpret its approach to Schengen enlargement. The uprisings in Northern Africa – now called "Jasmine revolutions" in the popular press – led to an en-

masse inflow of illegal migrants into Malta and Italy, with Italy even declaring a humanitarian emergency on the island of Lampedusa after ca. 25,000 immigrants reached its shores. The crisis spread as Italy issued temporary travel visas to thousands of Tunisian refugees, who then left for France, making Paris accuse Rome of escaping its responsibility of border protection under Schengen law. In order to solve the impending political crisis, at an April 26 meeting, Italy and France discussed possible changes to border control, i.e. reintroducing temporary border control along the French-Italian border. Under Schengen law, member countries can only take such action by evoking the “serious threat to public order” exemption in the Schengen treaty, yet this was clearly not the case. President Sarkozy and Prime Minister Berlusconi issued a joint letter to Council President von Rompuy and Commission President Barroso, criticizing Schengen area governance and proposing changes that would strengthen member state governments against the Commission in border management issues. The letter also criticized the Schengen evaluation mechanism, which enabled the Commission to assume control over the application of Schengen regulations. With such direct criticism, the migrant crisis threatened to turn into a crisis of basic EU principles, overshadowing Presidency goals.

In response, on May 4, the Commission presented proposals to reinforce the Schengen regime, rejecting the above French and Italian bids for “renationalization” of Schengen acquis through a modification of the Border Code. Instead, the Commission – itself already having had pondered the possibility of modifying Schengen regulations – called for modifications that would rely on existing EU mechanisms. The Commission proposed to enlarge the possibilities of restoring internal border checks in two situations: where a member state is not fulfilling its obligations and where the external border comes under heavy pressure due to external events. Commission President Barroso emphasized that these checks should only be introduced as a last resort. During an extraordinary meeting in Brussels on 12 May, interior ministers later agreed on the need to change the rules and to further clarify the circumstances, under which border controls can be reinstated. However, the role of the Commission in approving such actions is still unclear even after the Hungarian Presidency’s last, June 24 meeting. Vagueness notwithstanding, with the Hungarian Council Presidency as a natural ally, the Commission could limit member state recourse to unilateral steps and could reinforce EU mechanisms. Hungarian Foreign Minister Martonyi and Interior Minister Pintér were quick to emphasize that this revision of the Schengen regime is in no way related to Bulgarian and Romanian accession prospects.

Hungary could secure another small step forward at the June 9-10 meeting of Justice and Home affairs ministers, where the Commission proposal was discussed, along with Bulgaria’s and Romania’s accession. The European Parliament had accepted Romania’s and Bulgaria’s entry on June 7 (after the Parliament’s Civil Liberties, Justice and Home

Affairs Committee gave its support), and the home affairs ministers also unanimously established that the two countries have fulfilled the technical conditions of accession. Although a final date for actual enlargement was not set, ministers agreed to return to the question during the Polish presidency no later than September 2011. The July 2011 report of the European Commission under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism will determine whether Bulgaria and Romania can join the Schengen zone by the end of the year.⁷

This last-minute development is an unexpected victory for the Hungarian Presidency, after EU-wide expectations have been managed downwards in the preceding weeks. It is the conclusion of a constant struggle with negative external developments, and we can safely say that, given these circumstances, Hungary has adequately managed matters relating to Schengen enlargement, not letting the migration crisis develop into an EU-wide crisis and a complete rebound for Bulgarian and Romanian hopes. Under the Hungarian Council Presidency, the European Union implemented short and medium term measures within the field of migration policy, had the new, ambitious neighborhood strategy “A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood” accepted, granted significant aid to Southern member states for handling the inflow of migrants, and strengthened the Frontex border control agency. Though still incomplete, Bulgarian and Romanian Schengen accession is a steadily advancing process that will surely be aided by a supportive Polish Presidency.

⁷ The Council’s Working Group on Schengen Matters (SCH-EVAL) has already approved the report on technical preparedness

The public relations and the image of the Hungarian EU Council Presidency

The main theme of the presentation shall concern the manner in which the Hungarian Presidency of the European Union Council was promoted both domestically and abroad. From the initial stages of setting up the venues and presentation of the presidency to the public at home, the function was both an opportunity and challenge for Hungary from the perspective of public relations. The challenge was constituted by following a coherent agenda of both important issues for the EU, and the Hungarian interests. Another test of the strength of the presidency was the myriad international situations it had to manage, a true test for each state holding this office. But the final, and most important (from the point of view of Hungarian politics) was the foreign image of Hungary, and the manner in which some measures in domestic politics cast a shadow over the positive view of the state and the presidency. The way in which the Hungarian officials handled these various challenges and utilized the presidency as a tool for the promotion of Hungary and Hungarian interests will be succinctly presented in the conference. The image of Hungary promoted by the officials heading the presidency vis-à-vis the tests of day-to-day international politics were both factors contributing to the overall perception of the country, and are the two tiers the presentation will be concentrated in. The sources shall be the main foreign, EU-based political and economic journals, and also the public, promotional materials released by the presidency itself.

One of the main test for the success of any EU Council Presidency is its ability to project a positive image about itself, and the country heading its achievements. In this sense, it is among many things, an exercise in the promotion of the image of the country involved. The state holding this office will be put under a spotlight of concentrated international scrutiny, successes and blunders committed being enhanced. The successful marketing one's own image is therefore highly important, for it will influence how the country and the presidency will be thought of in the years to follow. Many factors influence the development of a positive or negative apprehension of the presidency holder in the international eye: the multifarious developments on the international political scene, the management of crises, both diplomatic and economic, et cetera. Most of these cannot be anticipated or planned for, and it depends on the skill of the appointed staff (the assignation of which may provide a certain amount of control) how these happenings are managed. The part which can be controlled and shaped (to a certain degree, of course), is one's own political and diplomatic output. The developments of internal politics, which are not technically part of the actual domain of the presidency (as prime-minister Viktor Orban rightfully pointed out in his address to the EU Parliament in Brussels earlier this year), can however influence, and as the case-study of Hungary's Presidency will show, even

take over the perception about the term itself. The best mirror for this is the press of the Western Parts of the EU, for two reasons: it expresses and shapes opinions in the West and it also influences and formats opinions in the smaller states of the Union and their press outlets. For this reason, the methodology of this brief shall consist of a succinct review and analysis of the main journals of EU's "main players" France, Germany and Great Britain. Main groups of topical perceptions on Hungary and its presidency shall be presented in journals such as *Le Figaro*, *Le Monde* of France, *Der Spiegel* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* of Germany and *The Guardian* and *The Times* of Great Britain. This selection was done with the intention of providing a balanced cross-section of European media, with journals representing both the left and the right wing specters. The counterpoint will be represented by the domestic media outlets of Hungary, conservative journal *Magyar Nemzet*, the MTI (Hungarian State News Agency), and left-wing daily *Népszabadság*. Other sources, such as the EU Presidency official website, and various examples of logistical style in the organization of venues, official leaflets, materials shall also be considered.

Hungary's image during the term of the presidency roughly broken up into three main categories. The first are reactions to the assumption of the office, and the immediate responses to the passing of the new media law. The two are at first glance, separate subjects, however, in the eye of the European press, they were inextricably bound together due to temporality. The second category concerns the main domestic development of the political semester, the adoption of a new basic law of the state, which attracted controversy among European and domestic commentators. The third is a more general corpus of developments, in which the general policies of the state, both domestic and diplomatic, may be included. These are influenced mostly by issues such as the Roma strategy, and various social and economic policies of Hungary.

The first days and the media law

The premier days of the office were stormy and showed just how much a non-related internal move may take away from the prestige of the function. The law on the reorganization of the media regulatory agencies and standards of conduct had a generally chilly reception in the main European newspapers. The left-leaning dailies had a very strong reaction, echoing those of Hungarian journal *Népszabadság*. The conservative newspapers treated the subject in a more nonpartisan fashion, most of them simply reporting the issues. Though this may seem like two different approaches, one negative and one positive, the simple positing and selection of the theme itself can be considered loaded, and carries an implicit criticism within.

In the German press, left-wing daily *Der Spiegel* reacted swiftly and strongly to the two events, linking them together in a comparative fashion. Headlines such as "Chorus of Criticism: Germany Denounces

New Hungarian Media Law⁸ or “Media Law Outrage: Hungary's 'Orbanization' Is Worrying Europe⁹” speak for themselves. In the articles, the governing party is described first as “center-right¹⁰”, but quickly gains the pejorative designation of “right-wing populist¹¹”. The link between a country at the European helm passing “repressive” media legislation was immediately made, in an article entitled “A Slow Poison Attacking Democracy: Facebook Generation Fights Hungarian Media Law”. The law was deemed as “gagging the press” and quotes from left-wing public figures comparing the Orban government to repressive authoritarian regimes can be found in the piece. The law was scrutinized and the persons who conceived and administered it, caricaturized (the media body head, Szalai Annamária, is referred to as “a former elementary school music teacher”). The article then proceeds to describe Hungary as a poor and backward country, with a deeply divided society, attempting a vulgar explanation for the events. In all the articles, the protests in Budapest are described in detail. The question whether the EU is able to act as a normative power in favor of human rights in the international context while having as its president a country which curtails them, is posed. In another article, the reactions in the European Parliament are lengthily described, with all invectives launched by the MP's toward the Hungarian Prime Minister included¹². Hungary is described as a “communist surveillance dictatorship” and Orbán as a “European Chavez”. In follow-up articles, Hungarian opposition journal *Népszabadság* journalists and articles are quoted, the German daily siding with the anti-Orbán side. The subject was on the agenda for all of the first month of the EU presidency, the last article on the topic being dated on the 19th¹³.

Conservative daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* took a more balanced approach on the media law controversy, but still reported it in detail, nevertheless. The law was deemed “controversial”, which may be interpreted as a loaded term. However, the question of Hungary being a “dictatorship”, the paper deemed “an exaggeration”¹⁴. Similarly, French

⁸ *Der Spiegel International*, 12/22/2010

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,736206,00.html>

⁹ *Der Spiegel International*, 12/28/2010

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,736706,00.html>

¹⁰ *Der Spiegel International*, 12/22/2010

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,736206,00.html>,

¹¹ *Der Spiegel International*, 12/28/2010

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,736706,00.html>

¹² *Der Spiegel International*, „Media Law Controversy: Hungary's Orbán Gets Frosty Reception in European Parliament”,

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,740400,00.html>, 01/19/2011

¹³ *Der Spiegel International*, „Muted Protests”

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/business/0,1518,740294,00.html>, 01/19/2011

¹⁴ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, “Ruhig Blut!”,

<http://www.faz.net/IN/INtemplates/faznet/default.asp?tpl=common/zwischeneseite.asp&dox={C90FA0FC-5F60-C815-7A7F-647773D7784F}&rub={7FC5BF30-C45B-402F-96E9-64EF8CE790E1}>, 19.01.2011

center-right daily Le Figaro, approached the subject in a neutral manner, simply reporting the facts pro et contra¹⁵.

The French left, however, reacted aggressively against a move it perceived was violating basic civil rights of fellow EU citizens. This is manifest in the article headlines which popular center-left journal Le Monde ran all throughout the first month of the presidency. They read as following: “Hungary debuts its EU presidency among critiques¹⁶”, or “A Hungary in full authoritarian shift at the head of Europe¹⁷”. British leading journal, The Guardian, followed suit, widely reporting on the issue, with headlines as “Hungary’s democratic ‘dictator in the making’ takes center stage in Europe¹⁸” and “Hungary’s media law protest show forbidden fruits remain sweet¹⁹”. In both publications, Orbán is referred to as “right-wing populist”, the press and the opposition “muzzled” and the European democratic values are confronted with the events in Hungary.

The new Constitution and European reactions

Another important episode of Hungarian-EU relations during the time of the presidency was the passing of a new constitution in late April. This bold move was interpreted as an attempt to reformat the public space in a personal manner by the governing party, by most foreign newspapers. Most virulent in their opposition were center-left journals in Britain, France and Germany, which posted articles such as “Hungary heads in undemocratic direction²⁰” (The Guardian), “The new Hungarian Constitution, considered reactionary, raises concern²¹” “Hungary: The parliament adopts an ultra-conservative constitution²²” (Le Monde), “Hungary is a disgrace for Europe²³” (Der Spiegel). The government and its measures are put under a barrage of heavy criticism, and Hungary is described in the articles as a haven for anti-democratic sentiment, the media law and other measures are also rejuvenated and treated in a similarly critical manner.

¹⁵ <http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2011/01/03/01003-20110103ARTFIG00573-presidence-de-l-ue-budapest-rate-son-entree-en-scene.php>

¹⁶ http://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2011/01/03/budapest-justifie-sa-loi-critiquee-sur-le-controle-des-medias_1460501_3214.html

¹⁷ http://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2010/12/31/une-hongrie-en-pleine-derive-autoritaire-prend-la-tete-de-l-europe_1458954_3214.html

¹⁸ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/06/hungary-democratic-dictator-europe>

¹⁹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jan/14/hungary-media-law-protest>

²⁰ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/apr/25/fidesz-hungarian-constitution>

²¹ http://www.lemonde.fr/cgi-bin/ACHATS/acheter.cgi?offre=ARCHIVES&type_item=ART_ARCH_30J&objet_id=1154555

²² http://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2011/04/18/hongrie-le-parlement-a-adopte-une-nouvelle-constitution-ultra-conservatrice_1509551_3214.html

²³ <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,757971,00.html>

Conservative journals also seemed to be sucked into debating the issue by the virulent reaction of the left-leaning journals. British and French dailies The Times and Le Figaro treat the problem mainly in neutral terms, opting only to report on the events unfolding. Headlines read: “Hungary: the constitution worries the EU²⁴” and “Hungary heads for trouble over new constitution that ‘threatens rights’²⁵”. The only advocate of the adoption of a new Hungarian basic law is again Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, which ran an article, saying “the preamble may seem antiquated to Western observers. But for the big majority of Hungarians in the country and for the Hungarian minorities abroad, the references to a 'national statement of faith' and a holy crown' are values as worthy of the constitution as are references to God and Christendom and the emphasis on marriage and family as foundations of society and state. There is no evidence in the text that the amendments are not in line with basic European values, as Orbán's opponents are claiming”.

Hungary’s presidency in the news: other issues

Hungary and its status of EU president were mentioned haphazardly in a number of other related topics, of macro-European interest, containing mainly the statements of prime-minister Viktor Orbán, foreign minister János Martonyi, and president Pal Schmitt. They referred to EU policies, regional diplomatic situations such as the war in Libya, the relementation of the energy situation, the extension of the Schengen area and EU membership. The style and content of these articles were mainly neutral, and technical in nature, reporting on the events at hand.

Another group of articles refer to a number of social problems in Hungary, among them the most present being the Roma issue. These issues are treated exclusively by French, and especially German center-left publications. The various problems the Gypsies face integrating into Hungarian society are described, and so are the negative attitudes they face by the majority population. Le Monde takes a balanced view of the matter, reporting that “Orbán wants to take action against the extreme right in Hungary²⁶”; still, the overall tone of the article is critical, since it describes in great detail all the problems of Hungary in this field. German daily Der Spiegel goes much further than any other newspaper, with exaggerated titles such as “Roma defenseless against extremist vigilantes²⁷”, “A Roma community fights against the odds²⁸”, and on a milder tone “EU presidency a test for tolerance in Hungary²⁹”. The

²⁴ <http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2011/04/15/97001-20110415FILWWW00506-l-nouvelle-constitution-hongroise-inquiete-l-ue.php>

²⁵ Imre Karacs, *Hungary heads for trouble over new constitution that ‘threatens rights’*, The Times, London, 08 April 2011

²⁶ http://www.lemonde.fr/cgi-bin/ACHATS/acheter.cgi?offre=ARCHIVES&type_item=ART_ARCH_30J&objet_id=1155689

²⁷ <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,759586,00.html>

²⁸ <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,738724,00.html>

²⁹ <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,737283,00.html>

picture painted is a grim one, of an intolerant Hungarian public opinion, reflecting badly on the status of an EU president. There is little or no mention of Hungary spearheading the process for the adoption of an EU Roma strategy. The conclusion is that the presidency officials should have invested more into publicizing this process, for it would have improved their country image.

Conclusions

If we consider the axiom that a significant part of an EU presidency is a public self-promotion exercise, the main conclusion to be drawn is that Hungary did not succeed. On the battlefield of public opinion, the utterances and arguments of the opposition were heard louder than its own. This is of course, due to the greater logistical means of this opposition, but we may observe a sort of inward turn of those responsible for the public promotion and relations of the Hungarian EU presidency. In this sense, the PR of the campaign was highly concentrated towards the Hungarian public, which got mostly technical, neutral or positive information about the presidency and its undertakings, while no attempt was made to challenge the critics abroad. This marketing strategy may be regarded as faulty, if we again refer to the presidency as a promotional operation.

Presentation of the Council Presidency in the Hungarian media

Hungary's first Council Presidency had been intensely anticipated. The public both in Brussels and Hungary was eager to see how the new government, arm in arm with the Hungarian diplomacy, would manage the EU's issues, and how it would be able to prove its European leading skills.

One of the measures of the Hungarian Council Presidency's success was the way how the rotating EU president country would present, during its six-month term, as well as prior to it and after closing it, the administering of EU's issues, their efficient handling, and the management of possible emergencies. The greatest challenge was posed by how the above-mentioned could be presented, particularly in the media, and for the public in such a way that would make part of Hungary's and its Council Presidency's favorable image. The media is exceptionally sensitive to crisis situations so their efficient handling could favorably influence the media's response to the Hungarian Council Presidency.

Taking a look at the most read and most representative Hungarian print and online media, it could be conferred that the presentation of the Council Presidency in the Hungarian media went in line with what emphasis was laid on it by the Hungarian government and politics. The domestic political bickering, primarily over the media law and the constitution, took away the attention from this important event, so the Hungarian Council Presidency could not fulfill its original objective that it should be a common case for the whole of Hungary or as Hungarian diplomats put it before the beginning of the Presidency, a "historic opportunity".

The media that have been analyzed are as follows:

2 national dailies: Népszabadság (left-winged, oppositional) and Magyar Nemzet (conservative, government-allied); 2 weeklies: HVG (dealing with economic and social issues) and Heti Válasz (conservative), 2 news pages: index.hu and origo.hu. HVG, the weekly with a mainly economic profile, reacted quite realistically to the Presidency. It published profound and thorough reports, made interviews and combined the western reactions with the findings of their own investigations. The index.hu website regularly mirrored the reactions and the headlines of the western media and insisted upon its themes, sometimes even embellishing them with tabloid elements.

From the perspective of our analysis, it was important to examine the official homepage of the Presidency, the eu2011.hu³⁰. That was the only forum besides the Presidency's Facebook account that the presiding administration could efficiently utilize. They informed the public about the events and news in four languages, in Hungarian, in English, in French, and in German. It was a transparent website divided into different sections: 1) first, News and Events, Presidency (information about Hungary, about the EU, different Council formations); 2) second, videos and galleries; 3) third, the faces of the Presidency (Bálint Ódor, Deputy State Secretary for European Union Affairs; Enikő Győri, Minister of State for EU Affairs, Piroska Bakos, spokesperson of the Hungarian Presidency in Hungary, and the hostesses of all the cultural events. They all were writing a blog, in which they wrote in an informal and straightforward manner about the Presidency for the public trying to bring it closer to the people. The image-movie promoting the Presidency³¹ was even awarded a Grand-prix prize. The social networks were also regularly used. They frequently updated their Facebook as well as their Twitter accounts. All this, however, could enthuse the public who was already interested in EU issues. This kind of public attitude to the Hungarian Council Presidency is reinforced by the joint survey of Policy Solutions and MEDIÁN³². At the end of the Presidency, half of the Hungarians think that it has been successful. However, seven out of ten Hungarians cannot mention any event or achievement from the time of the Presidency. Prior to the beginning of the Presidency, the majority of the respondents (55%) did not know that Hungary would fill in the position of the EU's rotating Presidency from January 1.

The beginning of the Council Presidency's term was witness to several regrettable domestic political issues such as the issue of the extra taxes, the nationalization of the pension funds, the curtailing of the Constitutional Court's power, the media law, the campaign for the destabilization for the Hungarian National Bank's leader, etc. In the western media, the media law and the approval of the new base law received the most intense response, which is why, in addition to these two issues, the presentation of the EU issues in the Hungarian media is regularly examined.

1) Media law: the media that have been analyzed regularly cite the leading European media. According to index.hu, "the foreign minister of Luxembourg called Orbán a dictator"³³, or "according to German papers, Hungary became Führerstaat"³⁴. Népszabadság, through its Brussels

³⁰ <http://www.eu2011.hu/>

³¹ <http://www.eu2011.hu/news/eu-presidency-image-film-wins-grand-prix>

³² http://www.policysolutions.hu/userfiles/elemezsek/Policy%20Solutions_Medi%C3%A1n_EU-eln%C3%B6ks%C3%A9g_2011.pdf

³³ http://index.hu/kultur/media/2010/12/22/diktatornak_nevezte_orbant_a_luxemburgi_kulugyminiszter/

³⁴ http://index.hu/kultur/media/2010/12/22/fuhrerstaat_lett_magyarország_a_nemet_lapok_szerint/

correspondent, as well, constantly reported on the media law's negative reception³⁵. Magyar Nemzet, scarcely criticizing the media law and practically ignoring the western media offensive, with regard to the media law, cites only government-allied politicians and fends off criticism³⁶: „There is no point in ringing alarm bells”; “There are chances for success”; “The western-left cannot digest the victory of the Fidesz” – they react to the articles of the western papers polemically. They enter into competition with the western media in front of the Hungarian audience, but they do not attempt to counter the negative reactions in the west at the European level. The conclusion is that the Hungarian conservative pro-government media is highly self-centeredly turning in on itself. The conservative print media, however, published an analysis of the media law, which was made by a Fidesz-close analyzing institute³⁷ titled “Dual vision: On the media law and its background”.

After the approval of the media law, the Hungarian Council Presidency caught attention by making another promotional blunder. It put on display in the Brussels building of the European Council a huge “historical” carpet³⁸, which immediately stirred a smaller-scale scandal. This was an initial small-scale controversy that would herald the controversial public image of the Presidency. The Hungarian officials opted for marketing the Presidency through the country's own history and culture – by the means of displaying the historical carpet.

"The carpet is basically a timeline of cultural, historical, and scientific symbols or images of Hungary: kings, ancient artifacts, excerpts from the encyclopedia, the map of the region in 1848 – the year of the “Spring of nations”, when revolutions took place all across Europe. This is a reflection of the governing party's own understanding of the country's historical identity. This came as an unexpected development in Brussels, since it infringed on other countries' symbolic sovereignty.

2) The Constitution – articles were intensely published before and after the Easter approval of the new base law. The left-winged, oppositional Hungarian media adopted the comments of the mainstream western media. Index.hu cited “There is an abundance of controversial points” by Le Figaro³⁹. Origo.hu published the title as follows: “The German, who infuriated the Orbáns for the second time”⁴⁰ referring to the criticism of Werner Hoyer, member of the German government, in terms of the media law and the constitution. Magyar Nemzet delineates the half-term

³⁵ http://www.nol.hu/archivum/20110112-brusszeli_ossztuz_alatt_a_mediatorveny;
http://nol.hu/belfold/20110111-nyilatkozatok_tuntetesek_europai_kozmeghallgatas;
http://nol.hu/belfold/20110108-eselyunk_sem_volt

³⁶ [http://www.mno.hu/portal/756685;](http://www.mno.hu/portal/756685) <http://www.mno.hu/portal/756583>

³⁷ <http://www.mno.hu/portal/759995?searchtext=sajtotorveny>

³⁸ <http://euobserver.com/?aid=31629>

³⁹ http://index.hu/kulfold/2011/04/19/le_figaro_boven_vannak_vitatott_pontok/

⁴⁰ <http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20110421-werner-hoyer-a-magyar-alaptorveny-es-mediatorveny-biraloja.html>

achievements of the Presidency⁴¹, or it cites the representative of the European People's Party, "Tőkés says, being a Hungarian in Europe, this is our responsibility"⁴².

3) EU issues: regrettably, the presentation of these issues in the media was proportionately much lower scale than it was experienced in terms of the two previous issues. The conservative media presented all government-allied comments and appearance favorably. *Népszabadság*, through its Brussels-based correspondent, regularly informs about the main events, which can undoubtedly be evaluated as the success of the Council Presidency, and which presumably could not have been so markedly present in the EU agenda without the present and previous Hungarian governments' commitment and the strenuous lobbying activity of the experts' think-tank. An example of it is the approval of the European framework of the national Roma strategies, which is the result of the close cooperation between the European Commission and the government. In the field of development policy, the approval of the European Danube Region Strategy has been a significant development, at the same time, supporting the political agreement promoting Croatia's accession has been a long-time enlargement priority for Hungary. All these are unexceptionally such European issues which have crucial importance from the perspective of national strategy, as well, (social alliance, regional security policy, and regional cohesion, etc.) and which, unfortunately, have not been emphasized enough neither in the domestic, nor in the foreign media. Therefore, in the eye of the Hungarian public, the Presidency is a missed opportunity.

In the light of all this, it can be said that these issues right at the beginning narrowed the political latitude in which the Presidency could have been used to promote Hungary's prestige and to strengthen its position. The European Parliament, during the six-month Presidency term, held two unprecedented debates on the development of the Hungarian internal politics (the media law, the constitution). This impeded the advancement of the Presidency's priority issues with regard to the EP's enhanced role in EU legislation. The three subjects: the media law, the new constitution, and Hungary's presidency issues were presented in the Hungarian media according to their political orientation. They mainly react to the articles of the western media. The oppositional ones criticized the work of the government members during the presidency, they criticized the fact that domestic politics influenced the country's image during the presidency and that the issues of the presidency – like the Roma strategy, the Danube strategy, economic governance – were not emphasized enough in the domestic media. Besides the official website of the presidency, there were few opportunities for information for the larger public.

⁴¹ <http://www.mno.hu/portal/779378>

⁴² <http://www.mno.hu/portal/779466>

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