

Chapter 7

Malta's Presidency of the EU Council: External Relations in the Presidency of a Small State

Roderick Pace

On the 4th July the European Parliament in Plenary met to discuss the report on Malta's Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The Prime Minister Joseph Muscat and the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker both addressed the meeting. The session was very poorly attended by Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and this led to an altercation between Juncker and the President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani. Addressing the Chair, Juncker said, "*Monsieur le Président, Monsieur le Premier ministre, le Parlement européen est ridicule, très ridicule. Je salue ceux qui se sont donné la peine de se déplacer ici, mais le fait qu'une trentaine de députés seulement assiste à ce débat démontre à suffisance que le Parlement n'est pas sérieux, et je voulais le dire aujourd'hui. Si M. Muscat était Mme Merkel difficilement imaginable – ou M. Macron – plus imaginable ... We would have a full House. The Parliament is totally ridiculous.*" Mr Tajani asked the President of the Commission to moderate his tone, reminding him that though Juncker could criticize the Parliament, it is not "*la Commission qui doit contrôler le Parlement. C'est le Parlement qui doit contrôler la Commission*".¹⁷⁷ Juncker pressed the point further: "*There are only a few Members in the plenary to control the Commission. You are ridiculous! I wanted to pay tribute to the Maltese Presidency ... I will never again attend a meeting of this kind. The Commission is under the control of the Parliament, but the Parliament has to respect even the presidencies of smaller countries*" concluded Mr Juncker.¹⁷⁸

The absence of the MEPs from the Plenary does not reflect on the performance of Malta's Presidency, but the episode brings to light in a very clear and concrete way an important constraint within which small EU Member States have to work, namely that they are considered as "unimportant" despite the lack of evidence to back this argument. Small States suffer from lack of human and financial resources and the cost of running the Presidency are comparatively larger in comparison to their economic size. However, broadly

¹⁷⁷ Free Translation: "Mr President, Prime Minister. The European Parliament is ridiculous, very ridiculous. I welcome those who have taken the trouble to be here. But they are just thirty in all who are here to follow the debate and this shows well enough that the European Parliament is not serious. Had Joseph Muscat been Angela Merkel or Emanuel Macron, it is difficult to imagine – we would have a full house..." President Tajani replied that "it is not the Commission which has the duty to control Parliament but Parliament which has the duty to control the Commission ..."

¹⁷⁸ European Parliament (2017).

speaking they do make an effort at completing as many dossiers as they can. Diana Panke (2010) observes, that although small EU Member States have fewer resources in order to participate in argumentative-based or bargaining-based policy shaping strategies, they are not unimportant for the dynamics and outcomes of EU negotiations *per se*. Small States can concentrate their contributions and efforts on issues of higher relevance and ably apply a variety of shaping strategies.

This is exactly what Malta managed to do during its Presidency of the Council of the EU as will be shown in this chapter by reference to Malta's Presidency and the external policies of the EU.

A Focus on the Essentials

At the start of the Malta's Presidency, The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini (henceforth the High Representative) held bilateral talks with Foreign Minister George Vella, where they agreed that "Migration" and the "Situation in the Mediterranean" were to be the main objectives of the foreign policy initiatives to be pursued by the EU during Malta's Presidency of the Council of the EU. With respect to the Mediterranean two countries were to particularly occupy the EU's attention, namely: Syria, and the EU Regional Initiative for that country, and Libya.¹⁷⁹ The other priority, Migration, had an "internal EU aspect" characterized by deep divisions among the Member States and an external aspect concerned with saving lives at sea (a humanitarian concern as well), stopping the irregular flows of migrants and strengthening the EU's borders in collaboration with partner countries.

At the start of Malta's Presidency, the EU was facing a few uncertainties which are discussed in the next section. Each one of them could potentially rock the Union in a serious way and conditioned the decision-making environment surrounding Malta's Presidency. However, not all of them were in the Presidency's sight or it's "to do list". Correctly, and in line with small state capabilities, and the short duration of the Presidency (six months is not a life time), Malta's Presidency adopted a pragmatic approach and decided to focus on Migration and the Mediterranean. Maritime policy was another priority objective of the Presidency with external policy ramifications. Of course, Malta had also to operate within the parameters of the three Presidency programme (Malta, Slovenia and the Netherlands), and work together with the High Representative in building diplomatic bridges to facilitate agreement on matters already on the CFSP/external relations agenda. It also sought to coordinate its efforts with the informal "Mediterranean Group" or Club Med. i.e. the EU Mediterranean Member states in advance of key EU meetings and summits.

¹⁷⁹ European External Action Service (2017).

The EU and the World at the start of 2017

At the start of Malta's Presidency of the Council of the EU, there were several external relations issues that promised to mark the Presidency as one of the most interesting in recent times. Of most immediate concern were the Ukraine crisis and relations with Russia, the situation in Syria as well as the challenge it posed to the post-conflict stabilization of that country and the adjoining sub-region. Turbulence in the EU's neighbourhood was also unrestrained: Turkey was still unsettled after the 2016 failed coup attempt; stability in Libya had not been achieved; the Middle East crisis was still simmering. Irregular migration was testing the EU's resolve, internal unity and cohesion. Migration had long been an important internal EU and foreign policy issue but the 28 Member States were nowhere near resolving it in a definite way. In 2015, EU consensus had jelled around the notion that apart from strengthening its borders and cooperating with its immediate neighbours such as Turkey and Libya, which were themselves "transit countries", the EU needed to speak with the neighbours of its neighbours, mainly the countries of the Sahel and beyond in order to deal more effectively with the problem. Shaping external policy on migration looked relatively easier than approving internal measures such as the EU asylum policy, the reform of the Dublin regulation and the thorny issue of intra-EU relocation.

The start of the Trump administration in the USA coincided almost exactly with the start of Malta's Presidency. It led to several uncertainties foremost among which were doubts (later allayed) about Washington's continuing support for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the future of the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) which is still at a stalemate and mired in controversy on both sides of the Atlantic, and of course climate change and the US pledge to pull out of the Paris agreement.

Then there was BREXIT which was lumped on Malta's Presidency agenda when the 23rd June 2016 referendum decided in favour of Britain leaving the EU. London's announcement that it would trigger Article 50 by the end of March, as indeed happened, meant that the BREXIT process would begin in the middle of Malta's Presidency. This would add another complication to a small country running the EU Presidency for the first time. Important national elections due in the first half of 2017 in France and the Netherlands and later in Germany also cast their shadows on the Presidency. The main concern here was whether Europhile parties would manage to hang on to power in these countries and give the EU a breathing space to sort itself out on the aftermath of the recession and the divisions on migration or whether Eurosceptic parties would enter government and unravel the Union. This uncertainty about the future of the EU coincided with the 60th anniversary of the Rome Treaties which also fell during the term of Malta's Presidency.

The calling of a snap election in Malta on 1st May 2017 can perhaps be considered as the only bolt from the blue originating from domestic politics. It was only the second time in EU history that a national election was called during a Member State's Presidency, but then this was due to a constitutional requirement. Malta's Presidency managed to plod on and ended successfully notwithstanding the distraction caused by the election and the real risk of a disappointing *finale*.

Small State Presidencies

Before the analysis of the Maltese Presidency can proceed further, it is important to dwell briefly on the role of small country Presidencies of the Council of the EU in the Union's external relations, a subject which has always been complex and controversial. Before the appointment of Javier Solana as the first High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in 1999, and during the debates leading to the ill-fated Constitutional Treaty and then the Lisbon Treaty, there was a general mistrust of Small States' ability to lead the EU's external relations dimension even though the records did not show that the larger EU member states really outshone them in this respect. Up to a certain extent this mistrust can still be felt today, though the situation has changed radically as a result of the Lisbon Treaty changes. External relations have almost been completely taken out of the hands of the six-month rotating Presidency and placed in the hands of the High Representative and the President of the Council. As a result, the rotating Presidency has lost most of its ability to influence policy-making while it has become relatively easier for the larger EU member states to shape the EU's foreign policy by focusing their influence on these two top officials appointed by the European Council. Although the smaller EU Member States can still influence, if not also to a certain extent frustrate the EU foreign policy-making process since decisions are taken by unanimity, they tend to rely more on achieving their foreign policy objectives through the CFSP than the larger EU member states for whom the EU is just one of several "arenas" where they can act with a modicum of independence.¹⁸⁰

Given these complications, any analysis of Malta's six-month Presidency and the EU's foreign policy is very challenging. It is important to keep in mind the dualism that persists between the Union's external relations and the national foreign policies of the Member States. Broadly speaking, national foreign policies constrain the development and operation of the EU's external policies, but not the other way around. There is no pain associated with blocking consensus on EU external relations, particularly in the CFSP and its component the Common Defence and Security Policy (CSDP) or in pursuing national goals regardless of the Union's interests. The Court of Justice simply has no role in the CFSP. For a small country EU

¹⁸⁰ Lehne (2012).

Presidency with its characteristic lack of resources, managing 27 other Member States in this domain raises several difficulties.

The second major observation concerns the structural change that has been brought about by the Lisbon Treaty since it went into effect in 2009. Before the ratification of the Treaty, the Member State holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU used to Chair the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) composed of the Foreign Ministers of the Member States. This is what gave the rotating EU Presidency policy shaping opportunities. The Lisbon Treaty split the functions of this Council configuration and created the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) and the General Affairs Council (GAC). FAC is chaired by the “two-hatted” High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy who is also a Vice President of the Commission.

The Lisbon Treaty also gives the EU its own legal personality. It has created a permanent Presidency of the EU Council (which is composed of the Heads of State and/or Government of the Member States) and the European External Action Service (EEAS) with its uneasy relationship with the European Commission. Given time the EEAS may also develop into a powerful policy shaping institution, if it has not already done so. The rotating Presidency used to form part of the “Troika” which played a crucial role in the EU’s diplomacy, but the Lisbon Treaty dispensed with that as well when the permanent Presidency of the European Council and High Representative took over the international responsibilities formerly exercised by the rotating Presidency.

The final observation concerns the global context in which the EU’s external policies are pursued and which make life even more hectic for small states. The ongoing strengthening of communications, the increase in inter-regional trade and the multiplicity of global interdependencies have in certain instances weakened national governments’ control over their own borders and territories and has led to the phenomenal growth in importance of “non-state” actors in world politics. The globalization of world politics has blurred the dividing lines between “domestic” and “foreign” policies. One consequence of this is that it is no longer possible to distinguish clearly between health, education, the environment, law and order, migration and terrorism as internal, purely “domestic” policies from trade, development, security and the traditional concerns of foreign policy as different, exterior or international policies. It is evident, and even recognised by all stakeholders, that what happens “out there” affects the lives of people at home, and what happens at home shapes national outlooks about foreign policy, forcing governments to adopt stances and responses in the EU’s external relations policy-making processes.

The latter point complicates our analysis of Malta's Presidency because in the same breath as we claim that the Presidency's role in the EU's foreign affairs has been weakened considerably since the Lisbon Treaty's ratification, Malta's Presidency was involved in several decisions on matters which appear to be of an internal or "domestic" policy nature, but which have a clear direct impact on external relations. There are many examples of policies that have this duality – global warming, migration and terrorism being three of them. But in the analysis carried out in this chapter, the problem has been simplified for us because at the start of the Presidency following the Vella-Mogherini meeting, the Presidency's main objective in external relations were listed as migration and the Mediterranean. The "Mediterranean" was also a vague reference which could include a lot of things.

The Foreign Affairs Council (FAC)

Before carrying forward the analysis, we need to clarify one further issue, the mechanics of the FAC. The Foreign Ministers of the Member States of the EU meet in the Foreign Affairs Council chaired by Federica Mogherini, the High Representative. At times the Council brings together the Ministers of Defence to discuss security and defence, development ministers and trade ministers. When FAC discusses trade policy, it is presided by the EU Member State holding the EU rotating Presidency, in this case Malta. The FAC is also responsible for the bilateral Association and Cooperation Councils which are held periodically between the EU and its partner countries. The meetings of the FAC and related events which took place during Malta's Presidency are listed in **Diagram 1**. Several meetings took place at Ministerial and Senior Officials level in Malta and Brussels, but the eye catchers were: the FAC meeting of 6th February 2017 which met in Brussels and which led to the formation of the Quartet on Libya composed of the United Nations, the League of Arab States and the African Union and the EU; the Informal Trade Ministers meeting of 3rd March 2017 chaired by Dr Chris Cardona, Minister for the Economy, Investment and Small Business which was also attended by European Commissioner for Trade Cecilia Malmström; and the 26th–27th April 2017 meeting in Malta of European Defence Ministers which was followed a day later by a Gymnich meeting of Foreign Ministers.

On behalf of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, George Vella, co-Chaired the EU-KYRGZ Republic Cooperation Council (6th March 2017); the EU-Angola Ministerial Dialogue (7th March 2017); co-Chaired the EU-ECOWAS Ministerial Dialogue (4th April 2017); the ACP-EU Council of Ministers (4th-5th May 2017); the EU-Tunisia Association Council (11th May 2017); and the EU-Tajikistan 6th Cooperation Council (15th May 2017).

It must also be kept in mind that Mogherini's portfolio does not only cover FAC. As Vice President of the European Commission she is also in charge of the European Neighbourhood Policy, Enlargement, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, International Cooperation and Development as well as Trade. The High Representative is also involved in the external aspects of Climate Action, energy, transport and migration. In June 2016, Federica Mogherini unveiled the EU's "Global Strategy" to replace the European Security Strategy launched by Javier Solana in 2003 and the strategy marked its first anniversary towards the close of Malta's Presidency.

The Best Laid Plans – Migration and Development

The easiest way to assess Malta's performance in external relations is to compare what was stated in its Presidency Programme with what was achieved, while taking into account related circumstances and contexts. In its Presidency Programme, Malta did not present very ambitious objectives, but working within the strictures of the Lisbon Treaty, pledged to support the work of the High Representative.

One of the policy priorities identified was Migration. On the external dimension of migration, the Presidency Programme stated that: "*Addressing the External Dimension of Migration will require the continued resolve of the EU and Member States to maintain a comprehensive approach deploying the full range of the EU's policies and instruments. The implementation of the new Partnership Framework with third countries will be further pursued as tasked by the European Council in December 2016, as well as actively contribute to the ongoing negotiations of the Global Compacts in the follow-up to the adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants*".¹⁸¹

The Maltese Presidency Programme stressed a nexus linking development and security and another one linking migration-development.¹⁸² The approach pursued during the Presidency of linking migration and development aid, was inspired by the decisions taken during the EU-Africa Summit held in Malta in 2015 and the establishment of the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa.¹⁸³ The EU-Africa Valletta Summit had agreed on an Action Plan which was to be financed from the Trust Fund. The Action Plan sought among other things to mainstream migration in development policies, develop a system of legal migration and reward states, mainly in Africa, which cooperated with the EU on restraining illegal migration and in implementing socio-economic programmes intended to eliminate the root-causes of irregular migration in the longer-term. It was in the context of the

¹⁸¹ Government of Malta (2016) p. 14.

¹⁸² Government of Malta (2016) p. 17.

¹⁸³ European Commission (2015); Pace (2016).

Valletta Summit that the security-migration-development nexus was sharpened into an EU policy instrument.

Migration in the Central Mediterranean was the subject of the informal European Council meeting which took place in Malta on 3rd February 2017. These types of meetings normally end with a summary by the President and a statement or declaration instead of an official conclusion. The Malta meeting ended with the Malta Declaration on the external aspects of migration, particularly the Central Mediterranean route linking Libya with the rest of Europe.¹⁸⁴ The Declaration focused on the importance of stabilizing Libya by training and equipping the security forces there, disrupting the smugglers' business model, improving reception centres for migrants, but also looking beyond Libya's borders by stepping up information campaigns in the countries of origin and assisted return activities. It was a good sign that Malta went straight to the point on its most central objective it wanted to achieve in external relations.

To complete the circle, Malta's Presidency worked to ensure that the EU's new development policy would be in line with this approach. Malta had pre-announced this at the very start of the Presidency when it declared that one of its main priorities would be to achieve agreement on "*a new European Consensus for Development*" in order to "*provide a new shared vision of how the EU institutions and Member States will work together to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*".¹⁸⁵ The "new" consensus was proposed by the European Commission in November 2016,¹⁸⁶ FAC approved it in on 19th May 2017 and the strategy was signed by the EU Member States and the Institutions on 7th June 2017.¹⁸⁷ The European Consensus on Development is not legally binding, but it provides the framework for the EU and its Member States' development aid efforts in the context of achieving the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and more. Malta's Presidency worked assiduously and succeeded in closing this dossier. Indeed, this success can be recognised as one of the main achievements of Malta's Presidency. Not only, but the adoption of this Consensus marked the fact that for the first-time the EU has put in place a framework for a common EU and Member States approach that goes a long way to strengthen the relations between the EU and its Member States with the developing countries.

Malta had also tried to reach agreement on the External Investment Plan (EIP) to help in the financing of projects to achieve the SDGs and deal with the root-causes of migration, but this only came into effect in September 2017.

¹⁸⁴ Council of the European Union (2017c).

¹⁸⁵ Government of Malta (2016) p. 17.

¹⁸⁶ European Commission (2016).

¹⁸⁷ European Commission (2017a).

The New Consensus on Development has been criticised by several international non-governmental organizations working in the developmental field for linking development and security – in other words for tying aid to compliance in controlling irregular migration.

Malta's Presidency also tried to heal internal EU rifts on migration by proposing a "cash solution" to the problem that many Member States continue to adamantly refuse to accept the relocation of refugees from Italy and Greece. The main line of the proposal was to give Member States a sum of €60,000 per refugee which they accept to relocate and to fine Member States by the same amount for every refugee which they refuse. The fine could also be paid in kind through the provision of material help and expertise. A three-year phasing in period was also proposed for the scheme.¹⁸⁸ The proposal failed to gain approval by Council mostly because the Member States refusing to resettle refugees were liable to pay several millions in cash or in kind. For example, Poland which refused its share of 6,182 refugees would have had to pay around €37 million in fines.

The Mediterranean Region

On the other objective to be pursued during the Presidency, regarding the Mediterranean region, several FAC meetings which took place in the first half of 2017, focused on the trouble spots of the region particularly Syria and Libya. The initiative in this case was more in the hands of the High Representative Mogherini. (Vide Diagram 1)

Of most immediate interest to Malta, was the establishment of the Quartet on Libya composed of the UN, the Arab League, the African Union and the EU. The Libya Quartet met twice during Malta's presidency. It is too early to judge how the Quartet will fare in its objective and this is certainly an issue which must be followed in the future.

Some other Mediterranean initiatives considered as of a lower 'high politics' level but which are nevertheless significant for the region were on maritime affairs. Cooperation in the maritime sector is a functional and pragmatic approach that was prioritized in Malta's Presidency objectives. This policy initiative does not fit well in the CFSP quadrant, but it is extremely relevant for the EU's Neighbourhood Policy, another area of special priority for Malta's Presidency

A MedFish4Ever Ministerial Conference held in Malta ended with a Ministerial Declaration on 30th March 2017. The Conference forms part of what is referred to as the Catania process which was started in February 2016 by Karmenu Vella, the Maltese Commissioner in charge of the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries at a meeting in the Sicilian city that gave it its

¹⁸⁸ Baczynska (2017).

name. The Malta meeting was attended by the European Commission, eight EU Mediterranean states (Spain, France, Italy, Malta, Slovenia, Croatia, Greece, Cyprus), seven of the EU's Mediterranean partners (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Turkey, Albania, Montenegro), FAO, the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean, the European Parliament, the EU Mediterranean Advisory Council. The aim of the Catania process is to safeguard fish stocks in the Mediterranean by managing fishing, collecting data, eliminating illegal fishing and encouraging small scale fishing and aquaculture.¹⁸⁹ The initiative which is based on EU soft law [ministerial declarations as opposed to legally binding instruments],¹⁹⁰ falls within the scope of the EU's integrated maritime policy and the "Blue Growth" initiative. Such initiatives rarely capture attention, but being of a functionalist, or "soft" nature, they link EU and non-EU states into a cooperative relationship of mutual benefit and strengthen mutual understanding. Under the aegis of the much-castigated EU's Barcelona Process, the Neighbourhood Policy and the Union for the Mediterranean, the EU has launched several such initiatives in the region over the last two decades. In most instances this type of cooperation is resilient to the vagaries of regional instability and political shifts.

A month later another informal Ministerial meeting met in Malta to discuss "Blue Growth"¹⁹¹ which refers to the expansion of maritime and coastal economic activities such as tourism, fishing, aquaculture, shipping, etc. in a sustainable way). The EU had published a "Blue Growth Strategy" in 2012. At the end of the Malta meeting, the Valletta Declaration endorsed by the ministers, not only listed a series of positive initiatives and achievements but called on the Council "to endorse the declaration as a substantial component of the Union's priorities for Jobs, Growth and Investment and the forthcoming Presidencies, in close cooperation with other EU Institutions, to take appropriate initiatives and set milestones, taking this declaration as a basis, to further develop and implement the 2012 EU Blue Growth Strategy".¹⁹² Blue growth also serves as a soft policy approach to strengthen cooperation between the states on both shores of the Mediterranean Sea, as is

¹⁸⁹ European Commission (2017b).

¹⁹⁰ European Commission (2017c).

¹⁹¹ The documents published by the European Commission on Blue Growth include the following: Initiative for the sustainable development of the blue economy in the western Mediterranean (19/04/2017): Framework for action; Report on the Blue Growth Strategy: Towards more sustainable growth and jobs in the blue economy (31/03/2017); Communication from the Commission: Innovation in the Blue Economy: realising the potential of our seas and oceans for jobs and growth – COM(2014) 254/2 (13/05/2014); Marine Knowledge 2020: roadmap accompanying the document; Communication from the Commission: Blue Growth opportunities for marine and maritime sustainable growth (13.09.2012). They are available at https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/blue_growth_en (accessed on 02.01.2018).

¹⁹² Government of Malta (2017c).

exemplified by the initiative for the sustainable development of the blue economy in the western Mediterranean.¹⁹³

Enlargement and Turkey

During Malta's EU Presidency no major progress was recorded on the enlargement front. In a speech to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament (AFET), Minister for Foreign Affairs George Vella had placed a lot of emphasis on maintaining the momentum on enlargement. Dr Vella referred to the transformative power of the EU and the effect that this could have on the Balkan countries and Turkey. He also argued that the EU must see enlargement in the context of the competition it was facing from other powers in its neighbourhood. The minister proposed that "Enlargement is a key contributor in shaping the Union".¹⁹⁴

A substantive part of Minister Vella's presentation to AFET focused on the EU's relations with Turkey. While stressing the EU's well-aired concerns about the political situation in Turkey, he urged the Union to upgrade and modernize its customs union with that country. However, no progress was made on this proposal which is still being discussed by the Council. In the meantime, in his State of the Union speech delivered some three months after the end of Malta's Presidency, Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker ruled out the possibility of Turkey joining the EU in the foreseeable future, adding that it (Turkey) had been taking giant strides away from the EU for some time. He was referring to the deteriorating political and human rights situation and the imprisonment of journalists in Turkey.¹⁹⁵

The EU-Tunisia Association Council

As already indicated, during Malta's Presidency, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, George Vella, co-chaired a number of important meetings on behalf of the High Representative Federica Mogherini. One of these meetings was that of the EU-Tunisia Association Council, particularly in view that Tunisia is one of Malta's important neighbours and a country which has enjoyed long-standing relations with the EU. It was in Tunisia that the Arab uprisings were triggered off and it is the only country in the Arab world that has made great strides in advancing in its road to democratic transition.

The EU-Tunisia Association Council met in Brussels on the 11th May. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Tunisia, Khemaies Jhinaoui, participated and Co-Chaired the meeting. Important to note also that the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn, also participated in the meeting. The discussions covered the latest political and institutional developments and progress made in the

¹⁹³ European Commission (2017d).

¹⁹⁴ Government of Malta (2017b).

¹⁹⁵ European Commission (2017e).

process of democratic transition in Tunisia. Views on the situation in Libya and on security and counter-terrorism were exchanged.

Like most Mediterranean rim countries of both the northern and southern shores, but for different causes and reasons, Tunisia has suffered economic disruption that has left it with several problems particularly high unemployment rates. For demographic reasons, Tunisian young people are the more adversely affected by unemployment. During the Association Council meeting, the dialogue focused on this pernicious aspect of the unemployment problem – namely youth unemployment, education, employability and participation in public life.

The Council discussed the priorities of the EU-Tunisia partnership, namely: namely support for socio-economic development, trade relations as well as migration and mobility.¹⁹⁶

Conclusion

In this brief appraisal of Malta's Presidency and the external relations of the EU, we have focused on a few major objectives in Malta's pre-Presidency Programme. Reference was made to the decision-making structures and the constraints placed on any Member State heading the Presidency of the Council of the EU in the field of foreign policy. These constraints are more acute in the case of small Member States which have much more limited human resources as well as sources of information on which to rely. Yet, Malta's Presidency has shown that if a Member State puts its mind to it, organizes its limited resources well and focuses on the most urgent and burning issues, then it can make headway.

The main task of the Presidency is not to solve all the issues confronting the Union at any time, in any case six months are insufficient for doing that, but to help the unfinished business on the EU's agenda to cross the finishing line. To achieve this a Member State requires patience and diplomacy. A Small State can neither entice compliance by offering advantages nor force recalcitrant States through the fear of punishment. It has neither carrots nor sticks but a genuine desire, leadership and the political acumen in the search for a suitable and balanced compromise which often convinces bigger States to overcome their fears and suspicions.

Malta's success in moving the migration agenda forward owes much to its ability to remain focused. Indeed, neither the heated trans-Atlantic exchanges that reared their head as soon as the Trump administration took the oath of office, nor the ups and downs of BREXIT or the negative attitude of a section of the British press deflected the Maltese side from its objective. It was also useful that Malta had achieved some experience on the issue of migration in

¹⁹⁶ Council of the European Union (2017b).

diverse ways: it had confronted the migration challenge for close to 17 years, had explored every nook and crevice of the EU’s legal structure in the hope of finding what is useful to help it confront the challenge in the EU institutions and had at times stood alone and isolated as other Member States failed to come to its rescue when the arrival of irregular migrants had become acute. The experience gained at the EU-Africa Summit of November 2015 was also a useful springboard to the results achieved by the 2017 Malta’s EU Presidency.

The analysis in this chapter has focused on the main objectives in the CFSP/external relations dimension which fall under the wings of the High Representative, the FAC and the EEAS. But by reference to two initiatives in the maritime sector, one of Malta’s six main Presidency priorities, it was shown how a Small State Presidency of the Council of the European Union can also play a distinct role in promoting regional understanding and cooperation. While the hard-foreign policy issues such as the Syrian and Libyan crisis stayed almost entirely in the hands of the High Representative and the FAC, the maritime initiatives took place in informal ministerial meetings unconnected with “High Politics” but perhaps equally or more fruitfully effect in promoting mutual understanding between States in the longer-term perspective. The modest steps taken in pushing the agenda forward within the maritime sector also shows the kind of role that Small States can play in shaping the international or regional agenda during their short EU Presidencies of the Council of the European Union.

Diagram 1 - Foreign Affairs Council Meetings and Related Events during Malta’s EU Presidency		
DATE (2017)	TYPE AND PLACE OF MEETING	MAIN TOPICS DISCUSSED
16 th January	FAC, Brussels. The first meeting which took place in the Europa Building which is the new seat of the European Council and the Council of the EU.	Syria and the Middle East. The Council reiterated the EU’s full support to the UN-led process in Syria and the EU regional initiative on the future of Syria after the end of the conflict. The meeting also discussed the Middle East peace process. The council also reaffirmed its support for the democratic process in Lebanon.
6 th February	FAC, Brussels.	Libya was the main topic. The EU decided to join the United Nations, the League of Arab States and the African Union to form a Quartet to stabilise Libya. The council reaffirmed its support for a comprehensive agreement on the Middle East and the two state

		solution. Situation in Egypt and the Ukraine was also discussed.
2 nd -3 rd March	Informal Meeting of Trade Ministers which was held in Malta	The meeting was chaired by Dr Chris Cardona, Minister for the Economy, Investment and Small Business. European Commissioner for Trade Cecilia Malmström attended the meeting.
6 th March	FAC, Brussels.	Western Balkans, Security and Defence particularly improvements in the CSDP missions. Guidance on strengthening synergies on climate change were also agreed.
6 th March	EU-Kyrgyzstan Cooperation Council, Brussels	The Cooperation Council was chaired by Dr George Vella, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malta. The Council discussed trade and development but the main focus was on political issues. The EU encouraged the Kyrgyz Republic to strengthen further competitive parliamentary elections and the rule of law, the fight against corruption and judicial reform. The EU called on the Kyrgyz government to guarantee the independence of the judiciary. The EU welcomed the rejection by the Kyrgyz Parliament of the "foreign agent law" as a recognition of the important positive role that the civil society traditionally plays in the Kyrgyz Republic.
13 th March	EU-Algeria Association Council, Brussels.	The meeting decided the EU-Algeria Partnership Priorities and €40m worth of projects mostly in renewable energy.
18 th March	Libya Quartet, Arab League Headquarters, Cairo.	The first Quartet meeting on Libya.
31 st March	EU-Moldova Association Council, Brussels.	It was attended by Moldova's Prime Minister Pavel Filip and discussed bilateral relations, the reform process in Moldova and security and defence policy. Moldova is negotiating a deep and comprehensive free trade area with the EU.
3 rd April	FAC, Brussels	The Council adopted the EU Strategy on Syria. It also discussed Yemen and Libya.
4 th -5 th April	Conference, Brussels	The EU, Germany, Kuwait,

		Norway, Qatar, the United Kingdom and the United Nations co-chaired the Brussels Conference on Supporting the future of Syria and the region.
26 th -27 th April	Informal Meeting of Defence Ministers, Malta	The meeting was hosted by Malta and was chaired by High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini. The Secretary General of NATO and the UN Under Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations were also present for part of the discussion.
28 th -29 th April	Foreign Ministers, Gymnich meeting, Malta	Hosted by Malta, an informal meeting of all EU Ministers of Foreign Affairs who later in the afternoon met their counterparts from the candidate countries.
11 th May	EU-Tunisia Association Council, Brussels.	It was chaired by Minister for Foreign Affairs, George Vella representing Federica Mogherini. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Tunisia, Khemaies Jhinaoui participated. The discussions covered the latest political and institutional developments and progress made in the process of democratic transition in Tunisia. Views on the situation in Libya and on security and counter-terrorism were exchanged.
15 th May	FAC, Brussels.	The focus was on Africa but Venezuela, Eastern Partnership, Security and Defence were also discussed. On Africa, the EU announced that it wished to refocus the relationship from aid to Partnership.
23 rd May	Libya Quartet, Brussels.	Second meeting of the Quartet.

References

- Baczynska, G. (2017) “Malta suggests cash solution to end EU migration row”, 24th April, Reuter’s News Service, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-europe-migrants-eu-asylum/malta-suggests-cash-solution-to-end-eu-migration-row-idUKKBN17Q18G> (accessed on 02.01.2018).
- Council of the European Union (2017a) “Malta Declaration by the members of the European Council on the external aspects of migration: addressing the Central Mediterranean route”, Press Release 43/17, 3rd February. <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/02/03/malta-declaration/> (accessed on 02.01.2018).
- (2017b) “Joint statement on the occasion of the EU-Tunisia Association Council of 11th May”, Press Release 250/17 at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/05/11/eu-tunisia-association/> (accessed on 02.01.2018)
- (2017c) “Outcome of the Council Meeting, 3540th Council meeting, Foreign Affairs Development Issues, 19 May, Brussels”, press release no 9486/17 at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/22373/st09486en17.pdf>. (accessed on 02.01.2018).
- European Commission (2015) “President Juncker launches the EU Emergency Trust Fund to tackle root causes of irregular migration in Africa” Press Release, Valletta, 12th November at <http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release-IP-15-6055-en.htm> (accessed on 02.01.2018).
- (2016) “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Proposal for a new European Consensus on Development – Our World, our Dignity, our Future”, Strasbourg, 22.11.2016, COM (2016) 740 final.
- (2017a) “The new European Consensus on Development – EU and Member States sign joint strategy to eradicate poverty” Press Release, 7th June, at <http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release-IP-17-1503-en.htm>. (accessed on 02.01.2018).
- (2017b) “European Commission secures 10-year pledge to save Mediterranean fish stocks”, Brussels, 30th March, IP/17/770 at <http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release-IP-17-770-en.htm>. (accessed on 02.01.2018).
- (2017c) “Malta MedFish4Ever Ministerial Declaration, Ministerial Conference on the Sustainability of Mediterranean Fisheries, 30th March, at <https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/sites/fisheries/files/2017-03-30-declaration-malta.pdf> (accessed on 02.01.2018).
- (2017d) “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Initiative for sustainable development of the blue economy in the western Mediterranean”, Com (2017) 183 final, Brussels 19th April. (accessed on 02.01.2018).
- (2017e) “President Jean-Claude Juncker’s State of the Union Address 2017” Brussels, 13th September, at <http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release-SPEECH-17-3165-en.htm> (accessed on 02.01.2018).
- European External Action Service (2017) “High Representative Mogherini in Malta at launch of Maltese Presidency of the Council of the EU” at http://eueuropaeas.fpfis.slb.ec.europa.eu:8084/headquarters/headquartershomepage/18480/node/18480_mt. (accessed on 02.01.2018).
- European Parliament (2017) Verbatim report of the Plenary Session of 4th July, Strasbourg, at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP/TEXT+CRE+20170704+ITEM-002+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN> (accessed on 02.01.2018).
- Government of Malta (2016) Programme of the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union PROGRAMME (1st January 2017–30th June 2017), https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=0ahUKEwjJpbP-0K_YAhVDPBQKHRvhBnoQFggrMAE&url=

- <https://www.eu2017.mt/en/news/Pages/Speech-Minister-for-Foreign-Affairs.aspx?IsPrintPrev=1> (accessed on 02.01.2018).
- (2017b) Speech by the Minister for Foreign Affairs to the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament, web-page of Malta Presidency of the Council of the EU at <https://www.eu2017.mt/en/news/Pages/Speech-Minister-for-Foreign-Affairs.aspx?IsPrintPrev=1> (accessed on 02.01.2018).
- (2017c) “Declaration of the European Ministers responsible for the Integrated Maritime Policy on Blue Growth (Valletta Declaration)”, Valletta 20th April, at <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&ved=0ahUKEwj2kJeJsmYAhXBWxOKHeI4D5wQFggYMAI&url=https://www.eu2017.mt/en/news/Pages/Speech-Minister-for-Foreign-Affairs.aspx?IsPrintPrev=1> (accessed on 02.01.2018).
- Lehne, S. (2012) “The Big Three in EU Foreign Policy”, The Carnegie Papers, Carnegie Europe, July, at http://carnegieendowment.org/files/eu_big_three1.pdf (accessed on 02.01.2018).
- Pace, R. (2016) “The Trust Fund for Africa: A Preliminary Assessment”, September, EUROMESCO, <https://www.euromesco.net/publication/the-trust-fund-for-africa-a-preliminary-assessment/> (accessed on 02.01.2018).
- Panke, D. (2010) *Small States in the European Union: Coping with Structural Disadvantages*. UK: Ashgate.