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## The Influence of the EU Council Presidency on Public Opinion

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**Abstract:** *The Presidency of the EU Council is regarded as an influential and useful instrument for domestic political progress of European integration and the issues it brings along. Many academics as well as politicians assume that the EU Council Presidency, which allows any country to be at the centre of European and world media attention for six months, therefore represents a strong potential for domestic socialization. This article investigates that idea at the level of public, analyzing several EU Council presidencies, and the potential impact of these presidencies on the voters' attitudes in the Presidency holding countries on key aspects of the EU. The text's hypothesis refers to the supposition that the EU Presidency in its present form has a positive influence on the support of citizens for European integration and improvement of their information level on the EU.*

**Keywords:** *EU Council Presidency, European integration, European Constitution, enlargement of the European Union, public support for EU membership*

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### 1. Introduction

The Presidency of the EU Council has been, for quite some time, a topic inadequately addressed by political science. European integration has offered more attractive targets for research, whether it is European institutions, development and impact of community policies, or revision of treaties. By itself the Presidency is difficult to grasp from an academic standpoint because of a research standpoint it encompasses the perspectives of European and national politics. These two levels are very difficult to link; that is, combining them makes it hard to arrive at a compact result. In short, the Presidency of the EU Council has one theme for the EU and its functioning, and a different theme for the presiding country. In many cases these themes may be difficult to link one to another, or even opposing.

On the other hand, it must be said that, since the 1990s, the interest in the Presidency on the part of researchers has increased. Its European dimension especially has been mapped in great detail, which considering that the Presidency is generally regarded by the academic literature to be an influential function or institution of the EU (Schout 1998: 2, Elgström, 2003: 1, Hayes-Renshaw, Wallace 2006: 133, Schout 2008, Bunse 2009), is not that surprising. From another perspective, however, the increased academic interest in the Council Presidency is somewhat paradoxical. Given the treaty revisions resulting in the proposed text of the so-called European constitution, which has been made part of the Treaty of Lisbon, it is evident that the Presidency will not continue for long in its current

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form, and that its character will be changed. The division of what is now the Presidency into three functional levels, as set forth in the Treaty of Lisbon, can be regarded as the biggest change in the form of the Presidency in its more than fifty years of history.

While the union context of the Presidency during its sunset days has been satisfactorily studied, its domestic political context and importance for the home country have not been adequately researched. Yet, in many member states and in academic texts the socializing impact of the Presidency is often assumed as well as its educational effect (Hegeland, Johansson 2001, Luif 2006, Miles 2005: 201, Hayes-Renshaw, Galloway 2006: 155, Schout 2008: 284, Bunse 2009: 213). However, this domestic impact of the Council Presidency is namely linked to the respective national administrations or political elites. Question stays if the Council Presidency delivers similar positive effect on the public of office holding country.

Presumption asserting that the Council Presidency may be capable of influencing public opinions towards the European integration can be set in the framework of research on public support for European integration. Despite of that, Gabel (Gabel 1998) has identified partisan affiliation and utilitarian consequences of EU membership as most valid theories explaining the support, several scholars still pay attention to the “non-rational” explanations of public support for European integration (Inglehart 1970, Janssen 1991, Sánchez-Cuenca 2000, McLaren 2002). For instance, higher level of cognitive mobilization is thought to be associated with more support for European integration, because the more information one receives about the EU, the less threatening the organization becomes. Council Presidency, as being accompanied by the communication and information campaigns<sup>1</sup> about the EU, seems to be an adequate tool for such cognitive mobilization and should thus result into increasing support for the EU as well as better information on EU affairs.

Moreover, apart from the theoretical reason, research on potential domestic impact on EU Council Presidency is interesting also from the practical point of view. Especially in countries where support for the EU is not high, the political elites regard the Council Presidency as a good instrument for changing the perception of European integration among citizens. It is obvious, that no government will spread negative information about the EU during its term, as one of the goals of most of the presidencies is to earn a reputation among the other EU member countries and institutions as a competent and reliable partner.

The following pages will attempt to find out whether these both theoretical and practical assumptions basically hold. The impact of the EU Presidency for the Presidency holding country will be investigated on two concrete levels:

- a) Influence of the Presidency on the degree of support for the European integration by citizens of the Presidency holding country for European integration
- b) Influence of the Presidency on the level of citizens’ information on European integration

The article works with the presumption that if both assumptions derived both from the political praxis as well as from cognitive mobilization theory explaining EU support

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<sup>1</sup> One can refer e.g. to the Czech EU Council Presidency and its campaign “We will sweeten Europe”.

hold, EU Presidency should positively affect support for the EU, and raise level of citizen information about the EU. Thus this text works in its analytical part with a pair of concepts. The first is the *support of citizens* for European integration; the second is their *level of information* about European integration.

In attempt to evaluate these assumptions, the research deals with ten consecutive EU Council presidencies. The first analyzed Presidency is that of Denmark from the second half of 2002, the final one that of Germany from the first half of 2007. Analyzed data was gathered from Eurobarometer survey from reports No. 57 – No. 68. Eurobarometers were also chosen because they cover all member states using the same methodology, and the data contained in them are thus comparable. Using national public opinion surveys, comparison of the data would be practically impossible because of the differences in the sampling, and the results thus obtained would be misleading.

The structure of the text corresponds to its goals. After explaining the used methodology as well as defining key terms, the first segment covers previous research on the EU Council Presidency. The third part of the text sets forth and comments upon findings extracted from the Eurobarometer reports. The last part of the study consists of a summary of results and suggestion for further research.

## 2. Methodology

As stated above, the article deals with two questions addressed to the Council Presidency. First, can Presidency influence public support for the EU? And second, can it lead to the better information of citizens in office holding country?

Before beginning the methodological part, it is necessary to make one comment already denoted above. It would be an illusion to suppose that support for European integration and its key segments can be influenced by the Council Presidency alone. The opinions of voters are shaped especially by domestic politics and its direction in the individual countries; and the substantial debates underway at any given moment are also very important. However, the article does not aspire to explain motivation relating to support of European integration as a whole. Its only ambition is to decide whether the Council Presidency can have impact on it. Even so, the Council Presidency is important, and for the voters it is often the most tangible instrument for concretization and explanation of what the EU is all about.

Both concepts (level of information about the EU and support for the EU) will be operationalized with the help of data from the Eurobarometer surveys, which are carried out in EU member and candidate countries twice per calendar year. The category of EU support is understood as support for key elements<sup>2</sup> of European integration - support for the membership of the given country in the EU, support for the single currency, support for EU enlargement and support for the so-called European constitution<sup>3</sup>. The second

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<sup>2</sup> Similar components can be found in Inglehart's „pro-European Index“ measuring support for common foreign policy for Western Europe, free movement of workers and business in the same area and support for abolishing tariffs in Western Europe (Inglehart 1970: 48-49).

<sup>3</sup> This conceptualization is not unusual. For example, Gable (Gable 1998) has measured citizens' support for European integration (where support is a dependent variable) combining support for membership and support for further unification of the EC/EU.

concept – information on the EU – is less complicated as Eurobarometer regularly asks respondents on their self-evaluation of being informed on EU affairs.

How will the possible effect of the Council Presidency be measured? As stated above, research covers ten consecutive Council Presidencies beginning with Denmark 2002 and finishing with Germany 2007. A set consisted of just ten countries can seem as insufficient. However, Council Presidency has in its modern form existed since the late eighties. A number of available case studies that can be compared is thus limited *per se*. The second important reason for limiting the analyzed presidencies is the comparability of the individual Eurobarometers with identically-phrased questions. A longer time period would invalidate this approach, because the character and content of the Eurobarometer questions change continuously over time. Limitation of the sample can also be explained by the Presidency agenda itself. Compared to the Council Presidencies from e.g. pre-Maastricht period, all analyzed mandates deal with quite similar agenda (e. g. the enlargement process, single currency etc.) and came through similar EU as well global context.

The analysis is based upon aggregate data and only on using of tools of descriptive statistics. The data sets served as a basis for answering the question of whether an EU Presidency influenced any increase in numbers.

First of all, an immediate impact of the Council Presidency is observed. Comparing the last Eurobarometer survey carried out before the Presidency ( $P_0$ ) with the survey conducted during the Presidency ( $P_1$ ), should say if there can be noted an immediate effect on public in office holding country. Second, the same operation will be done with last Euro-barometer study carried out before the Presidency ( $P_0$ ) and first survey conducted after its end ( $P_2$ ). This step should investigate if substantial change in public support and information can be observed after Presidency. In all cases, differences in all indicators before Presidency and during/after the examined country's term should be at least 5 percentage points. Value of 5 percentage points is considered as statistically significant.

As the article deals with possible impact of Presidency on both examined parts of analysis, it must isolate the influence of overall European-wide factors. Change in the Presidency holding country will be thus compared with the change in the rest of the EU. EU changes in the indicators serve thus as a control variable. Comparison between the office holding country and the EU average is carried out by simple calculation. The value measured during the Presidency ( $P_1$ ) or immediately after the Presidency ( $P_2$ ) is either higher or lower than the value  $P_0$  expressed in percentage. The difference between  $P_0$  and  $P_1$  and  $P_0$  and  $P_2$  in the office holding country and the averages in the EU is then noted. If the difference between the Presidency and the EU average is less than 5 percentage points, then the change in the Presidency more or less matches the EU trend, and was caused by other influences that led to increase support for one or both concepts in all of the EU membership states. The range of 5 percentage points – as in the case of respective Presidencies - can be considered sufficient to filter out the influences at work in the entire EU; this figure is right around the edge of statistical significance.

From the standpoint of analysis, the following applies: a decline in values or their movement close to that of the values prevalent in the EU (again, around 5 percentage points), means that the EU Presidency has no important effect either on EU support or citizens' information on EU. The influence of the EU Presidency can be considered as

present if there is a growth in the indicators of over 5 percentage points' difference and the average in the EU. The overall impact of the EU Presidency on both dimensions will be calculated on the basis of a growth/drop in the majority of the analyzed countries.

### **3. Previous research on the Presidency**

Increased interest of political science in the Presidency includes research on the Presidency in the context of European institutions and analysis of individual mandates. It is hardly possible to comment all previous research here as the question of Council Presidency is quite controversial. If there is any broad consensus relating to the research of Presidency, it is statement that Presidency offers holding state potential opportunity to influence decision-making system of the European Union (Warttjen 2008: 317). Presidency can do so by exploiting formal and informal advantages of the office (Tallberg 2004, Tallberg 2006, Bunse 2009: 46-55) or by acquiring private information on position of the members' states. Then, Presidency can influence agenda of the Council of the European Union by exercising power of agenda shaping (Tallberg 2004) and by its position in the decision making system (Tallberg 2006). Though several currently published studies (Schalk et al 2007, Warttjen 2008, Thomson 2008) confirmed this potential using empirical methods, the Presidency is not being considered as a key factor in the decision making system of the EU.

As the Council Presidency contains set of functions, previous research has focused namely on them (Schout, 1998, Elgström, 2003: 4–7; Tallberg, 2006: 10–11). First, the EU Presidency carries out administrative tasks by organizing meetings, distributing relevant documents and revising draft texts in accordance with previous meetings. Second, Presidency sets political priorities in form of releasing programmes outlining their priorities. Third, presidents mediate between other Member States to resolve controversy. Presidents are charged with achieving political progress in the form of decision outcomes on controversial dossiers. Fourth, presidents represent the Council of the EU in the institutional system of European Union. For instance, in the protracted negotiations that can take place between the Council of the EU and the European Parliament under the standard legislative (former co-decision) procedure, the Presidency represents the Council of the EU in the conciliation committee.

Great amount of previous research has also focused on particular Council Presidencies, especially in the form of one case studies (e. g. Henderson 1998, Stubb 2000, Kerremans and Drieskens 2002, van Keulen 2004) or texts based upon comparative approach (Elgström et al 2003, Quaglia and Moxon-Browne 2006, Bunse 2009). In these texts, performances of particular states are analyzed and eventually compared.

Nevertheless, previous research does not focus upon the national dimension of the Presidency, that is, the influence of this institution or function of the EU on the domestic politics and public of the member state. Studies and articles mention the positive influence of the Presidency on the administration of the member country (Westlake, Galloway 2004: 335, Bunse 2009: 213), or the potential instrument of the Presidency for advancing national interests. Schout (Schout 1998) here points out [the function of] advancing or defending national interests, which is inevitably part of the Council Presidency. Moreover, Bunse says, that the Presidency works as a continuous motor for policy innovation as

each state brings new solutions and ambitions and thereby injects renew dynamism into EU decision making system (Bunse 2009: 213). For the majority of EU member states, however, the Presidency is an opportunity to present a country's own interests not only to the other Member states, but also before the European and world media. This dimension of the Presidency makes it possible for the Member State in chair to emphasize projects that correspond to its own socio-political priorities. In this regard the public relations function intertwines with the initiative function, or may to a certain extent motivate it. This dimension is evident mainly with the smaller countries' presidencies, which often present as their priority an area in which they present themselves as more advanced than the rest of the EU Member states. Thus the Council Presidency allows smaller countries to test the limits of their influence for a certain time.

Another aspect of the Presidency is its domestic political socialization potential. As it has been said, the Presidency is seen in this regard as a unique instrument that a government may use to increase the popularity of European integration among voters (Hegeland, Johansson 2001: 173, Luif 2006: 5).

Table 1: Presidencies studied

COUNTRY	TERM	COUNTRY	TERM
Denmark	7/2002	Luxembourg	1/2005
Greece	1/2003	Great Britain	7/2005
Italy	7/2003	Austria	1/2006
Ireland	1/2004	Finland	7/2006
Netherlands	7/2004	Germany	1/2007

Source: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showPage.asp?id=695&lang=en&mode=g>

#### 4. Support for European integration

There comes, of course, a question: which aspects of the Eurobarometer to choose as significant in terms of attitudes of citizens of the member countries towards European integration?

The key factor seems to be people's attitudes towards the country's EU membership, which is either positive or negative for the given country. A very interesting point is the support for the project of a single currency. The Euro brings with it not only economic change, but also political and symbolic potential. It has been one of the most important elements of integration. The same can be said of the so-called European constitution project, the support for which in relation to the Presidency is also the subject of this research. Another variable indicator is the degree of support for EU expansion, which indicates the willingness or unwillingness of citizens of a given country to extend European integration and the advantages derived from it to other countries as well.

The second important question for this study is connected to the possible impact of the Council Presidency on citizens' information on European integration. The final indicators shown by the Euro-barometer surveys are attitude towards the Presidency and level of information among citizens. All of the Presidency countries invested significant resources

before and during the mandate in information campaigns; for the national government the Presidency itself was seen as an effective instrument for bringing European integration closer to citizens. Hypotheses will be tested by analyzing the differences between two points on the time scale. Data from the relevant Eurobarometers related to our individual research questions was selected. For the ten presidencies analyzed, 12-point scales were thus created for every country. The analyzed data was put into tables and graphs comparing the values for each Presidency with the average values of all the EU member states.

#### 4. 1 Perception of EU membership

The first dimension to be examined is the potential influence of the Presidency on perceptions toward a given country's membership in the EU. The Eurobarometer examines the attitudes of respondents to the question of whether they regard the membership of their country in the EU as a positive thing.

When we compare, on the basis of the described methodology, the values found in the presiding country before the country's term in the Presidency ( $P_0$ ) with the values found immediately after its ending ( $P_1$ ), and with the same values in the EU, then in only 2 of 10 presidencies do we find that the Presidency had a major influence.

Table 2: Overview of presidencies' influence on support for EU membership (% differences in percentage points).

COUNTRY	$P_0$	$P_1$	$P_2$	$P1 - P0$	$P_2 - P_0$	$EU_0$	$EU_1$	$EU_2$	$EU_1 - EU_0$	$EU_2 - EU_0$
Denmark	60	69	63	9	3	53	55	54	2	2
Greece	62	61	62	-1	0	55	54	48	-1	-7
Italy	64	58	54	-6	-10	54	48	48	-6	-6
Ireland	73	71	77	-2	4	48	48	56	0	8
Netherlands	54	75	67	21	13	48	56	54	8	6
Luxembourg	85	72	82	-13	-3	56	54	50	-2	-11
Great Britain	40	34	42	-6	2	54	50	54	-4	0
Austria	32	39	36	7	4	50	54	53	-4	3
Finland	45	39	52	-6	7	54	53	59	-1	5
Germany	58	57	58	-1	0	53	59	58	6	5

Source: author, on the basis of data from Eurobarometer 56 - 68

A comprehensible influence can be observed in the case of the Netherlands, where support during the period between measurements grew six percent in comparison with the EU. Greece is a disputable case, where support for membership did not change, but in the EU declined 7 percent during that same period.

Thus, from the standpoint of evaluating the Presidency, no relevant conclusions can be drawn. The positively-regarded Netherlands Presidency gives some "plus" points, and perhaps conditionally the neutrally-regarded Greek mandate as well.

## 4. 2 Support for the single currency

The second indicator to be examined is the support for the Euro. Respondents were asked whether they are *for or against* the European Monetary Union with its single currency - the Euro. The overview of positive responses in the pre-term, term and post-term surveys is given in table 3, showing levels of support for the single currency in the given country and in the EU.

Table 3: Overview of support for the single currency as influenced by Presidency

COUNTRY	P <sub>0</sub>	P <sub>1</sub>	P <sub>2</sub>	P <sub>1</sub> -P <sub>0</sub>	P <sub>2</sub> -P <sub>0</sub>	EU <sub>0</sub>	EU <sub>1</sub>	EU <sub>2</sub>	EU <sub>1</sub> -EU <sub>0</sub>	EU <sub>2</sub> -EU <sub>0</sub>
Denmark	52	55	53	3	1	67	63	66	-4	-1
Greece	71	70	64	-1	-7	63	66	59	3	-4
Italy	82	70	69	-12	-13	66	59	60	-7	-6
Ireland	70	69	85	-1	15	59	70	63	11	4
Netherlands	58	72	71	14	13	60	63	59	3	-1
Luxembourg	85	87	89	2	4	63	59	60	-4	-3
Great Britain	28	28	28	0	0	59	60	59	1	0
Austria	67	60	67	-7	0	60	59	60	-1	0
Finland	75	78	81	3	6	59	60	63	-1	4
Germany	63	72	69	9	6	59	63	61	4	2

Source: author, based on data from Eurobarometer 56 - 68

When we compare pre- and post-term findings, we see a clearly positive influence with the Netherlands, where support grew by 13 percentage points (14 percentage points better than the EU), Ireland (increase of 15 and 11 percentage points respectively), and Luxembourg, where support grew by 4 percentage points (a 7-point difference with the EU).

The other presidencies examined did not diverge from the EU trend during their mandate. It is interesting that the Presidency had no influence on this dimension even in the countries that were focusing on currency issues at the time (Great Britain and Austria were involved with the EU's 2007 – 2013 financial planning).

## 4. 3 Support for further EU enlargement

The third indicator examined is the support of citizens of the EU Presidency country for further EU enlargement. In this case as well, this is an EU issue that influenced all of the presidencies, an issue on the long-term agenda of the EU. While the first mandates worked to complete the so-called Eastern expansion, later countries dealt with enlargement to Bulgaria and Romania. The issue of enlargement continues to be on the agenda of the Presidency. An overview of respondents who reacted in the positive to the Eurobarometer question whether they agree with the further enlargement of the EU during the periods P<sub>0</sub> and P<sub>1</sub> is given in Table 4.



Table 4: Overview of presidencies influencing support for EU enlargement

COUNTRY	P <sub>0</sub>	P <sub>1</sub>	P <sub>2</sub>	P <sub>1</sub> - P <sub>0</sub>	P <sub>2</sub> - P <sub>0</sub>	EU <sub>0</sub>	EU <sub>1</sub>	EU <sub>2</sub>	EU <sub>1</sub> - EU <sub>0</sub>	EU <sub>2</sub> - EU <sub>0</sub>
Denmark	68	71	63	3	-5	50	52	46	-2	-4
Greece	76	71	65	-5	-11	52	46	47	-6	-5
Italy	59	61	55	2	-4	46	47	42	1	-4
Ireland	59	60	54	1	-5	47	42	53	-5	6
Netherlands	44	50	45	6	1	42	53	50	11	8
Luxembourg	38	35	31	3	-7	53	50	49	-3	-4
Great Britain	48	43	44	-5	-4	50	49	45	-1	-5
Austria	29	27	31	-2	2	49	45	46	-4	-3
Finland	35	43	39	8	4	45	46	49	1	4
Germany	28	34	28	6	0	45	49	46	4	1

Source: author, based on data from Eurobarometer 56 - 68

Presiding over the EU Council has not had a marked influence on support for EU enlargement. The attitude of respondents is evidently much more affected by other problems; for example there was a visible change in the level of support after the so-called Eastern enlargement. The entry of the Central and Eastern European countries in the spring of 2004 brought a marked decline in support for the enlargement process, which was also reflected in the presiding countries. Detailed comparison between individual countries and EU data shows that all of the Presidencies copied the EU pattern, except for Austria, where from the pre-(P<sub>0</sub>) to the post-(P<sub>1</sub>) support for enlargement grew by two percent, while falling 3 percent in the EU during the same period. In the data taken before, during, and after the Presidency, we observe no difference between the numbers in the Presidency country and those in the EU at large.

#### 4. 4 Support for the so-called European constitution

Another phenomenon studied is the support for the project of the European constitution, which the Eurobarometer investigated by asking the question whether the EU should have a constitution. The percentage of positive answers is shown in Table 5. The data is complete except for Germany. In its case, for Eurobarometer no. 68 there was a change in the content of the survey, and the issue of the European constitution was not included.

Table 5: Overview of the influence of presidencies on the support for the so-called European constitution

COUNTRY	P <sub>0</sub>	P <sub>1</sub>	P <sub>2</sub>	P <sub>1</sub> - P <sub>0</sub>	P <sub>2</sub> - P <sub>0</sub>	EU <sub>0</sub>	EU <sub>1</sub>	EU <sub>2</sub>	EU <sub>1</sub> - EU <sub>0</sub>	EU <sub>2</sub> - EU <sub>0</sub>
Denmark	49	51	43	2	-6	63	65	63	2	0
Greece	78	75	74	-3	-4	65	63	62	-2	-3
Italy	77	74	78	-3	1	63	62	63	1	0
Ireland	53	59	61	6	8	62	63	68	1	6

Netherlands	70	73	53	3	-17	63	68	61	5	-3
Luxembourg	77	63	69	-14	-8	68	61	63	-7	-5
Great Britain	43	46	42	3	-1	61	63	61	2	0
Austria	49	44	51	-5	2	63	61	63	-2	0
Finland	45	53	47	8	2	61	63	66	2	7
Germany	73	78	NA	5	NA	63	66	NA	3	NA

Sources: author, based on data from Eurobarometer 56 - 67

The issue of the so-called European constitution is one of the topics that the individual presidencies inherit, and is more or less a necessary item on the president's agenda. None of the presidencies studied produced a breakthrough in the country's support for the so-called European constitution, as public opinion after all of the presidencies copied the pattern in the EU at large.

### 5. Citizens' level of information

The second part of the hypothesis set forth in the introduction of this study concerns the level of information among the presiding EU countries. In this part of the survey the Eurobarometer asks the question whether respondents see themselves as well-informed about the EU.

The Eurobarometer uses a ten-point scale, where the value of 10 represents an excellent level of information and a value of 0 no information. For purposes of clarity of the study, the value obtained (expressed in numbers down to a tenth of a percentage point) is multiplied by ten to generate whole numbers, the differences in which can be followed to the desired relevance of 5 points. Table 6 shows an overview of the presidencies.

The research was intended to include Eurobarometer 67 and subsequent issues. But beginning with Eurobarometer 67, the research method on the level of information among citizens was changed. Despite of the absence of the most recent numbers, the data set can be regarded as sufficiently indicative, as the absence of data from the last two Eurobarometers concerns only two of the countries that were studied.

The first finding is that the dimension of citizen information about the EU in individual countries corresponds with the trend in the EU. The number of presidencies during which values changed from the pre-term to the post-term survey is 2.

Table 6: Overview of presidencies' influence on information level of citizens about the EU.

COUNTRY	P <sub>0</sub>	P <sub>1</sub>	P <sub>12</sub>	P <sub>1</sub> - P <sub>0</sub>	P <sub>2</sub> - P <sub>0</sub>	EU <sub>0</sub>	EU <sub>1</sub>	EU <sub>2</sub>	EU <sub>1</sub> - EU <sub>0</sub>	EU <sub>2</sub> - EU <sub>0</sub>
Denmark	49	52	50	3	1	43	44	42	1	-1
Greece	43	45	47	2	4	44	42	44	-2	0
Italy	43	44	44	1	1	42	44	45	2	3
Ireland	39	41	46	2	7	44	45	43	1	-1
Netherlands	48	50	53	2	5	45	43	44	-2	-1

Luxembourg	49	51	47	2	2	43	44	42	1	-1
Great Britain	41	37	41	-4	0	44	42	45	-2	1
Austria	47	48	48	1	1	42	45	42	3	0
Finland	51	45	NA	-6	NA	45	42	NA	-3	NA

Source: author, based on data from Eurobarometer 56 - 66

A relevant increase in the tracked values occurred only in the cases of Ireland and the Netherlands (of 8 and 6 percentage points respectively). With other presiding countries the growth in level of information was lower; the case of Greece was borderline, with growth of 4 percent, while in the EU the level of information stayed the same.

## 6. Conclusion

The present study can be described as an attempt to analyze the influence of the EU Council Presidency on domestic policy. The article specifically focused on two dimensions: “support for European integration”, which was operationalized as the support for EU membership and support for key sectors of European integration, and on the “information on the EU affairs” dimension. Both concepts were analyzed only at the level of aggregate data, using basic descriptive statistics and focusing rather on data description and explanation than on drawing any causal inferences. Only in this framework the results of the analysis can be interpreted.

The support for European integration obviously does not depend on the EU Presidency. The support for individual aspects of the integration project is dependent on other factors, and the Presidency turns out *not to be* a relevant tool for the socialization of citizens of the member states. The fact that citizens of the EU Presidency states are, due to information campaigns (and generally higher attention paid to European topics in the media and public life during the Presidency), exposed to a large amount of information on European integration has, at the aggregate level of data analysis, no substantial effect. With a few exceptions, the numbers describing in the analyzed Presidency countries the decrease/increase in support for the indicators followed the same pattern as in the rest of the EU.

The Presidency has also a surprisingly marginal influence on citizens’ level of information about the EU. In two of the analyzed countries the level of information grew by significantly more than the increase/decline during the same period in the EU. In 6 countries the EU Presidency either had no relevant positive influence, or the indicators stagnated during the examined period. In the cases of Finland and Germany it is not possible to come to a convincing conclusion because of the changes in the Eurobarometer survey questions; in the Finnish case the data obtained before and after the Presidency indicate that either continued decline or moderate increase can be expected. Likewise in the context of information about the EU, the member states exhibit very similar trends. If they are influenced by the Presidency, then it is only a temporary fluctuation; the exception, not the rule.

What effect do the conclusions of this text have on perceptions of the EU Presidency from the standpoint of its effect on domestic politics in a given country? The assumption put forth at the beginning, that the Presidency may be a welcome instrument for the

political elite of the EU Presidency country in its efforts to increase citizen support for European integration and increased levels of information, is more a wish than a reality. The EU Presidency and the sensitive attention to European integration associated with it bring no positive effect in growth of support for the key indicators and an increased level of knowledge, and the socialization effect (in a pro-integration sense) is negligible. If support has risen in some countries, it is almost exclusively in the cases of the positively-regarded and problem-free presidencies.

Even though the article has examined only aggregate data, its conclusions support arguments explaining different levels of EU support by other than cognitive factors. Education as well as information campaigns accompanying ad-hoc event such as the EU Presidency – at least at the aggregate data level - do not have the desired positive impact on population. The same can be argued in the case of the EU Presidency's impact upon the level of information on EU affairs.

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