



TEPSA Brief:

European Leadership

January 2009

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ISSUE 1 / 2009

Leadership is a concept which has been broadly discussed, especially with regard to the political system of the European Union. Currently, (possible) leadership is dispersed among at least three different positions: The President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the High Representative/Secretary General of the Council of the EU. This on the one hand mirrors the balance between intergovernmental and supranational sources of power, but on the other hand contributes to a lack of legitimacy and accountability as well as inefficiency in the decision-making process.

The events of January 2009 now reveal a picture which could hardly be more confusing: Whereas in the United States Barack Obama's inauguration as President of the United States of America seems to demonstrate the maximum leadership possible, the European Union is currently led by a Presidency which puts own national considerations first. Both the positions of the President of the Commission and the High Representative – which will be merged with the Commissioner for External Relations when the Treaty of Lisbon will come into force – are subject to their five-yearly revisions in 2009. Thus, where is European leadership heading?

Context

There are many examples where leadership in the European Union in the past years has been missing: in the aftermath of the failure of the referenda on the Constitutional Treaty, in the Foreign and Security Policy, concerning the negotiations with Russia and Ukraine on gas supply, or in the question of how to proceed after the failed Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty. All these issues constitute missed chances to position the European Union as an efficient problem-solving mechanism for the benefit of its citizens on the one hand, on the other hand as a powerful actor in the world and, at the same time, as a political system capable of reforming itself.

What is Leadership?

To be clear; one should first state what is meant by leadership. Leadership can take different forms; in its most debated appearances it can be structural, entrepreneurial or intellectual. Structural leaders are, as the wording suggests, successful in shaping structures of political systems, i.e. translating power in influence over the behaviour of actors engaged in processes of designing structures. This form of power can thus also be indirect and does not require being in a certain position, but rather to have access to people that are able to change existing patterns. As a second type, entrepreneurial leadership means the capacity to produce results by helping to cluster alternatives in acceptable and unacceptable solutions, which is especially important in the framework of consensual policy making and known to many rational-choice oriented scholars as 'structure-induced equilibrium'. Finally, intellectual leaders exert their influence by inserting into the debate new ideas that will change the alternatives available and add new possibilities.¹

Still, linked to these typologies are certain conditions for being able to exercise leadership. In other words, there is difference between *de jure* (formal) and *de facto* (informal) leadership. An actor might be formally in a position for leadership, but not exert his powers, or might, without formally being the leader, informally take the lead. Leadership first and foremost depends upon the will to lead, and the acceptance of leadership by those led (the most important sources for this acceptance would here be legitimacy, but also charisma). In the case of the EU, prerequisites are even higher, when leadership is dispersed and not vested in one person. Thus, it is in addition necessary that leadership is coordinated and stable.

¹ For a detailed typology see Young, Oran R., Comment on Andrew Moravcsik, "A New Statecraft? Supranational Entrepreneurs and International Cooperation", in: *International Organization* Vol. 53 1999, pp. 805-809.

From theory to practise: Leadership in the EU

Those concepts of leadership can be of use for the European Union, especially as the EU has the means to address all three types mentioned: structural leadership could best be exerted by the High Representative, entrepreneurial leadership by the President of the European Commission, and intellectual leadership by the Presidency, or, after the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, the President of the European Council. Still, this cluster does not exclude one or the other exercising other forms of leadership.

One needs to be conscious that also with the Treaty of Lisbon, leadership will not come automatically to the European Union. The new Treaty will only contribute to improving the conditions for exerting leadership by providing more stability and, in the area of Foreign Policy, coordination by merging the office of the High Representative with that of the Commissioner for Foreign Relations. Still, there need to be adjustments made not of the written but 'living' constitution of the European Union, for which also the upcoming European elections might provide a chance.

Practical implications and necessities therefore should be to:

- (1) **Improve the basis for leadership by adding more legitimacy to the positions of formal leadership.** Thereby it should not be forgotten that legitimacy needs to come from two sources: the citizens and the member states. A higher legitimacy vis-à-vis the people could be assumed by a stronger involvement of the European Parliament and the European Political Parties in the appointment procedures. For legitimacy vis-à-vis the member states a balance between small and big, as well as 'old' and 'new' members of the European Union might be crucial.
- (2) **Use mechanisms such as the use of qualified majority voting in the Council or enhanced cooperation in order to reinforce debate and competition.** Those provisions have actually been enlarged with the past European treaties, but not frequently or never been used. The consensual style of decision-making in the European Union might be classified as a systemic necessity in most cases; however intergovernmental leadership by a type of *avant-garde* has proved e.g. in the Schengen system successful. Those forms of **team-leadership by countries**, as long as kept open to be joined by others, might help to counter national vetoes and/or the necessity to water down proposals to find consensus.
- (3) **Select European leaders.** In this context it is necessary to emphasize both notions; "European" as well as "leaders". In a system with dispersed power it is – independently from the Treaty of Lisbon coming into force – necessary to appoint/elect leaders with the will to jointly exercise leadership at the European level. At the same time, leaders, again independent from reappointment or new appointments, must have the personality, in the best case the charismatic attributes to act as leaders. Furthermore they will need the administrative and political apparatus in the institutions backing them up. The European elections provide also here for a chance which should not be missed.

Further sources:

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