**Lessons from the Past and Prospects for the**

**Cyprus Presidency**

**University of Nicosia**

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I would first like to thank the Jean Monnet Chair of the University of Nicosia, the Center for European and International Affairs, the European Parliament Office in Cyprus for organizing this very interesting and stimulating conference and for giving me the opportunity to comment on our positive experience of the Trio-Presidency arrangement and for presenting to you today – 23 days before the Cyprus impending Presidency, our perspective.

Dear Friends,

With the Lisbon Treaty and theestablishment of the new element of the Trio Presidency, a great extent of coordination with the other two Presidencies is required. First and foremost, in defining and implementing a detailed Trio Presidency Programme that sets the EU priorities and policies for a period of 18 months.

Our experience in cooperating with our Trio Presidency partners, Poland and Denmark, has been proved very effective. I have to stress that we have benefited immensely from the Polish enthusiasm and effectiveness, as well as from the Danish know-how and institutional experience.

It is obvious that the Trio Presidency is an efficient tool that ensures a more coherent rotating Presidency system. The cooperation by three Presidencies with different sizes, and diverse geographical, historical and political experiences was indeed very effective.

The successful completion of the 18 month Programme and its approval by the Council in June 2011 was our first major undertaking in the policy preparations. The current drafting of the Cyprus Presidency’s 6 month policy programme, which forms the back-bone of each EU Presidency, is based on the experience gained in preparing the 18 month programme.

It is a well known fact that the subjects to be discussed during a Presidency are more or less predetermined since they are mainly issues inherited from previous Presidencies, as well as issues stemming from the Commission Work Programme for 2012. Thus the progress achieved in the legislative framework by the Polish and Danish Presidencies is essential for a successful Cypriot Presidency.

 Not only we have decided and drafted together a common 18-month program in full cooperation and complimentarity, but we also have benefited from the Polish and Danish experiences and expertise. The Polish Minister for European Affairs and other Polish experts have visited Cyprus and shared with us valuable information and practices. Also through the signing of separate memoranda we have established a close cooperation with Denmark with regard to chairing of working Parties on international environmental issues; and on forestry and agricultural issues. The exchange of experience with our Danish friends is still ongoing despite their heavy work as Rotating Presidency.

Cyprus, as a relatively new member state and assuming the Presidency of the Council of the EU for the first time, considers the forthcoming Presidency as a great challenge. It is clear for us that assuming the Presidency is a demanding and costly task, even more so as Cyprus has a respectively small public administration.

In order to undertake this challenging task, a new political and administrative structure has been in place by taking its final shape in October 2011. The objective is to guarantee the smooth coordination of the preparations for and the management of the Presidency, as well as an effective and swift decision-making. The relevant decisions included the establishment of a Ministerial Committee for European Affairs, chaired by the Foreign Minister, the creation of the post of Deputy Minister to the President for European Affairs, as well as the Cyprus EU Presidency Secretariat, whose main task is to ensure the overall effective coordination of preparations.

It has been also decided that the Cyprus Presidency will be Brussels-based. Thus, the role of the Permanent Representation of Cyprus in Brussels is crucial, being on the ground and having the potential to assess the situation and react swiftly. Also the majority of the chairpersons have been placed in Brussels while a meticulously developed training strategy offered specialised training to all parties involved.

Another difficulty was the austerity measures taken at national level due to the ongoing financial crisis. This meant that the Presidency will have to take place with limited budgetary resources, which made the whole preparation even more difficult.

Despite those limitations, we are preparing efficiently and in a way to ensure that the quality of our Presidency will not be undermined. The greater part of logistical preparations has been completed. Fifteen Informal Council meetings and about 180 other meetings will be taking place in Cyprus; a number which is quite ambitious for a small Presidency. As part of our preparations, the Conference Centre “Filoxenia” in Nicosia has been renovated, so as to host the majority of these meetings. Also, accommodation, transport, security, interpretation, gifts and other logistics planning has been completed.

Cyprus aims to be a responsible, results-oriented Presidency with full respect to the fundamental values of the EU. Mechanisms have been implemented to ensure the strategic management of each dossier. The aim is to set a strategic goal for every file before the Presidency and give to the chairpersons the necessary mandate so as to be able to progress negotiations and reach an agreement where possible. To this end, we are in close cooperation with all EU institutions (the Commission, the Council Secretariat, the President of the European Council, the HR, the EEAS) and of course we maintain a rigorous cooperation with the European Parliament, a key partner for every Presidency. The recent visit by the Conference of Presidents to Cyprus was quite productive. We had the chance to have a thorough examination of the legislative workload that will be dealt by us during the second semester of 2012.

 Last but not least we are in continuous contact will all our partners in our aim to be open, transparent, and to take into consideration their national interests and positions.

I have to stress that being small means that we are more flexible and effective. Our administration is in a position to act swiftly, take fast decisions and move forward. The EU can also benefit from the Cyprus Presidency as Cyprus, being a small member state with no far reaching national interests, is in a better position to be accepted and act as an honest broker, able to strike compromises. That becomes even more important for the progress of negotiations for important dossiers, such as the Multi-annual Financial Framework 2014-2020.

 One major difficulty that I would like to share with you, as a new member state assuming for the first time the task of the Presidency, is how to fix the level of ambition for each dossier. Too little is not effective, too much is not serious. That is why we need the assistance by all.

We are also aiming to use our geostrategic position in the Eastern Mediterranean and our traditional ties with some of the EU’s Arab neighbours, as a useful tool in our common efforts to promote pluralism and democratisation reforms.

Some might say that Cyprus’s national problem will be an impediment to these goals. I assure you that our aim is to act in a purely presidential manner, not allowing our national problem to define our Presidency but at the same time not allowing our role as Presidency to be jeopardized by the Cyprus problem. The Cyprus issue and the Cyprus Presidency are two parallel and independent processes. We will not accept to have a second class presidency due to our national problem and to the stance of Turkey towards the Council of the EU. Turkey, as a candidate country for EU membership, must respect the role of the Presidency of the Council, which is a key institutional feature of the EU. Both the European Council and the Council of the European Union have repeatedly confirmed this expressing, inter alia, their regret for the Turkish stance.

Humble and modest, Cyprus is yet ambitious to bring a special sensitivity and flavour to EU policies; in particular when it comes to the social dimension. We want to contribute towards a **Better Europe** by increasing solidarity and effectiveness.

Filoxenia, which is one of the traits of the Cypriot people, is one of the fundamental concepts of our Presidency. «Filoxenos topos» is part of our aspiration of a European Union more relevant to its citizens and in the world. Αnd I quote the DM when he explains: «A hospitable place for enterprises, ideas, services, innovation, technology, trade, culture, where growth flourishes; a place where values and principles such as freedom, justice, democracy, cultural diversity and pluralism, respect, tolerance and equality prevail, a space where the young feel welcome and embraced.»

In conclusion, we firmly believe that the experience of the Presidency of the Council of the EU will also bring some tangible benefits for Cyprus:

-By navigating in the deep political waters of the EU we will be gaining not only useful experience and expertise, but also political capital.

-We are already gaining the benefits of a more experienced and effective public sector.

-Cyprus’ promotion as a member state that is part of the solution is also quite important for us.

-The Presidency will also provide us the opportunity to promote our rich culture and heritage not only in Europe, but also in other areas of the world.

 Thank You

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