

What it Takes to Run an EU Presidency: Study of Competences in Slovenia's Public Administration

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to find out whether Slovenia as a presiding EU state in the first half of 2008 and her diplomatic elite and experts were "equipped" with adequate competences for the materialization of its soft sources of influence, which small countries possess according to previous small-state research. The analysis is based on the survey conducted among over 600 civil servants involved in Slovenia's EU Council Presidency. The survey demonstrated that respondents did not regard "hard" knowledge as a limiting factor but attributed greater importance to "soft" knowledge. Slovenia's public administration does not profit from its smallness, which should enable greater efficiency. On the contrary, it is piled with problems on intra- and inter-ministerial co-ordination, hierarchic culture, poor flow of information and a low level of informal contacts among civil servants.

Key Words: Slovenia, EU Presidency, competences, knowledge, small states.

1. Introduction

Slovenia is both a small and a new member of the European Union (EU). As such, it has at its disposal formal channels of decision-making which, however, are not the only source of influence in the EU. The power or influence of a state in the EU's political reality can be increased (or decreased) by its reputation, represented by consistency, constructiveness, a principled approach and, finally, professionalism as well as proper functioning of its political, diplomatic and expert-level elite (cf. Wallace 2005). Consequently, one of the main membership challenges is the availability of appropriate competences, which enable working towards the better reputation and thus the increased informal influence of a state in the EU.

The institution of the rotating Presidency, being in the center of EU institutional

reform in spite of skepticism of academic literature about its role¹ (see Bunse 2009, ch.1 and 2), reflects the principle of equality of member states in the EU and enables each country to leave its mark in the life of the EU, to increase its formal weight for six months and at the same time to use these six months to raise its informal sources of influence, which it can retain long after the end of its Presidency term.

The Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2008 – less than four years after its accession to the Union – set in motion a wave of preparations and training of public servants for the Presidency tasks. Although some of those tasks are specific, such as chairing meetings (the so-called organizational-managerial skills), most of the expert knowledge and know-how is part of the kind of knowledge with which a state acquires its reputation as an EU Member State. Small states, above all, are those whose influence in the EU is to a larger extent dependent upon their reputation and thus on the working of its political and diplomatic elite, given the smaller formal political power (e.g. a lower number of votes in the Council, a lower number of Members of European Parliament (MEPs) and smaller economic weight).

The objective of the paper is to find out to what extent Slovenia as a presiding state, or rather its expert and diplomatic elite, was “equipped” with adequate competences to use its soft sources of influence. Apart from standard, field-specific competences, a Presidency requires a substantially wider scope of leadership, organization as well as diplomatic and communication/negotiating competences and, finally, new interdisciplinary expertise needed when working with increasingly interdependent issues. The EU attaches such importance to special EU competences that it elaborated a reference framework of key competences, which serves as a common standard for all member states.² These include: communication in the mother tongue, communication in the foreign languages; mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology; digital competence; learning to learn; interpersonal, intercultural and social competences and civic competence; entrepreneurship; and cultural expression.

An analysis of the appropriate and required knowledge for the Presidency, as well as of the adequacy of training for the Presidency, is thus one of the key elements for the formulation of a strategy for a successful performance and, in particular, an effective participation of the Republic of Slovenia (RS) as a “normal” member in the EU. This paper analyzes the results of the survey among the key Presidency actors³ in light of adequate preparations and competences for the Presidency and the subsequent effective functioning of RS in the EU. First, it outlines the conceptual framework for the purpose of understanding various types of knowledge and competences.

¹ Academic literature has described the rotating Presidency as a “responsibility without power” (Dewost 1984) – a “neutral broker” with burdensome administrative and organizational tasks that put small countries under great strain.

² The Commission incorporated the proposals into the Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning (COM (2005) 548 final, 10 November 2005. Available at http://www.hs-owl.de/kom/fileadmin/download/Downloads/Key_competencies_com_com_2005_0548_en.pdf (accessed on 3 January 2009).

³ By the term “key actors of the Presidency”, we mean those who worked on substantive dossiers related to the Presidency.

Secondly, it links competences to (the theory of) small states' functioning within the EU. In the third chapter, the methodology of the survey is presented. An analysis of the results follows in the fourth chapter, broken down into relations between hard and soft knowledge, the usefulness of pre-Presidency trainings and, finally, key problems of the Presidency. The paper finishes with conclusions and a discussion on what needs to be done in order to surpass these problems in the course of everyday "normal" membership.

2. Hard and soft knowledge in the EU context

Competences are abilities to effectively perform certain tasks. They combine what is sometimes labeled as soft knowledge, also as skills, and (traditional, hard) knowledge. Analytically it is important to distinguish between soft and hard knowledge and to contextualize them within the particular framework.

Perrenoud (1997) understands the competences of an individual as the activation, use and interconnection of knowledge, skills, motives, self-image and values as a whole, which enable the individual to successfully perform tasks and resolve problems in complex, diverse and unforeseeable situations. It is a body of patterns that an individual has to master to do his/her work successfully and effectively and the ability to implement them in (multicultural) teams that require an individual to face differences.

In the narrow sense, hard knowledge is the knowledge according to which A always follows from B. This is the knowledge that can be codified and obtained in schools. It provides answers to questions like "what" and "why". It is a transmittable formal knowledge, separated from its host and explicitly expressed in words, numbers, data, information, formulas, notes or manuals. An example of it is an automobile driving manual, while driving the vehicle itself represents tacit/soft knowledge. In this regard, international business theories (Dunning and Lundan 2008, 96) refer to tangible resources (natural resources, people, capital).

On the other hand, soft knowledge is intangible knowledge, which is difficult to quantify, codify, store and transmit, because it relates to more personal characteristics and includes judgment and experience. It is hidden within the answers to questions like "how", with which one is to negotiate, how expertise is articulated and presented in a simple and comprehensible manner. To know "how" relates to the ability to implement certain tasks, to know "who", on the other hand, relates to who possesses the knowledge of *what* and *why* (hard knowledge). Soft knowledge is tacit – internalized skills acquired with experience and practice. Experience is meaningful only if implemented on an adequate expert level. Skills relate to procedures, abilities and encultured knowledge linked to context (e.g. knowledge on intercultural dialogue and communication in general, negotiations, rhetoric, teamwork, stress control etc.) (Pavlin 2007 and Kohont 2005).

In international business theory, soft knowledge is defined in relation to intangible resources (technology, information, managerial, marketing and entrepreneurship skills, organizational systems, motivational structures) (Dunning and Lundau 2008, 96). Intangible capital (managerial theory refers to intellectual capital) is represented by everything linked to innovation and creative potential, e.g. patents,

trademarks, copyright, know-how. This represents as much as 80 percent of the wealth of OECD member states (see in Svetličič 2007, 222). The value of companies' intangible resources is estimated by S&P to have increased from 20 percent in 1980 to 70 percent today (Economist 2006, 11). Tacit activities, such as communication, negotiating and networking, represent as much as 45 percent of total employees' activities (Bearsley et al. 2006). These generic, subject-independent competences also include social (charisma, persuasiveness) or interpersonal competences, vital for a successful cooperation of individuals in any society.

Their importance, however, is exacerbated in a multicultural and multi-linguistic environment such as the EU. For competences are also environment- or context-specific (i.e. relational competences). Multicultural and multilinguistic aspects are the most obvious characteristics of any international environment. The structure of the particular environment, i.e. norms, actors, processes and relations among them, favors certain competences over others. Nye (2004) defines the ability to influence the behavior of others with the view of achieving the desired results as "soft power", which is increasingly important in the world of "complex interdependence", in contrast to "hard power", which is traditionally associated with military power in international relations. Fukujama (2008) even talks of the world today being driven by weak states, because the usual instruments of power (especially hard military power) do not work. For such a new world, a new arsenal of competences is needed (Fukujama 2008, 40). Soft power can only be executed through persuasion and the legitimacy of one's actions. Loss of respect and legitimacy can do away with it (Nye 2004). In the field of European diplomacy, studies indicate that differences between diplomats and experts are disappearing while managerial tasks, performed by diplomats, are increasing. All these are tasks that demand different knowledge and thus different training (Jazbec 2008).

Since EU membership entails activities in an international and multicultural environment, public servants facing these challenges require certain specific competences, which are also associated with global negotiators/managers. Beamish and Killing (2001, 178-195) include the following among those competences: the ability to develop and implement strategic skills, change and cultural-diversity management, functioning in a flexible organizational structure and teams, the ability to communicate openly as well as to learn and transmit knowledge within an organization. Research with regard to managerial staff in companies indicates that leading staff shows the weakest competences precisely in the fields of intercultural sensitivity, change-introduction and leadership. Therefore it is not surprising that implementation is more challenging than strategy (Hrebiniak 2005). It is precisely implementation which is the major task of each Presidency.

Operating within the EU is not characterized only by multiculturalism, but also by its structure and a specific institutional culture that has developed over the years of integration of the European continent. The specific, *sui generis*, institutional setup makes characteristics such as population and territorial size and strength of the economy relative by overproportional representation of small states, which also retain their sovereignty in most important issues via the right of veto. EU member states can also draw from formal as well as informal sources of power (Wallace 2005). While formal sources of power are defined in the treaties in terms of weight

in decision-making processes, informal sources are the subject of analysis, which particularly attracted small-state researchers. Two distinctive approaches in small state research in relation to the informal influence in the EU are worth presenting here: Thorhallsson's research on small states introducing distinctive forms of power that come to the fore in the specific institutional set-up of the EU and S. Baillie's attempt to develop a theory of small-state behavior in the EU.

Thorhallsson (2006, 8) differentiates among political, perceptive and preference sizes of a country. Preference size relates to ambitions and the setting of priorities by political elites in relation to the international system (including the EU). Perceptive size relates to how the state is seen by internal and external actors. Political size is understood by Thorhallsson (2006, 18) as a sum of military and administrative capabilities and cohesion in the country. Administrative capability is defined as the capability to govern the state and take an active part in bilateral and multilateral negotiations, which especially comes to the fore in the particular and perpetual negotiating environment presented by the EU and in purposes for which the practical competences of public-administration personnel are crucial (Thorhallsson 2006, 19). By emphasizing administrative capability, Thorhallsson is close to Bunse's approach in evaluating the role of small states in EU governance, which is new institutionalism⁴, attributing a crucial role to institutions in explaining political behavior and outcomes (Bunse 2009, 6).

Baillie (1999) elaborated basic tenets of the theory of small states in the EC/EU by analyzing the operation of Luxembourg in the European Community. According to her research, a small state's ability to have a desired effect is based on three sources (Baillie 1998, 195-197):

1. A small state's means of influence are directly related to its particular historical context.
2. There are advantages stemming from institutional factors at the EU and national levels. At the EU level, it is the quasi-federalist system of decision-making, based on the equality of States, and on the *acquis communautaire*, according to which acquired rights cannot be revoked without unanimity. At the national level, a small administration engaged in EU matters enables more effective and efficient decision-making (this advantage is also discussed by Katzenstein 1985).
3. Conflict-avoiding strategy is potentially a small state's source of power. Conflict avoidance leads to the state being perceived as weak, which can be advantageous. Namely, first, small states tend to find themselves in a non-competitive relationship with other parties. Secondly, aware of their weaknesses, they seek to maintain good relations with their partners, which help them in defending their particular interests. Thirdly, a small state tends to adopt a low-profile approach in negotiations on most issues since most often, it does not have a strong interest to defend. When it does, it can readily argue that its existence is at stake, and given its general low-profile approach, the

⁴ Institutions are more and more emphasized also by economists (see North 1993 and 1999).

other member-states will tend to show a high level of tolerance and understanding. Fourthly, by playing the role of an honest broker or neutral coordinator, they can play a central role in the decision-making process. This may provide it with ample opportunity to defend its own interest "in the background" and enables it to defend its national interests effectively.

Thorhallsson deepens these tenets by further developing the institutional dimension in relation to the behavioral dimension. He shows that institutionally, it is the Commission that is perfectly placed to allow for the specific influence by smaller member states. While larger states can exert stronger influence upon the Commission, smaller ones compensate for this by developing special relations with the officials of the Commission. Thorhallsson's analysis on the negotiation behavior of small states also confirms findings by Baillie. However, he goes deeper in searching what allows small states to change their strategy from reactive to proactive and from flexible to inflexible, depending on the issue at hand. He concludes that it is the special characteristics of their administrations, such as informality (their personnel is also more constant),⁵ flexible decision-making and greater room of maneuver for their officials that allows them to switch between tactics (see Thorhallsson 2000, 232, 237).

EU Presidency puts a Member State into the center of EU politics and diplomacy and also into the EU's external activities.⁶ Presidency holds tasks of ensuring a smooth conduct of activities in the Council, managing its relations with other EU institutions, guiding the EU and representing it in front of third actors (cf. Wallace and Edwards 1976; Kietz and Perthes 2007). These are enormous tasks, which demand extraordinary preparations and extra hiring also in administrations of bigger member states. Still, the analysis of Presidencies shows that small states, despite their small public administrations – but therefore counting more on help provided by the Commission and General Secretariat of the Council (GSC) –, cope successfully with Presidency tasks.⁷ Problems of vertical and horizontal co-operation, which are inherent in every administration (cf. Deal and Kennedy in Haček and Bačljija 2007, 74-77) and tested to the utmost limits during Presidency, are lessened in smaller administrations by informal contacts, enabled by physical closeness and long term acquaintances.

Analyses of small states also suggest that they are good in the Presidency seat precisely because they are not so inclined to promote their national interests simply because they are too small to have strong national interests with an EU dimension. Large states, on the other hand, are tempted to promote their own national interests as common (communitarian) interests of the EU (cf. Beach 2004; Quaglia and Moxon-Browne 2006; Schout and Vanhoonacker 2006, Bunse 2009).

⁵ Instructive is the case of Luxembourg, which conducted its three successive Presidencies (notably in a time when these were more often due to the smaller number of member states) with largely the same personnel.

⁶ For an extensive analysis of small state Presidencies, see Bunse (2009).

⁷ On the bigger reliance of small-state Presidencies upon the EU institutions, in particular the GSC, see Beach (2004). Also the *Journal of Common Market Studies' Annual Review* publishes an analysis of each year's Presidency.

Following the 2004 enlargement, fears were raised, saying that the new member states might block the operation of the EU due to their inexperience in consensual decision-making and understaffing (cf. Juncos and Pomorska 2007). Prior to the Slovenian Presidency, these fears were not entirely overcome, and expectations of the Slovenian Presidency were low. Slovenia demonstrated during preparations and the Presidency itself that it is able to balance, mediate and understand the need for compromise (Kietz and Perthes 2007; Kajnč 2008a, 2008b, 2009a), which suggests that it adopted the “small state behavior” typical in the EU (adoption of “low profile” and “honest broker” roles). To what extent it increased its reputation and informal sources of influence, however, as shown above, depends on the expertise presented by its diplomats and experts (their generic competences), a good understanding of the EU’s institutional set-up (relational competences, e.g. cooperation with relevant actors, such as Commission officials) and on the relative advantages of its (small) administration (use of informality, flexibility, lessened coordination problems).

3. Methodological framework

The main research question in this paper is to what extent Slovenia, in terms of the expertise of its public officials as well as the efficiency of its administration, was “equipped” for the conduct of the Presidency. Expertise is understood as the possession of hard and soft knowledge. Concretely, hard knowledge, in this particular context of Presidency-conduct, is about the content of the problem or issue at hand, with which a person working on a certain aspect of the Presidency (dossier) is faced, and about acquaintance with the political system (institutions) and processes (decision-making) in the EU. In the case of soft knowledge, it is about competences which serve for the articulation of positions (organizational skills) and their communication (rhetoric, conversational) – including the use of (foreign) language, leadership and negotiating skills. Efficiency of public administration in the sense of comparative advantage of small states depends on horizontal and vertical co-operation, informal contacts and hierarchic relations on the one hand, while on the other sufficient staffing needs to be considered. This is in line also with the new institutionalism approach emphasizing the difference between formal and informal power (rules and real procedures) focusing on *actual* behavior. (See Bunse 2009, 7).

We tested these elements of expertise in and efficiency of Slovenia’s public administration by means of a survey among public officials involved in the Presidency with substantive tasks. Between 9 July and 4 September 2008, we conducted an anonymous electronic survey consisting of 40 questions.⁸ It has been sent directly to the distribution list of the Presidency Human Resources Sub-Group,

⁸ The survey started in the week following the end of the Presidency. It was conducted by Internet. Although we knew that the timing was not the best since respondents were still tired of the Presidency, it was crucial to get their opinions immediately after the conclusion of the Presidency and before their vacations. Such timing influenced the response rate and in some cases the partially filled questionnaires. But the quality of the responses was much better than in the case of a survey which would have been conducted much later. Employment contracts of the majority of temporary staff expired on 4 July, so that the majority of them, including students, is not included in the survey.

which includes those responsible for substantive dossiers (454 persons). Separately, the survey has been distributed to diplomats and other public servants working on substantive issues at the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Slovenia in the EU (PermRep) (169 persons) and to other diplomatic and consular representations of the RS abroad (44 persons, distributed to the addresses of ambassadors). In total, the survey has thus been distributed to 667 addresses. We received 407 replies, among which 235 have been completed while in 172 cases, the respondents did not answer at least one question. The response rate can be assessed as very high⁹: 61 percent responded, 35 percent to all questions. In the case of partial responses, the share of unanswered questions increases towards the end of the survey, which suggests that either lack of time or unwillingness to answer the demographic questions prevented the respondents from finishing the questionnaire.

The results are representative with regard to representation of categories of the stakeholders with respect to their status in the administration, experience and issue area in which they worked (table 1). Among the respondents, desk officers dominate (22 percent) followed by heads of divisions and sections (18.2 and 17.2 percent) and diplomats in the PermRep (16.7 percent) and in other diplomatic and consular representations (14.8 percent). Analysts, ministers and state secretaries were the least represented (10.5 percent and 0.5 percent). It is obvious that middle-management staff (Heads of Divisions and Sections) is evenly distributed in relation to others. Diplomats are evenly distributed between the diplomatic and consular network and the PermRep. Experienced personnel was strongly represented. Those with more than 4 years of experience working in the administration represented 74.7 percent, 42.8 percent with more than 11 years of experiences. Those with less than 1 year of experience represented only 9 percent of all respondents.

The survey's results thus reflect the assessment of the predominantly experienced public servants. The relevance of replies increases if one takes into consideration that respondents were heavily involved in EU matters. As much as 39 percent of them worked on EU-related matters more than 20 hours per week, while 61 percent worked on these issues more than 13 hours per week. Issue-area representation is also ensured, although respondents marked several issue-areas due to the interdisciplinary nature of a large number of areas.

⁹ This is in line with 36.1 percent average response rate of mail surveys among top management based on 175 studies published in five leading journals in management in 1975, 1985 and 1995. The result for 117 studies in 17 referred journals published in 2000 and 2005 was also similar (35.7 percent) (see Bavdaš, Drnovšek and Lotrič-Dolinar 2009, 189).

Table 1: Issue-area representation

| Issue-area | N | (%) |
|--|-----|------|
| EU Foreign and Security Policy, EU External Relations | 73 | 17.4 |
| Justice and Home Affairs (Justice, Freedom and Security), Fight against Fraud | 44 | 10.5 |
| Agriculture and Fisheries | 36 | 8.6 |
| Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid, Human Rights | 33 | 7.9 |
| Environment | 29 | 6.9 |
| Internal Market, Competition, Consumers, Enterprises | 28 | 6.7 |
| Energy | 23 | 5.5 |
| Industry and Monetary Affairs | 21 | 5.0 |
| Public Health, Food Safety | 21 | 5.0 |
| EU Enlargement | 19 | 4.5 |
| External Trade, Customs | 17 | 4.1 |
| Research, Innovation, Information Society | 17 | 4.1 |
| Education, Training, Youth, Employment and Social Affairs | 16 | 4.0 |
| Transport, Maritime Affairs | 13 | 3.1 |
| Culture, Audio-Visual Affairs and Media | 12 | 3.0 |
| Institutional Affairs, Budget, Taxation | 10 | 2.4 |
| Regional Policy | 7 | 1.6 |
| Total | 419 | 100 |

* Respondents could choose several appropriate responses

In order to answer the lead research question, we statistically analyzed answers to the questions related to (i) competences required for the conduct of the Presidency, (ii) usefulness of pre-Presidency training, (iii) problems encountered during the Presidency term and (iv) the question of what needs to be changed (in the event of another Presidency). Independent variables are presented separately in each section below.

4. Analysis: Relative importance of hard vis-à-vis soft knowledge

4.1. The relevance of hard and soft knowledge

Two major conclusions regarding the relative importance of hard vis-à-vis soft knowledge stem from the survey results. Firstly, hard knowledge was generally not perceived as a problem (see table 7). Secondly, respondents have clearly rated soft skills as more important than hard skills, which is in line with Bunse's conclusion (2009, 207) that it is their entrepreneurial behavior within resources/constraint structure and not bargaining power which explains why small countries can have signifi-

cant impact. This is reflected both in the importance attributed to selected Presidency competences (see table 2) as well as in the relevance of different forms of training for the Presidency (table 3) and the competences needed for potential new Presidency tasks (table 5) named by the respondents.

The low ranking of the significance of hard knowledge can be attributed to three factors. First, self-evidence; respondents might perceive knowledge as a necessary precondition for a successful Presidency, which thus requires no particular emphasis. Secondly, the specific Presidency tasks, such as chairing, coordinating and searching for a compromise exacerbate soft skills. Thirdly, not many are ready to admit that they have lacked the (self-evident preconditioned) knowledge.

Table 2: **Relevance of competences**

| | Number of valid responses | Yes, important (in %) | No, not important (in %) |
|---|---------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Command of English | 228 | 100 | 0 |
| Oral communication ability | 227 | 99.1 | 0.1 |
| Contact-building | 225 | 93.3 | 6.7 |
| Teamwork, organization of work (workload sharing) | 226 | 91.2 | 8.8 |
| Written communication ability | 226 | 90.3 | 9.7 |
| Negotiating skills | 222 | 86.0 | 14.0 |
| Analytical skills | 225 | 85.8 | 14.2 |
| Position drafting | 225 | 85.3 | 14.7 |
| Chairing meetings | 223 | 78.9 | 21.1 |
| Command of French | 219 | 57.5 | 42.5 |
| Command of German | 206 | 20.4 | 79.6 |

The prioritization of skills also suggests that problems occurred at the level of implementation of knowledge rather than at the level of expertise confirming theoretical expectations that policy implementation may be more important than policy creation (see Hrebiniak 2005). The analysis demonstrates that those who indicated their field of work as important for Slovenia also emphasized the significance of (the lack of) knowledge in said field, which indicates that expert knowledge increases when required for the promotion of a specific substantive interest. The assessment that expertise is not a significant problem (table 4) becomes relative if one takes into account that as much as 33 percent of the respondents stated that Slovenia did not have specific interests in the fields in which they operated. This leads to the conclusion that when something should be skillfully brought to conclusion (entrepreneurial skills according to Bunse 2009) with less emphasis on the concrete substance of that conclusion, it is the skills that really count.¹⁰

¹⁰ For more on the analysis from the perspective of interest promotion and problems of the Presidency, see Kajnč and Svetličič 2008.

When advocating clearly articulated interests, which are fewer when it comes to small states as compared to large ones (see Thorhallsson 2000 and Bunse 2009), the role of substantive arguments becomes significantly more important.

But those who have been the most intensively involved in the Presidency, who have also been supposed to be the most experienced and to possess the most knowledge – diplomats at the PermRep –, came to the conclusion that the knowledge about the EU was very poor. As much as 43 percent of the respondents based at the PermRep singled out the lack of knowledge about EU institutions as one among three major problems of the Slovenian Presidency. On the basis of the low assessment of cooperation with other institutions of the Slovenian administration by diplomats from PermRep,¹¹ it is possible to conclude that these problems – as deemed by the PermRep staff – do not exist within PermRep but in other parts of the Slovenian public administration. Diplomats at PermRep are undoubtedly better informed and knowledgeable about the working of EU institutions and therefore take note of a lack of knowledge in the public administration in the capital.

Among the soft skills, command of English was marked as relevant by all respondents. Oral communication ability, networking, team work, rhetoric and negotiation skills follow closely in frequency. Informal contacts were attributed less importance in the time prior to the Presidency¹²; however, they were perceived to be much more important as a desired competence. In this regard, underestimation and insufficient motivation to strengthen informal contacts can be characterized as a problem.

Among the soft skills, respondents gave priority to the knowledge of English (see tables 2 and 5). The high importance of English and much less of other foreign languages (French and German were at the bottom of needed competencies) is, in view of the fact that it was the working language of the Presidency, not surprising. Consequently, these responses should not deceive us into underestimating the other languages, since documents – in particular during French Presidencies – are drafted first in French and only later translated into English. They are also extremely important for informal contacts.¹³

Linking needed competences for the Presidency (table 2) with the importance of

¹¹ Average scores of cooperation with the Slovenian administration by PermRep were 3.91 with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; 3.11 with other ministries; 3.06 with the Office of European Affairs; 3.69 with other Slovenian diplomats and as high as 4.64 with PermRep.

¹² The conclusion is similar in the case of firms' strategies; here as well informal channels have been assessed as almost as important as informal ones; 84.9 compared to 4.98 for formal channels (5 was the most important) (see Pučko and Čater 2008, 318).

¹³ It should be emphasized, however, that these are specific competences which are critical in specific situations and in specific fields. Accordingly, 65.4 percent (N=26) of those working in Brussels during the Presidency marked the knowledge of French as an important competence, while the knowledge of German was marked as such by 12 percent (N=25). These figures are in essence quite low; it could be concluded that this presents a specific situation in the time of the Presidency when the presiding State has a larger influence on the choice of the working language. Informal contacts represent a similar case. Outside the Presidency, this percentage would probably be closer to the percentage of the use of individual languages in the EU institutions. While the use of German, for example, is of minor importance in comparison to French, the number of Slovenian German-speaking politicians and public servants and common interest areas with Austria and Germany represent important factors in favor of more intensive learning and use of German among Slovenian diplomats.

education for such tasks (table 3) and finally what respondents would like to change in the future (table 5) leads us to the conclusion that English is highly important as a needed and wanted competence. The relatively lower desirability of training in other foreign languages indicates that it was relevant only to a limited number of the respondents.

4.2. Usefulness of training/education

With regard to training and competences for the Presidency, we asked about the participation and assessment of the relevance of organized training during preparations for the Presidency¹⁴ and the frequency of working visits to Brussels during the preparations in order to see the relevance of hands-on experience and competences required during the Presidency. Indirectly linked to these questions were those regarding problems during the Presidency, assessment of cooperation with national and EU institutions and other external actors, including informal contacts and questions linked to the work in the Council Working Parties in general as well as specifically linked to agenda-setting. The number of respondents (339) is much higher here than in the case of other questions, which increases the weight of the results also because as much as 72 percent of the respondents participated in training for the Presidency. Most of the other questions were answered by around 235 respondents.

Measuring the usefulness of training with correlation coefficients¹⁵ shows the strongest correlation between the usefulness of training on the particular field/issue-area and on processes and decision-making in that field (0.699), followed by that between the usefulness of procedural training and the decision-making system and the usefulness of upgrading the knowledge of foreign languages (0.576). Slightly lower is the correlation coefficient between the usefulness of training in the field of familiarity with the institutions and, again, upgrading the knowledge of foreign languages (0.567). This means that those who felt they (or others) lacked knowledge in decision-making procedures also deemed necessary additional knowledge of foreign languages. One might assume that the Slovenian education system does not (yet) provide sufficient knowledge for a successful articulation in foreign languages when performing responsible tasks where – apart from language skills – communication and rhetoric skills are required as well. This is also suggested by a strong correlation between the usefulness of training in foreign languages and personal competence building – rhetoric, chairing meetings, negotiations and the use of diplomatic techniques (0.557). Insufficient knowledge of English is a problem when it is linked with the implementation of interests, the ability to articulate one's position as well as lobbying and networking informally.

Responses indicate that training has been instrumental in enhancing hard and even soft knowledge (see table 3), but particularly with regard to knowledge of the functioning of EU institutions/procedures. At the same time, experiences (working

¹⁴ See Government of Slovenia training for Presidency strategy (Vlada RS 2006) and Report on the preparations on the Presidency (Vlada RS 2008). In the 18 months before the Presidency, 263 preparatory seminars were prepared with almost 6,000 participants.

¹⁵ All correlations are significant at less than 1 percent.

meetings in Brussels) have been indicated as even more important than formal training. The low ranking of training usefulness with regard to acquiring hard knowledge on EU matters is a reflection of adequate knowledge in this regard, which the more junior staff acquired at the University or otherwise, while more senior staff might be lacking this knowledge (see more in Kajnč and Svetličič 2009). The low ranking of this knowledge for the Presidency can partly be attributed to the fact that the Presidency program itself limited the agenda and thereby allowed sufficient preparation for the implementation itself.

Table 3: Usefulness of training

| Preparation form | Number of valid responses | Median | Standard deviation | Very useful and useful in % |
|---|---------------------------|--------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| Participation at the Council Working Party meetings before the Presidency | 209 | 4.18 | 1.222 | 76 |
| Meetings with the EU institutions' and other MS representatives | 208 | 4.13 | 1.172 | 39 |
| Upgrading foreign-language knowledge | 211 | 3.89 | 1.200 | 44 |
| General familiarity with EU institutions and their functioning | 213 | 3.76 | 1.143 | 52 |
| Building personal competences: rhetoric, chairing meetings, negotiating, use of diplomatic techniques | 208 | 3.75 | 1.158 | 52 |
| Mastering procedures and the decision-making system in a specific field in which I operate | 195 | 3.59 | n.a. | 55 |
| Meeting people with whom I worked subsequently | 187 | 3.24 | 1.481 | 37 |
| Mastering issue-area/field of work | 175 | 3.17 | 1.358 | 45 |

The training for the Presidency enhanced English-language knowledge but was below expectations when it comes to its functionality. A very similar attitude can be perceived towards the negotiating skills. They seem to be less important as a required competence but the most desired skill in the case of a possible subsequent Presidency. Additional training in this respect seems necessary.

Respondents ranked the usefulness of training for the purpose of upgrading the knowledge of foreign languages with an average of 3.89 (on a scale where 5 was the most important), which is the third highest rank with regard to importance of training (outranked only by the participation in meetings in Brussels ($M=4.18$) and meetings with EU institutions' representatives ($M=4.13$)). However, the number of respondents who ranked the usefulness of training for the purpose of upgrading the knowledge of foreign languages as very useful is lower.

For further training policy purposes in the EU matters, it is perhaps more important not only to ascertain which areas have been the most important ones according to mean values (last column, table 5), but also which training type has been considered by the majority as very useful/useless (not considering answers under 3 – between useful and useless). Considering only these responses, respondents ranked

the decision-making system in their field of expertise and familiarity with the EU institutions' functioning/procedures¹⁶ much higher. Notwithstanding that they attribute less importance to hard knowledge itself, they wish to upgrade it.

Results also suggest that training was insufficiently focused to specific issues and/or themes or to particular groups by the type of tasks/functions they conducted. Apart from the content dimension of such training, the lack of it also prevented the adequate establishment of contacts (contact-building) between those working in the same field. For respondents attached high importance (third rank among the competences) to networking (establishment of contacts). In this context, it is not surprising that the most pressing problem of the Presidency as shown by the results of the survey was the weak interdepartmental/ministerial cooperation which obviously not fulfilled the respondents' expectations.

The survey demonstrates that experience is relatively more significant than formal education or additional training.¹⁷ As much as 76.1 percent of the respondents regarded the participation at meetings of the Council Working Parties before the Presidency as very useful or useful (figure 1), and this despite the fact that as much as 72 percent of them participated in training for the Presidency. The high frequency of visits to Brussels indicates that travelling to Brussels during the preparations was also a form of acquiring experience and knowledge. As much as 40 percent of the respondents went to Brussels more than three times, 34 percent five times, 14.4 percent three-five times, 13 percent twice and 28.3 percent never.

Respondents attributed the highest rank (M=4.18 and 4.13 respectively) to the usefulness of participation in meetings and meetings with the EU institutions' representatives (table 3). Participation in the Working Party meetings upgrades previous field knowledge from the procedural perspective, the perspective of other states' interests and inter-relations and/or relative importance of issues in relation to other aspects. Correlations between the usefulness of training on the one hand and participation in Council Working Party meetings before the Presidency and meetings with the EU institutions' representatives on the other are the strongest. Considering that respondents attributed high importance to the establishment of contacts (third place among the competences required for the Presidency (see table 4)), it can be concluded that the function of such visits was largely to complement knowledge and build informal contacts that respondents emphasized as an important working method, which Slovenia will require for the next Presidency (see table 5). Finally, such contacts provide a possibility to acquire insight into the unwritten rules of the functioning of institutions.

In order to see potential preparation priorities for the future Presidencies and also for "normal" functioning of Slovenia as an EU Member State, we also asked respondents what they would like to be different, to be changed for the future Presidencies.

¹⁶ It was specifically emphasized at the workshop, organized in order to evaluate the results of the survey (see acknowledgements), that we are weak in negotiating procedures and that the EU is not always procedurally transparent. Consequently, experience is even more important since these procedures cannot be mastered from theory. A more rapid exchange of staff at the PermRep could be one of the means to acquire such experience.

¹⁷ Intensive EU-related training of public administration started relatively late, Fink-Hafner estimates that this occurred only in 2000 when the official strategy in this field had been adopted (Fink-Hafner and Lajh 2003, cited from Fink-Hafner 2007, 11).

Immediately after improvements of intra- and inter-ministerial cooperation (see below), the largest frequency was attributed to the improvements of negotiation and communication skills followed by foreign-language knowledge. This is understandable since only two years of training for the Presidency cannot improve such skills to a very high level provided they have not been acquired earlier in regular education programs. In addition, experts involved in the Presidency have been selected on the basis of their issue-area expertise, regardless of their skills. Skills are also difficult to be qualified (and quantified) and are also not so exposed in the regular work of the majority of public officials.

5. Major Presidency-related problems

In accordance with postulates of the limited potentials of small states, the lack of personnel has demonstrated to be the most acute problem of the Slovenian Presidency (see table 4). But the lack of human resources can also hide in itself the lack of knowledge and information since it is not only a problem of quantity but also of quality. The fact that those who identified insufficient field/issue-area information as a problem were also the ones who were most critical of the cooperation within the public administration indicates that lack of information, also resulting from weak inter- and intra-ministry/department cooperation, was one of the serious problems during the Presidency.

Although the lack of hard knowledge was not considered to be a problem, it was the lack of knowledge in the related fields which ranked much higher. Obviously the interdisciplinary knowledge was the most important segment needed within the hard knowledge competences and some specific areas not specially dealt with in Slovenia (see Kajnč and Svetličič 2009). Experts also lacked background information on specific issues which had been available to officials at a higher but not at lower levels.

Our survey revealed that lack of knowledge has not been substituted by more intensive cooperation with the GSC and the Commission, nor by cooperation with other member states. Respondents have not used such contacts to compensate their lack of expertise with more intensive cooperation with the representatives of the Commission, GSC, national delegates and partners in the trio¹⁸ since such cooperation has not proved to be correlated with competences.¹⁹ The only strong and statistically relevant correlation is the correlation between the cooperation with the trio and training; those who marked training as useful were also those who cooperated better with their trio partners.

Lack of information on the substance of relevant issues is worrisome by itself, low rating of the cooperation between institutions as well as that within them, however, brings it even further into focus. Furthermore, this answer might also shed additional

¹⁸ Trio is the form of cooperation among states which consecutively preside EU. The most obvious activity of the trio is the common 18-month Presidency program. Such cooperation started by the trio a part of which Slovenia was, together with Germany (first half of 2007) and Portugal (second half of 2007). After Slovenia, a new trio (France, Czech Republic and Sweden) took over. For more on the cooperation of Slovenian Presidency actors with other actors from member states, Commission and GSC, see Kajnč (2009b).

¹⁹ Correlation coefficients are positive but weak (only in the case of cooperation with GSC 0.108), and not statistically significant.

light on the perception of lack of knowledge as non-problematic. Perhaps individuals did not have sufficient information to become aware that they lack hard knowledge.²⁰

The low weight attributed to the contact-building competences confirms the general conclusion of the survey that cooperation among and inside ministries during the Presidency has been relatively weak.²¹ This can be understood in relation to the manner in which the Presidency has been organized, the so-called “Brussels-based” Presidency, for which Slovenia decided, meaning that interdepartmental coordination took place in the PermRep rather than in Ljubljana. During the Presidency, “normal” interdepartmental coordination gave way to coordination on the spot, i.e. in Brussels.²² Irrespective of this form of organizing the Presidency, respondents – when asked about the three most prominent problems of the Slovenian Presidency – ranked the vertical in-house and interdepartmental cooperation (see table 4) as the second and third most pressing problems.

Table 4: The most problematic issues of the Presidency

| Issue | N | % | % of responses | Rating of cooperation in state administration |
|--|-----|------|----------------|---|
| Human resources deficit | 111 | 18.4 | 50.0 | 3.37 |
| Bad vertical cooperation within department | 94 | 15.6 | 42.3 | 3.41 |
| Insufficient interdepartmental cooperation | 86 | 14.3 | 38.7 | 3.51 |
| Hierarchy within institutions stifles initiative | 72 | 12.0 | 32.4 | 3.31 |
| Insufficient knowledge in similar fields and awareness of linkages | 63 | 10.5 | 28.4 | 3.51 |
| Insufficient information on the substance of relevant issues | 52 | 8.6 | 23.4 | 3.17 |
| Internal political issues | 52 | 8.6 | 23.4 | 3.49 |
| Unfamiliarity with the EU institutions' functioning | 40 | 6.6 | 18.0 | 3.45 |
| Insufficient knowledge in the field of operation | 32 | 5.3 | 14.4 | 3.44 |

* Percentage of the total of 602 responses to this question. The fourth column contains the percentage of those who responded to this question, i.e. 222 (meaning that not everybody has chosen to respond three times).

** Respondents could select three areas among the available responses.

²⁰ Marking the lack of information as a problem indicates passivity: information is given while knowledge needs to be (actively) acquired). Among the most pressing information-related problems were: i) slow and weak circulation of information top-down on the hierarchical ladder; ii) barriers in the direct access to the information, also passing by direct bosses. The system of confidentiality and non-harmonization of information systems are also two explanatory factors for such problems (for more on this see Kajnc and Svetličič 2008).

²¹ It was the cooperation within ministries that was ranked the highest (27 percent excellent, 36.8 percent good). Inter-ministerial cooperation was ranked significantly lower (only 8 percent excellent and 24.7 percent good), the best cooperation proved to be that with SVEZ (15.9 percent excellent and 24.8 percent good). Moreover, the highest ranked was the PermRep (47.1 percent excellent and 26 percent good) while the diplomatic network was not ranked well (27.2 percent very bad and bad, 31.1 percent neither good nor bad).

²² There were, however, Presidency-related fortnightly Government sessions, but our survey does not include representative number of those most likely to have attended these sessions.

Contact-building (networking) is a highly desired competence (table 5). It is thus not surprising that contacts with Slovenian diplomats and those from other States, the Commission and the GSC were very frequent. The only exception is the low number of contacts with the European-Parliament (EP) representatives, which may indicate an underestimation of the importance of such contacts (or the EP), but which might also suggest that these contacts were concentrated in Brussels and managed by a small number of PermRep staff. Cooperation with non-governmental organizations proved to be very poor, and their role has been rather marginalized. What may cause concern is that the contacts with other states' representatives have been more frequent than those with public servants/diplomats of RS (figure 1).

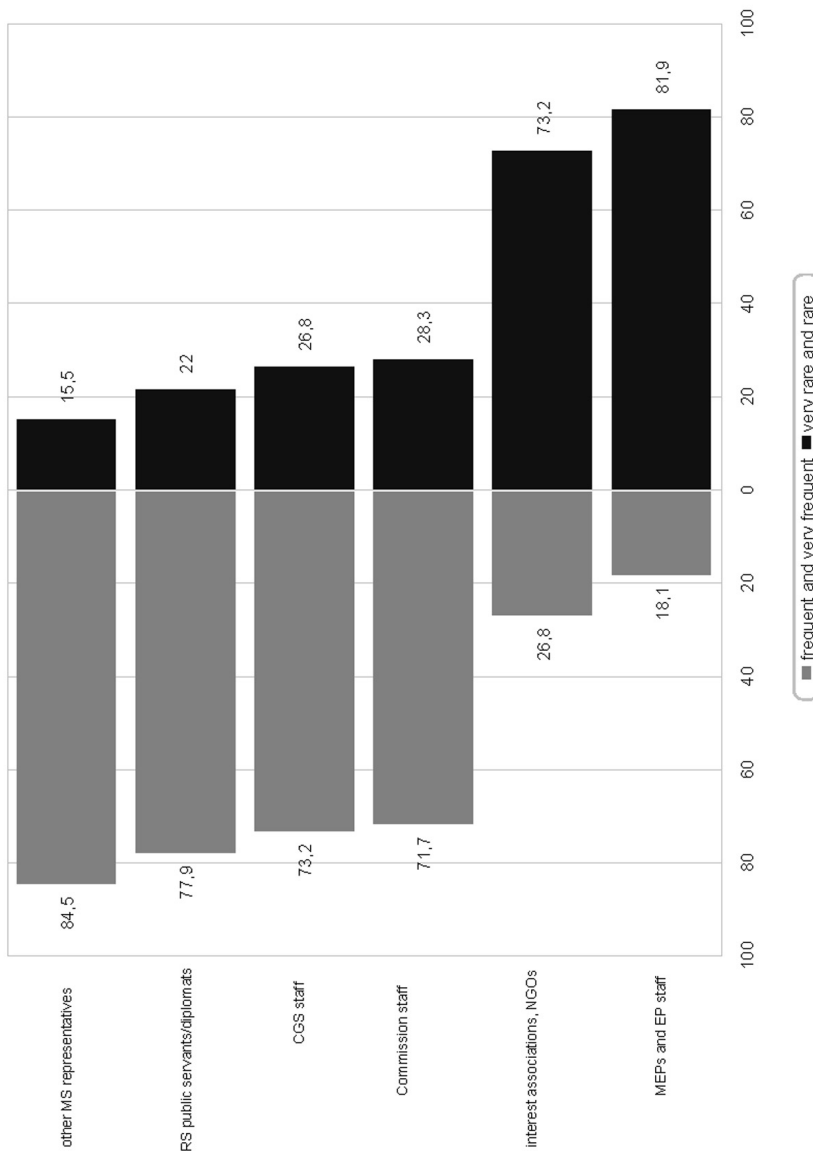


Figure 1: Frequency of Presidency-related contacts

Though it needs to be borne in mind that there are 26 other member states, more frequent international contacts might illustrate either the European nature of the Slovenian Presidency or a proactive stance in the sense of using these contacts not only for information-gathering but also for coalition-building²³, or that the services of the Slovenian diplomatic and consular representations and other public servants were not sufficiently used for the Presidency as such. On the other hand, one should also take into account the sheer number of other states' representatives who are interested in contacts with the Presidency. It is in this light that more frequent informal contacts with other states as compared to those with the GSC and the Commission can be understood. Certainly, the Presidency is a "target" of other states both as regards lobbying and information-gathering as early as during the preparation phase. Thus it is "normal" that contacts with the presiding government, formal and informal, increase substantially irrespective of the activities of the Presidency and more as a result of the proactive attitude of other States.

6. Strategies for the future

Perhaps the decisive question on the competences is what the Presidency actors would do to strengthen them in case of a new Presidency by Slovenia. This streamlines priorities and the importance of particular competences; however, it is not only relevant for the eventual next Presidency but also for the successful functioning of Slovenia in the "normal" conditions of EU membership.

²³ The results of the studies by Naurin and Lindahl (2008) on coalition-building in the Council indicate that as well. Slovenia is ranked among the last three member states as regards the unweighted network capital or on the coalition potential index (23rd among 27 member states). The rank increased slightly when rated by member states from Southern and Eastern Europe (16th in both cases), which is, however, the last place among the new transition member states. Slovenia's ranking improved only when rated exclusively by States from Southern Europe, in which case it was ranked before Hungary, Slovakia, Latvia, the Czech Republic, Poland and Lithuania (Naurin and Lindahl 2008, 71). The upside is that one is perceived as a neutral, untied State, the downside that one is less interesting and can learn less about ways of building coalitions and compromises, which are also elements of leadership capability. Since it is unlikely that Slovenia has so little in common with all member states that it would not form coalitions with them, such a low *network capital coefficient* tends to be more a negative than a positive characteristic of Slovenian foreign policy.

Table 5: **Desired changes for the next Presidency**

| | Number of valid responses | Yes, important (in %) | No, not important (in %) |
|--|---------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Interdepartmental cooperation in RS | 224 | 79.5 | 20.5 |
| Cooperation within my institution/ministry/office | 225 | 66.2 | 33.8 |
| My negotiating and communication skills | 223 | 64.6 | 35.4 |
| My command of foreign languages | 226 | 63.3 | 36.7 |
| Devoting more time to informal contacts | 223 | 58.7 | 41.3 |
| My expert knowledge | 222 | 54.1 | 45.9 |
| Preparing better for the Presidency | 225 | 42.2 | 57.8 |
| Raising my knowledge about the EU institutions to a higher level | 223 | 41.7 | 58.3 |

Although the lack of human resources was perceived by the respondents as the major problem²⁴, Slovenia's Presidency experiences demonstrate that the respondents in the future want most improvements in intra- and inter-departmental/ministry cooperation. As many as 80 percent of the respondents emphasized this as vital (see table 5). In this light, the results of previous research showing that coordination is not generally perceived as a problem (see Fink-Hafner 2007, 9-10) are a matter for concern.²⁵

The comparison between such answers on the one hand and pre-Presidency training and the importance of competences for the Presidency on the other demonstrates that the more the respondents are faced with a specific task, the more important it becomes to cooperate in Slovenia and to upgrade soft skills.

All these competences, also acquired during the Presidency, will be an irrational investment if the Presidency staff is not able to continue with their work on European affairs. Responses demonstrate that almost 30 percent of the respondents²⁶ that answered this question will no longer work on European affairs. As much as 42 percent of the respondents will change their employment after the Presidency and will no longer deal with European affairs. 66.1 percent will remain in the same positions, 15.2 percent will get new positions and 13.8 percent will lose their jobs. Only 4.9 percent will be promoted.

In spite of the fact that the majority of those involved in the 2008 Slovenian Presidency will still work on European affairs, a significant share of those that will cease to work on EU-related matters indicate that there may be a problem of transferring knowledge on European affairs to colleagues and especially new recruits and the transformation of such knowledge into institutional memory. Weak intra-ministry

²⁴ This does not confirm Bunse's conclusion that "small states are not overburdened with the presidency tasks" (2009, 206).

²⁵ Fink-Hafner quotes opinions of interviewed government's officials (interviews were conducted in 2002 and 2003) saying "that coordination is neither necessary nor wanted." She concludes that such opinions also present a barrier to the formation of coordination of European policies. (Fink-Hafner 2007, 9-10).

²⁶ Assuming that those promoted will continue to work on EU affairs.

cooperation reinforces such a conclusion. However, the knowledge will not be lost if these experienced people switch to the EU or other international organizations, provided that Slovenian public administration will be able to keep permanent contact with them and that they, perhaps after a certain period, return to Slovenia with newly acquired knowledge.²⁷ The problem of assuring institutional memory is also linked to the frequent changes of public servants and political elites which makes the loss of institutional memory not only the objectively determined problem but also a subjectively generated problem. Those leaving naturally have no incentive to transfer their knowledge on incoming, politically appointed, civil servants. The second barrier is sometimes also the "jealousy" of new leading civil servants whose position and reputation may be undermined by "old experienced" experts who know the working of (both Slovenian and international) institutions much better.

7. Conclusions

On the basis of the objectives of this article, i.e. to what extent Slovenia's government has possessed competences for the exploitation of soft sources of power in the EU, we can generally conclude that experts involved in the Slovenian Presidency have possessed appropriate hard competences in the area of their activities but less so when it comes to the skills necessary to implement such hard knowledge. So we can partly confirm Bunse's conclusion (2009) that size is not so important but entrepreneurial behavior, in our words "soft skills", is. According to the – albeit subjective – assessment of the Presidency personnel, the Slovenian civil service has not been able to exploit its advantages of (theoretically) more effective small civil service (Katzenstein 1985). Reasons for this are mostly weak intra- and inter-ministerial cooperation/coordination and hierarchical relationships. The result is that there is a lack of information, to which weak informal contacts/networks also contributed.

The results of the survey demonstrate that hard-knowledge expertise proved to be less important than soft skills (communication, negotiations, rhetoric, informal networking, etc). Hard knowledge was a necessary but not sufficient condition for an effective conduct of the Presidency since hard knowledge is only a precondition for its implementation by use of soft skills. Nevertheless the observed lack of knowledge about the functioning of the EU institutions of the experts from the PermRep does indicate that there are also holes in hard knowledge. This is even more important since more and more activities of Slovenian civil service (and other EU members as well) are linked to political processes at the EU level.

The emphasis on the communication skills indicates the high importance which Presidency actors have attributed to the articulation and *activation* of knowledge confirming Perrenoud's (1997) understanding of competences. The strategic implication of the growing importance of skills is that rhetoric, communication and negotiation skills as well as managerial competences have to become an important criterion also in the selection of personnel for leadership positions in general or in dealing with the EU.

²⁷ Slovenia has not been able to fill all position quotas in EU institutions and other international organizations and also not sends enough civil servants to the institutions of other member countries (Interview, MFA, July 2008).

Results indicate that the level of foreign-language knowledge, most importantly English, is insufficient²⁸ and is not a sufficiently good basis for such a demanding task as the Presidency. In particular, there is a deficit of functional use of foreign languages in more demanding circumstances (negotiations) when a high level of self-confidence is needed for public delivery of short presentations based on reasoned argument in a foreign language. Although respondents attach very low importance to the knowledge of French and German, it is to be taken into account that these two (and other) languages are significantly more important in vital informal contacts than in the specific role of the Presidency. The significance of other languages increases during the respective countries' Presidencies or/and in some specific issue-areas.

Major problems of the Slovenian Presidency have been, in contrast to Bunse's conclusions (2009), the human-resources deficit and intra- and inter-ministerial/departmental cooperation. "Suffocating" hierarchical relations within ministries and experts' lack of basic knowledge in related fields contribute to the above problems. The problem of weak intra-ministerial cooperation and the frequently mentioned lack of information, particularly in related areas, runs contrary to the thesis of advantages of small states' small administrations held by Katzenstein (1985), Baillie (1999) and Thorhallsson (2000). It also questions the administrative capabilities as part of the informal political power of Slovenia in the EU (as defined by Thorhallsson 2006). Our research shows that Presidency actors should address these problems by enhancing intra- and inter-ministerial cooperation and informal contacts and finally by additional training in negotiation-communication skills. Since a not exactly negligible number of respondents will cease to work on European issues, there is a risk that the acquired EU-specific knowledge could remain insufficiently utilized and not transformed into institutional memory. The weak team and internal and interdepartmental cooperation may lead to the evaporation of such acquired knowledge and not to its transformation in the institutional memory. Therefore it is necessary to materialize the continuation of personnel dealing with EU affairs.

Training for the Presidency mitigated these deficits in soft and hard knowledge but evidently cannot overcome it completely since experiences have been emphasized as also a necessary precondition for building complex EU competencies. The training of soft skills should start at the earlier educational level and should be systematically upgraded by the experiences. One should also take skills (rhetoric, communication, negotiations and organizational-managerial abilities) into account when selecting leading staff for tasks similar to the Presidency. The high importance of visits to Brussels and cooperation with others indicates that experience was a more significant source of knowledge than previous education, although without the latter, even practice could not yield adequate results. Training itself is therefore a necessary but not sufficient condition for the acquisition of competences for the implementation of the Presidency.

²⁸ This may be even more important for Presidencies of those new member states where knowledge of foreign languages is weaker than in RS.

Although respondents attached high significance to networking and informal contacts, it seems that they do not use coalition-building and lobbying sufficiently as an instrument of promoting positions and that there is insufficient awareness of the fact that the majority of issues need to be agreed upon before and not at the meetings. The survey contains a wealth of information for policy conclusions and functioning of small states in general and Slovenia in particular in the EU institutions, far beyond the Presidency functions. Regarding the personnel, we can put it in a nutshell by sketching an ideal public servant for operating in the EU. He would have to possess, according to the results of our survey the following competences:

1. a wide range of field expertise as well as that of institutions and procedures,
2. an excellent functional knowledge of English and a good knowledge of at least one other foreign language,
3. diplomatic experience and communicating skills,
4. rhetoric and negotiating skills,
5. organizational-managerial skills,
6. well-developed cross-cultural skills (to be acquainted with relations and values, to be patient, to avoid conflict),
7. the ability to identify and solve problems/conflicts (high stress level) and resolve them simultaneously,
8. the ability to recognize and accumulate experience and apply it as well as to be able and motivated to transform such competences into institutional memory,
9. networking competences and the ability to form coalitions and to lobby.

Such competences are the precondition for carrying out policies and strategies. Finally, we can conclude that the Presidency has contributed to the formation of such personnel and was a very useful experience on which Slovenia can build in the future. Apart from direct accumulation of experiences for Presidency actors, there were also two general benefits. Slovenia increased its world reputation as a State, while the experts who participated in it simultaneously substantially increased their self-confidence and improved their self-image.²⁹ Moreover, the Presidency contributed to higher ambition of the State and its public servants. All these are potentially informal sources of influence, highly relevant particularly for small states.

Although the results of the survey portray the subjective opinion of the actors, which we can not generalize without limitations, it is nevertheless possible to conclude that Slovenia has better and more competent civil service after the Presidency. In order to fully implement its potential informal soft influence in the EU, it has to build further on competences of its public officials as well as on the efficiency and effectiveness of its public administration.

²⁹ According to Boyatzis (1982), self-image represents a competence.

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