

## Interview with António Vitorino: the link between the successive Presidencies of the Council (Lisbon, 24 October 2007)

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[Miriam Mateus] In general, do the Commission and the half-yearly Presidencies, the *présidences tournantes* in French, work well together?

[António Vitorino] The Commission and the Presidencies do. My personal experience is that a range of issues succeed each other over time, so that each Presidency has to deal with a substantial part of the work from preceding Presidencies, and each Presidency introduces a new issue to which it is more sensitive into each EU action area. It's certainly no coincidence that the Summit with Brazil is taking place during the Portuguese Presidency or that Portugal is organising the second Summit with the African Union, just as it will be no surprise for a Finnish summit to lay special emphasis on relations with Russia. This shows the added value that each country can bring to the Union.

As soon as new rules governing the functioning of the Presidencies were adopted, even without the new Treaty, the 'successive Presidencies' programme came into effect, covering a period of 18 months, i.e. three successive rotating Presidencies. This reinforces the stability of the European agenda. It means that the programme is a combination of three Presidencies and, therefore, combines the specific priorities of each one in a more sustained and continuing work process. The first example was the current programme which is in progress, and which was prepared by the troika of the German, Portuguese and Slovenian Presidencies. This will be followed by a new troika of Presidencies, beginning with the French Presidency in the second half of 2008.

Under the new Treaty of Lisbon, the rotating Presidencies will give way to the 'presidency teams', i.e. three states that share a range of presidential responsibilities over a period of 18 months. The method will be different, but the logic is the same: to ensure consistency, continuity and stability in the priorities of the European agenda for a period of a year and a half.

[Miriam Mateus] And in this troika of Presidencies, how is the baton passed from one Presidency to the next?

[António Vitorino] Basically, from the moment when the troika starts to operate, a vast amount of information begins to be shared. The Treaty of Lisbon clearly illustrates this. The mandate was drafted by the Germans, in close coordination with the Portuguese and the Slovenes, and was approved in June 2007 at the German Presidency's final European Council.

It was the Portuguese Presidency that applied the mandate in the negotiation of a Treaty, and in record time, too, by October. That was possible precisely because the successive Presidencies were closely interlinked, so that what one Presidency was doing was monitored very closely by the following Presidency, and, obviously, the German Presidency always took account of the opinions of the following Presidency — in this case the Portuguese — very carefully from the outset in drafting the mandate. So I believe that this experience of a presidential troika brought about improved efficiency and positive synergies.