

**MANUAL ON
TRADE UNION TROIKA
AND THE PRESIDENCY
OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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1. INTRODUCTION

With the enlargement of the EU in 2004 and 2007 the number of old member states vis a vis newcomers significantly changed. The new decision on time schedule on holding the Presidency of the EU Council was adopted. The new time schedule defined that Slovenia as the first new member states will hold the EU Presidency in first half of 2008, the Czech Republic as the second one year later, in first of half of 2009. As these countries are not experienced in holding the EU Presidency, preparations started early in these countries, for example in Slovenia already in 2005. As the preparations continuing also trade unions realized that the EU presidency is also a chance for them, to express their opinion, trying to influence the European policies during the Presidency and make their voice louder.

It worse to point out that the importance of supporting trade unions in new member states for new opportunity realized DGB Germany initiating and then organizing first workshop of trade union organizations from troika countries just before beginning of the German Presidency in November 2006. The ZSSS Slovenia was very interested to learn more.

This manual is the result of our learning process in the framework of the ZSSS (Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia) project. In the project participated our partners – trade union confederations from Germany, Portugal, France as old member states, Slovenia and Czech Republic as new member states, European Trade Union confederation ETUC at European level, with the financial support of the European Commission.

It is intended as a learning tool for trade union organizations from the member states never yet holding the EU Presidency.



2. HOLDING THE PRESIDENCY

For the understanding of the term and the role of trade union troika it is first important to familiarize with the mechanism of the EU Presidency. The Presidency, i.e. the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, is held by each Member State in turn for a period of six months. During this time, the Presidency is the "face and voice" of the European Union, speaking on behalf of all Member States.

Holding the presidency of the EU Council by member states was introduced in 1957, with the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community, i.e., the Treaty of Rome. With the Maastricht treaty in 1992, the presidency functions were extended so as to cover the presidency of the European Council, which meets at least twice a year under the presidency of the head of state of the presidency country or the head of the government of the member state.

Troikas

On 29 October 2004 the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe, was signed, but has never come into force, provided for one of the more notable changes to the institutional framework of the EU by stipulating that individual six-month presidencies be replaced by joint eighteen-month presidencies by three member states, the so-called Troikas. Each member would hold a six-month term, with the other two providing support and assistance in accordance with a joint programme. The main goal of introducing the eighteen-month joint presidencies was to strengthen cooperation between three consecutive presiding countries with the view to creating a more coordinated development of the EU's strategic policies.

In September 2006 the Council of the European Union laid down the following in its amended Rules of Procedure: "Every 18 months, the three Presidencies due to hold office shall prepare, in close cooperation with the Commission, and after appropriate consultations, a draft programme of Council activities for that period."

A Troika represents the EU in dealings with non-member states. It is comprised of a representative of the country holding the Presidency, a representative of the European Commission, and a representative of the Secretary-General of the Council, in his capacity as High Representative for the common foreign and security policy; and on the invitation of the current Presidency also includes incoming Presidency – the member state, which is next in line for the Presidency.



Presidency of the Council of the European Union

In the spirit of contemporary European affairs it can be looked at the example of Slovenia's Presidency. Slovenia holds the Presidency for the first time, as the first of the twelve "new" member states. Slovenia's Presidency begins on 1 January 2008 and ends on 30 June 2008, follows its Trio partners (as called Troika in Slovenian Presidency Programme) Germany and Portugal. The next Trio consists of France, Czech Republic and Sweden.

During this period, Slovenia is taking over three important groups of tasks:

- chairing the work of the EU Council and the European Council;
- representing the EU Council in relation to other EU institutions; and
- representing the European Union in the international community.

During the first six months of 2008, Slovenia will chair all meetings of Heads of State or Government and all Council meetings. The presidency will also organise and chair 12 informal Council meetings in Slovenia. These gatherings allow Ministers to discuss topics in a more relaxed environment. Furthermore, some 150 Presidency meetings at lower levels will be held in Slovenia.

The European Council does not pass legislation, but takes

- political decisions aimed at strengthening the development of the Union,
- defines general political guidelines and
- coordinates positions on international issues.

It is the body which defines the EU's political policies at the highest level.

It is the Presidency's responsibility

- to prepare the Council's work as efficiently as possible and
- to deliver progress by drawing up compromise proposals and brokering agreements between Member States,
- it signs approved legal acts and
- carries the political responsibility for all adopted decisions.

It is important that it acts as a neutral mediator in representing European interests.

The Presidency represents the Council in dealings with other institutions and bodies of the European Union, in particular the European Commission and the European Parliament.

Cooperation with the European Parliament is intensive and demanding. The Prime Minister of the presiding country presents the programme for



the Presidency and a final report at a plenary session of the European Parliament. He also speaks before the European Parliament after sessions of the European Council. Also respective ministers from the member state holding the Presidency speak before the European Parliament as chair persons of respective Councils of the EU.

The European Commission has the exclusive right to initiate legislative proposals, which is why the agenda of the Council relies heavily on the dynamics of work.

The Presidency similarly represents the Council in the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee.

Defining the objectives of the individual Presidency

The preparations for the Slovenia's Presidency started already in 2005 when the government began planning the organisational, conceptual and personnel aspects of the presidency. The preparations on the contents of the presidency started with groundwork and coordination on the **18-month Presidency Programme** that was drafted by Slovenia, Germany and Portugal in cooperation with the General Secretariat of the EU Council and the European Commission.

Each member state also draws up their own 'national' presidency programme, which is largely based on the so-called inherited agenda of the Council of the EU. Prior to the beginning of the Presidency, **Programme of the Slovenian Presidency of the EU Council** was drawn up.

In addition the following events were prepared as well: A Calendar of Major Events, a list of informal meetings to take place in Slovenia and meetings with third countries, a list of accompanying events, an overview of multilateral events within the United Nations and obligations of the Republic of Slovenia during its EU Council Presidency.



3. TRADE UNION TROIKA

ETUC began to set up its representation to some EU meetings as the so called trade union troika following the example of troika member states. Firstly a new idea became a new method. It was introduced concerning social issues.

ETUC as one of the social partners at European level consist its delegation from trade union confederations from the same member states as those involved in Troika.

The first attempt was during the Finish Presidency in second half of 2006, followed by next Presidencies.

4. ETUC AND THE EU PRESIDENCY

Let's start at the European level and look more closely to the role of the ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation) in relations to the Presidency of the European Council. The ETUC before every Presidency produces the **Trade Union Memorandum** to the Presidency for each presiding member state (see example of Trade union memorandum to the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union, July-December 2007)

The 18-months presidency programme is the base but not something that the ETUC can actively work on, because it is too broad and not enough specific. It is a need to work with trade unions in each country separately, moreover on the basis of the Presidency's six-month programme. **ETUC memorandum therefore responds to the priorities of the relevant Presidency and expresses their expectations and demands.**

The Trade Union EU Presidency Memorandum is constructed by the contributions of the ETUC Secretariat and advisory staff. The basis for the Memorandum is laid down in the ETUC Congress documents and in the planning priorities of the member state that will hold the EU Presidency. It is drafted alongside English and French version in the language of the member state that will hold the next EU Presidency which is also consulted about the Memorandum. The Memorandum is completed in the months before the next Presidency.

The content of the memorandum usually consists firstly on main areas of action of the presiding country and then expresses their opinion and call for action about other for trade unions important issues. For example there are about ten social points and also some other important issues as



for example internal market, trade and external relations, climate change and energy package everything as response to the presidency programme and European Commission programme. It has a standard structure on 10 – 17 pages.

There is no formal **procedure** for the adoption of the Memorandum. The final document is presented to the General Secretary of the ETUC. Before finalizing it the applicable trade unions must provide the drafts of their country's presidency program and in the last month before the next Presidency the memorandum is finished and published on the ETUC web site.

After the end of existing Presidency the ETUC also prepares an **assessment of the presidency** according to its memorandum.

Important events during the Presidency

- **Meeting of trade union troika representatives** organized by trade unions of the presiding country of the EU just before or **at the beginning** of the Presidency.
- **The formal meeting** of the ETUC General Secretary with the Prime minister of the presiding member state hold **at the beginning** of the Presidency. The memorandum is widely distributed on the same day.
- **Informal meeting with the labour ministers of Troika** is another important event just before formal meeting of the Council of the EU for Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO Council) usually during **the first half** of the Presidency (in first or second month of the Presidency).
- **The main event is the Tripartite social Summit**, a meeting of social partners with the leaders of the EU just before **Spring European Council**, which is usually devoted to economic issues and performed in third month).
- **Conferences, meetings etc** organizing by member state holding the Presidency in its own country.

The ETUC representation to the informal meeting and tripartite social summit is usually structured as a trade union troika.



5. EXPERIENCE OF TRADE UNIONS IN PRESIDING MEMBER STATE

DGB Germany

The Presidency programme planning was based on joint programmes that were drawn up by separate ministries with the cooperation of the European Commission and Council Secretariat. In preparation of the six-month programme meetings with social partners were conducted for the purpose to discuss the proposed programme, but they were not involved.

The main issue of the German Presidency programme was the new treaty. Also social issues were part of the programme, but as the evaluation was made, very little was left. German Presidency didn't put any legislative proposal on the political agenda and in spite of many conferences, very useful, but the end effect was no legislative acts proposals, also not those directives already in place.

Dialog between government and trade unions was not deep; they could get documents but only through diplomatic ways.

Social partners participated at the informal meeting of Ministers for Employment and Social affairs in January 2007. Meeting with the ETUC in Brussels took place during the Presidency. Germany put some effort into the promotion of the social Europe and European social partners have always been high-ranking speakers. When country is preparing for the Presidency it should be always consider following levels:

- Commission
- Procedures in the pipeline
- Troika programme
- Country highlights
- Stressing the importance of social issues

The evaluation of the German Presidency was made also by the ETUC and could be seen on the ETUC website.

CGTP-IN, UGT-P Portugal

Trade unions designed their demands, during the Presidency organized demonstrations and also held a strike. For them it was important to underline the tight connection between making policy at European level and their implementation at national level, usually at the costs of workers decreasing their rights. It is not possible artificially differs European issues from national ones, they are connected to tight.



The highlight for the Portuguese trade unions was the informal social summit in July 2007, where the representative of social partners and the EU troika met. The trade union presented some main points; about the strategy of free movement of workers (the workers' rights apply to all), about the flexicurity (provision of the legal framework and involvement of trade unions); and about the challenges of the EU single market. One of the progresses was made on the area of international cooperation and the strengthening of the relations with the African countries and Brazil. For the preparation of the Presidency agenda there were several meetings, which included also social partners, trade unions.

Besides many events already mentioned previous also the Executive meeting of the ETUC was held in Lisbon during the Presidency.

6. EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AS A TOOL FOR TRADE UNION WORK

In the preparations for holding the Presidency the leadership of the European Economic and Social committee (EESC) usually contacts the future EU Presidency country to present the EESC role and possibilities of cooperation. The EESC is a consultative body set up by the Rome Treaties in 1957. It consists of representatives of the various economic and social components of organized civil society. Its main task is to advise the three major institutions (European Parliament, Council of the European Union and European Commission).

There are two possibilities for the cooperation in designing the opinion.

The Presidency country can ask from the EESC to shape and adopt an opinion on issues important for the future presidency, as one of the presidency programme task. This type of EESC opinion is called explanatory opinion.

EESC members coming from each member state could propose for an own-initiative opinion on issues relevant to civil society organizations and in connection to the presidency programme. Trade unions representative are members of the group II of the EESC and almost all of them are coming from the national trade union confederations affiliated to the ETUC.

There are many EESC opinions on that and could be found on the EESC website.



7. LESSONS LEARNED

- ETUC is the only one representative trade union confederation at European level and as such, as social partner directly involved in the Presidency of the EU (getting all invitations from the presiding country concerning social partners and involvement of trade unions at the European level);
- Trade unions' involving in designing the presidency programme at national level should not be seen as trade union priority or responsibility, it is a political task;
- To have an active role in getting information, calling on, demanding, giving proposals is better;
- It is unavoidable to deal with the European matters as the national, domestic one; it is not possible to separate them. Political decisions and legal acts at European level have always been transposed and implemented at national level;
- Using the EESC as a tool for trade unionists from the respective member state for call attention on for trade unions important issues; for presiding country as a consultation with the representative body of the civil society organizations, especially social partners, for topics of the EU presidency programme;
- Continuing the Trade union troika cooperation because of obvious added value;
- For good evaluation of experiences trade union troika should be extended by previous member state's trade unions, the structure would be 3+1;
- Set up an information system concerning what is happening in national governments regarding their response to the proposals from European level;
- Need for a closer cooperation among trade unions at European level regarding transposition and implementation of the European legal acts (for example post directive, services on internal market, health and safety strategy).

