Resolution on reform of the Council and transparency

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With the challenges posed by enlargement to the functioning of the Council, the European Council started its reform process at Helsinki in December 1999. The discussion continued in Gothenburg and Barcelona on the basis of reports presented by the Secretary General/High Representative. The European Council in Seville in June 2002 subsequently adopted a set of specific measures to be implemented without amendment to the Treaties. It also expressed readiness to continue the discussions, requesting the Danish Presidency to present an initial report to the December European Council. Against this background, the General Affairs Council debated the future report and reviewed the various possible options for reform. The draft report prepared by the presidency contained two parts. The first set out the main issues having arisen from the discussions so far and the second described possible approaches to presidency reform in the form of three models. Model 1 would maintain the main features of the present rotating presidency while extending the cooperation between successive presidencies even beyond what was decided in Seville . There would be a systematic obligation to share and delegate power. Model 2 consisted of a combination of an ‘institutional’ presidency for the Council’s coordinating chain (General Affairs and External Relations Council and Coreper), to be chaired for instance by the SG/HR or his representatives, with a system of either a rotating presidency or elected presidents for most of the other Council configurations and preparatory bodies. Model 3 was based on the idea of the ‘Team Presidency’. The team could be composed of three to five members, selected according to criteria such as geography and size, for a given period of time (one and a half or two and a half years), to be renewed either at fixed intervals or through a ‘rolling’ system. The presidency of Council configurations would be shared between the members of the team. As a variation, it would be possible to maintain in addition the six-monthly component for the purposes of the coordinating chain (GAERC + Coreper). The Danish Presidency also proposed strengthening the role of the High Representative to respond to the particular problem posed by the presidency function in the area of external relations. The tasks envisaged ranged from chairing certain Council meetings to supervising EU special envoys and included representing the Union in international organisations or in meetings with third countries, negotiating international agreements in the area of CFSP /ESDP, submitting proposals and informing Parliament. Finally, the Danish draft report presented the ideas put forward by a number of Member States on an elected president of the European Council. This variant could be combined with models 2 or 3. The European Council president would be elected for a longer period (of up to five years), would prepare and preside over the European Council and would represent the EU in relations with third countries at Heads of State or Government level. Concluding the debate, several Member States indicated a preference for reform model 1 while also referring to the broader debate on the future institutional structure of the Union within the framework of the Convention and the subsequent Intergovernmental Conference. Other delegations underlined that it would be necessary to consider measures going beyond model 1.