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**The Iraq crisis: did the fourth EU-Greek Presidency follow a problem
solving approach?**

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“The Iraq crisis: did the fourth EU-Greek Presidency follow a problem solving approach?”

Introduction

The main difference between a bargaining and a problem-solving approach lies in the respective focus on self-interests versus common interests. Problem-solving is often associated with creativity and the search for new inventive solutions. *“In situations where the players are driven by a concern for their own interests, the incentive to look actively for creative joint solutions is ordinarily absent.”*²

The state that holds the Presidency of the European Union should act as an internal mediator and could not show relational impartiality. As it is mentioned in the handbook of the Council Presidency Secretariat, *“the Presidency should, by definition, be neutral and not unilateral”*. The Presidency often balances between the readiness to become a broker and the difficulties to undertake this role³. As it is reported by Ole Elgstrom, the conduct of a Presidency depends on the power of a state but, particularly, on the identity of the member states.

This paper examines whether Greece holding the Presidency of the European Union, functioned as a broker in the case of Iraq. This study is mainly based on Official European documents and on articles from reliable Newspapers. The Iraq crisis affected the Fourth Greek Presidency and constituted a catalyst in internal EU developments. The way the Greek Presidency encountered the Iraq crisis constitutes a representative case study in order to examine the position of Greece in the European Union.

The Iraq crisis

Less than three months before the diplomatic culmination of the crisis, the successive NATO summits in Prague and EU summits in Copenhagen welcomed the parallel enlargement of these two organisations to the East and declared their joint commitment to become pillars of the euro-atlantic security and prosperity. In addition,

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² Ole Elgstrom and Christer Jonsson, “Negotiation in the European Union: bargaining or problem solving?”, *Journal of European Public Policy* 7:5, Special Issue: 684–704

³ Elgstrom Ole, “‘The honest broker?’ The Council Presidency as a mediator”, *European Union Council Presidencies- A Comparative Perspective* (editor Ole Elgstrom)

there was a deep feeling of lack of unity. The francogerman alliance had already been revived: in October 2002 the two European states “imposed” to the other European states the delay of the CAP reform until 2007 and in January they submitted to the Convention a series of joint proposals⁴.

At the beginning of its term, the fourth Greek Presidency was balancing between the safeguard of the European political “*acquis*” and the need not to be isolated from the transatlantic partner. At the domestic level, the Greek government could not ignore the popular reaction to the American intentions against Iraq as well as the repercussions in economy and the security of the Middle East area. As it was claimed in the Greek Presidency Priorities, “*The handling of the Iraq crisis constitutes a particular challenge in terms of maintaining the cohesion of the CFSP and enhancing the role of the Union in the international arena*”⁵.

The main objective of the Greek Presidency was the formulation of a joint position on Iraqi non-compliance to the UN inspections. A few days before the January GAC, the Greek Permanent Representative⁶ presented at COREPER a non paper on Iraq. There was consensus on three main points on EU policy: Iraq disarmament according to UN Resolutions, EU assistance to the mission of UN inspectors and consultation in the Security Council and in EU at ministerial level.

The Greek Presidency encountered various difficulties. Hans Blix, the head of the UN Monitoring, as well as the French government had made clear that another Resolution of the UN Security Council was required before the outbreak of the military operation⁷. The Greek Presidency tried to reach consensus on the necessity of a Resolution of the Security Council for any further action on Iraq, and on giving extra time to UN inspectors and a break to war preparations in order to create the adequate circumstances in conflict resolution⁸. Therefore, the Greek Presidency convened a meeting of the ministerial Troika with the Foreign Ministers that participated in the Security Council (France, UK, Germany and Spain) just before the

⁴ “Contribution franco-allemande a la Convention européenne sur l'architecture institutionnelle de l'Union”, Paris et Berlin, le 15 janvier 2003 CONV 489/03, & Fragkos Sp., “The revival of the francogerman alliance”/«Η αναβίωση του γαλλογερμανικού άξονα», To Vima, 19/1/2003.

⁵ “Priorities of the Greek Presidency”, <http://www.eu2003.gr/en/articles/2002/12/24/1310/>

⁶ Ambassador Aristidis Agathoklis

⁷ Seitanidis D., “Looking for a common policy”/«Ζητείται κοινή πολιτική», Eleftherotypia, 26/1/2003.

⁸ Adam Kyra, “Europe for Iraq: Yes, non, si, nein”/«Ευρώπη για Ιράκ: Yes, non, si, nein», Eleftherotypia, 26/1/2003.

January GAC⁹. In the January GAC¹⁰, the EU member states reaffirmed that full cooperation of Iraq on disarmament in accordance with UNSCR 1441 as well as the renewal of the intercultural dialogue/dialogue of civilizations was an urgent objective shared by all.

The joint statement of 8 European leaders¹¹ encouraging the European states to support US in an eventual attack to Iraq jeopardized the Greek Presidency's efforts for consensus building. This statement apparently represented the whole EU as expressions such as "We the Europeans", "We in Europe" were used. The fact that the Greek Presidency was not informed by the member states aggravated the situation. On 29 January the Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis alarmed by diffused information, tried to prevent dissent. He contacted Silvio Berlusconi and Tony Blair who did not inform him on that matter¹². It should be referred that the Netherlands were also aware of this movement¹³.

Simitis condemned this action by a written statement, underlying the importance of a united European position and referring to the Conclusions of the January GAC on Iraq. According to Greek newspapers¹⁴, almost simultaneous statements of the Greek Prime Minister and of France and Germany on that matter insinuated that there was previous consultation between the three countries. The Greek government tried to disperse any suspicion pointing out that the Presidency of the EU Council does not fall in with any group of countries¹⁵. The publication of a letter of similar content to the joint statement of 8 European leaders a week later by the "Vilnius group" (signed by Bulgaria, Romania, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Croatia, Albania and FYROM) aggravated the situation.

⁹ Podimata Annie, "The Greek non-paper for preventing invasion"/«Ελληνικό non-paper για την αποτροπή της επίθεσης», *To Vima*, 26/1/2003.

¹⁰ 27-28/1/2003. Iraq crisis was discussed during the 2482^d Council meeting of the GAC, 27/1/2003, 5396/03 (Press 8).

¹¹ This statement resulted from the initiative of the Spanish Prime Minister signed at the beginning by the Prime Minister of UK, Italy, Portugal, Denmark, Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary, and then of Slovenia and Slovakia.

¹² Pretenteris I., "Counter-attack against the American group"/«Αντεπίθεση στην αμερικανική φράζια», *To Vima*, 2/2/2003.

¹³ Karanasopoulou Irini, "A torpedo in Europe"/«Τορπίλη στην Ευρώπη», *Ta Nea*, 31/1/2003.

¹⁴ See footnote 13

¹⁵ Karelias G, "(The Greek Presidency) disapproves again and strives for an extraordinary Summit"/«Αποδοκιμάζει ξανά, ψάχνει για έκτακτη σύνοδο», *Eleftherotypia*, 1/2/2003.

The critical comments made by multiple European actors and newspapers on the stance of the European countries mentioned above deepened divergence¹⁶. On the other hand, the representatives of the ten countries argued that they expressed their solidarity to US without contesting the common European position concluded in the GAC few hours before and that there was no point in notifying the Greek Presidency since they knew that it had a different opinion.¹⁷

On 4 February the Greek Presidency following the GAC Conclusions carried out a demarche¹⁸ to Iraqi diplomatic missions in Athens, in Brussels and in New York expressing the EU's full support to the mission of the UN inspectors. Otherwise Iraq would be responsible for the consequences given that the time limit was coming to an end. This was the hardest warning made by the Greek Presidency during its term¹⁹.

Since 31 January Costas Simitis communicated the intent of the Greek Presidency to convene an extraordinary European Council on Iraq. At first, the Greek Presidency hesitated about making this move in order to avoid the intense divergence of the two camps being "registered". It is worth mentioning that Germany expressed publicly its support to the Greek proposal while the Greek Presidency was sounding the intentions of the European governments²⁰. However, a series of factors contributed to taking finally this decision: the connection of Turkish support to US with the Cyprus question, the need to satisfy the domestic public opinion as well as the fact that the President of the European Parliament and European leaders had requested from the Greek Presidency to organise a Summit²¹.

In fact, the Greek Presidency convened an extraordinary European Summit in Brussels on 17 February. The President of the EU Council declared that *"as a high priority is set the effort to safeguard the common position of the 15 on Iraq... I find it*

¹⁶ Delastik G., "A split in Europe in the name of US"/«Σχίσμα στην Ευρώπη εν ονόματι των ΗΠΑ», Kathimerini, 2/2/2003, Le Monde, 31/1/2003

¹⁷ Pretenteris I., "Counter-attack against the American group"/«Αντεπίθεση στην αμερικανική φράξια», Το Vima, 2/2/2003. & Kallergis K., "They promise to be wise in the future"/«Υπόσχονται να είναι φρόνιμοι στο μέλλον», Kathimerini, 19/2/2003.

¹⁸ "Demarche by the Presidency on behalf of the EU regarding Iraq", 4/2/2003, <http://www.eu2003.gr/gr/articles/2003/2/5/1814/>

¹⁹ The Acceding Countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia, the Associated Countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey aligned themselves with the demarche carried out on 4 February by the EU Presidency.

²⁰ Papachristos Ch., "An extraordinary Summit is being forwarded"/«Πρωωθεί έκτακτη Σύνοδος Κορυφής», Ta Nea, 1/2/2003.

²¹ Karanasopoulou E., "The Extraordinary Summit"/«Έκτακτη Σύνοδος Κορυφής», Ta Nea, 10/2/2003.

very important to meet and to discuss the late developments, in view of the report that the UN inspectors will submit to the UN Security on 14 February 2003..."²²

The Greek Presidency had to overcome many difficulties in organising this Summit. It is significant that numerous contacts with the British Prime Minister Tony Blair were required in order to make him accept the invitation. Then, Blair demanded the participation of the accession and candidate countries in the summit. His objective was the prevalence of the 'pro-american' positions²³. While the Greek Foreign Minister had declared that he would invite the 13 accession and the candidate countries to the Summit, Simitis in his letter to EU leaders favoured holding a special information meeting with the "13" a day after. This decision was backed by France and Germany trying to push aside the 'pro-american' group.

During his introductory speech, the Greek Prime Minister stressed that the EU should achieve a dual target: securing Iraqi compliance with UNSCR1441 and averting war. He argued that, given the EU's international role and European citizens' expectations, the European leaders should not repeat their disagreements but express EU opinion on the Iraqi war²⁴.

It was evident (even from NATO meeting that took place one day before) that the fifteen member states came over the Summit with modified positions²⁵. During the Council session, France insisted on not putting any time limit to the mission of the international inspectors in Iraq, arguing, however, that a second UN resolution is not necessary. On the other hand, the United Kingdom insisted that time should not be given indefinitely. The position of Germany was balanced and did not coincide any more with the position of France²⁶.

The stance of the Greek Presidency to be open to the 'pro-american' member states facilitated the 15 member states and the 13 under accession countries to formulate to a joint statement on Iraq. It was claimed that the Greek Presidency had received a francogerman draft proposal that did not isolate the partners lined up with the United States. The impressive public participation in the rallies of the 15th

²² Letter from Prime Minister C. Simitis to his EU Counterparts, 13 February 2003, <http://www.eu2003.gr/gr/articles/2003/2/13/1912/>

²³ Adam Kyra, "Yes to the Council with a British trip-up"/«Ναι στη σύνοδο με αγγλική τρικλοποδιά», Eleytherotypia, 12/2/2003.

²⁴ "Introductory remarks by C. Simitis at the European Council extraordinary meeting", 17/2/2003, <http://www.eu2003.gr/en/articles/2003/2/17/1942/>

²⁵ Adam Kyra, "The responsibility now goes to the Security Council and to Saddam"/«Μπαλάκι σε Συμβούλιο Ασφαλείας και Σαντάμ», Eleytherotypia, 18/2/2003.

²⁶ The position of France: Everything possible should be done in order to avoid the use of violence.

February, particularly in the big member states that were lining up with US constituted another parameter that affected the Summit proceedings.

The extraordinary Council common position verified the commitment of the European partners to the spirit of the January GAC Conclusions. The member states recognised the primary role of UN and the full political responsibility to UNSC. However, they also stressed that the war is not inevitable and that Iraq regime is the only responsible for the consequences²⁷. It is rather significant that, as Gerhard Schröder has argued, after the insistence of his country, the final document did not contain the phrase that “time is running out quickly for Iraq” as it was approved in the draft²⁸.

It was argued that not only in general but also in the February European Council there was not a supranational outcome surpassing the existing differences on Iraq. It was more about the formulation of a common position that “changed nothing and that could be signed by anyone”²⁹. However, even the existence of an official Conclusions document constitutes a success of the Greek Presidency, since few hours before the end of the Council no one could predict this outcome. The 15 member states managed to follow a common line after everything that had happened. Therefore, the strategy followed by the Greek Presidency prevented the breakdown of the Council.

In the Presidency Press Conference, the President of the EU Council stressed that the EU’s objective was to make the member states talk with each other, formulate common positions and follow the same line³⁰. The formulation of a common position turned the extraordinary Council into Formal European Council. Reaching an agreement was characterised as a significant success of the Greek Presidency that with prudent conduct managed to balance the contradictory views and led to a partial convergence³¹.

The compromise was temporary. On 17 February, Tony Blair wrote a letter to the 13 European under accession and candidate countries and approved their positions for eventual warfare and their right to express their opinion freely. The Greek Prime

²⁷Conclusions of the Informal European Council, 17/02/03, <http://www.eu2003.gr/gr/articles/2003/2/18/1945/>

²⁸ “Europe has a single voice after the European Council”/«Με ενιαία φωνή η Ευρώπη μετά το Συμβούλιο Κορυφής», Kathimerini, 18/2/2003.

²⁹Kallergis K., “They promise to be wise in the future”/«Υπόσχονται να είναι φρόνιμοι στο μέλλον», Kathimerini, 19/2/2003,

³⁰Presidency Press Conference: A Common Position on Iraq, 18/2/2003, <http://www.eu2003.gr/gr/articles/2003/2/18/1973/>

³¹ The Guardian, 18/2/2003, www.guardian.co.uk

Minister avoided commenting on this letter, as well as on the remarks made by Chirac, on purpose so as to avoid further division³². The Greek Presidency kept holding a mediation stance. In the February GAC³³, the Greek Foreign Minister suggested the formulation of a list of obligations with which the Iraqi regime should comply within a fixed timetable³⁴. The foreign ministers confirmed that the full cooperation of Iraq on disarmament according to the UNSCR 1441 constituted an emergency.

Within the period between the February European Council and the Spring European Council (March), EU looked as an observer of the evolutions. A few days before the Spring European Council, the leaders of Spain, UK and Portugal acted beyond the EU framework and put the Greek Presidency into an awkward position. The three European countries met the American President Georges Bush in Azores and decided to withdraw the plan of a second UN resolution in order to prevent a humiliating rejection of the other European states³⁵.

The Spring European Council took place while the military operation had already started in Iraq. After the war and in view of the Spring European Council, the objective of the Greek Presidency was to launch a coordinated and effective EU effort for direct restoration of the rule of law and humanitarian aid to the Iraqi people³⁶. Therefore, trying to avoid dissent, the Greek Presidency preferred the Spring European Council not to focus on the Iraq war but on the post-war period³⁷.

The joint declaration on Iraq included in the European Council Conclusions³⁸ was rather rhetoric. Among other things, it was declared that “*The EU is committed to the territorial integrity, the sovereignty, the political stability and the full and effective disarmament of Iraq in all its territory*”. It was stressed that EU should urgently respond to the needs arisen by the conflict and would back the proposal of the UN Secretary General to cover the humanitarian needs with the programme “Oil for food”.

³² Le Monde, 19/2/2003 & See footnote 48

³³ Podimata A., A list of obligations from the ‘15’ to Saddam”/«Λίστα υποχρεώσεων στον Σαντάμ από τους ‘15’», Το Βήμα, 23-02-2003

³⁴ This list would be renewed when the UN inspectors collect new information.

³⁵ The International Herald Tribune, 18/3/2003 & “The ‘war council’ in Azores”/«Το ‘πολεμικό συμβούλιο’ των Αζορών», Το Βήμα, 16/3/2003.

³⁶ “EU discusses about the day after”/«Η Ε.Ε. συζητεί την επόμενη ημέρα», Kathimerini, 20/3/2003.

³⁷ Adam Kyra, “The ‘15’ manoeuvre in order to avoid division”/«Ελιγμός των ‘15’ για ν’αποφύγουν διαίρεση», Eleftherotyria, 20/3/2003.

³⁸ The Spring European Council, 21-22/2/2003, http://www.eu2003.gr/multimedia/doc/2003_3/751.doc

The focus of the discussion on reconstruction issues contributed to the rapprochement of the European member states since their positions on that matter coincided to a great extent. In view of the June EU-US Summit, discussions were shifted towards the review of EU international role and the placement of the EU-US relations into a more realistic basis³⁹. The British Prime Minister was more determined, at this stage, to bridge the euroatlantic gap of the previous months. In addition, the UK did not want to be blamed again for a new clash in EU. Therefore, Tony Blair tried to make sure that the UN would play a primary role in Iraq reconstruction backing the proposal of the Iraqi government approved by the UN⁴⁰.

In the parliament session of the 27th March, the Greek Prime Minister repeated the moderated stance of EU Greek Presidency. *“EU Presidency strives to find a common denominator. Greece cannot support the one or the other position when there are controversial views.”*⁴¹

On 12 April the French, German and Russian leaders as well as the UN Secretary General met in Saint Petersburg on Iraq reconstruction. The objective of this meeting was to give an answer to declarations of American officials that UN role would be restricted to humanitarian aid⁴². In April GAC⁴³, the European ministers exchanged opinions on UN role as well as in the types of integration means, that could be used in the after war Iraq (apart from the humanitarian aid). During the ceremony of the Accession Treaty signature⁴⁴ a disposition of alleviation was evident⁴⁵. The Presidency did not want the Iraq issue to damage the historical significance of that day. However, this issue dominated in bilateral contacts. The Greek Presidency preferred not to participate in the member states discussions. On 16 April and after the initiative of the British Prime Minister, a draft document of four EU member states (France, UK, Germany and Spain) started circulating. In the evening of the same day a meeting among these four countries and UN Secretary

³⁹ Pagoulatos G., Blavoukos S., “The last Greek Presidency”/«Η τελευταία Ελληνική Προεδρία», Papazissis, 2004.

⁴⁰ Plaff William, “Old Europe grieves for the new America of Busch”, International Herald Tribune, 1/4/2003.

⁴¹ I' Period (Presidential Republic), Council meeting Γ', Session Α', <http://www.parliament.gr/ergasies/main.asp?orderby=1&sunodosid=0&periodid=1&keyword=&pageno=17>

⁴² “The ‘three’ seek for a role in peace”/«Οι ‘3’ αναζητούν ρόλο στην ειρήνη», Kathimerini, 13/4/2003 & Chirac, Schröder and Putin with Annan in Saint Petersburg”/«Σιράκ, Σρέντερ, Πούτιν με Ανάν στην Αγία Πετρούπολη», Kathimerini, 9/4/2003.

⁴³ 2501st & 2502nd Council meeting, 14/4/2003, 8220-8221/03, (Press 105-106).

⁴⁴ 16/4/2003, Athens

⁴⁵ The Spring European Council, 21-22/2/2003, http://www.eu2003.gr/multimedia/doc/2003_3/751.doc (p. 131)

General took place. Since this procedure could not be prevented, the Greek Prime Minister started to sound all EU partners about this document. His aim was to find out whether an agreement could be reached so as to present it in the context of the Spring European Council.⁴⁶

Therefore, in the Athens Declaration it was cited that: *“We are committed to facing up to our global responsibilities, ...to tackle global terrorism. The Union pledges its support to the United Nations and its efforts to assure international legitimacy and global responsibility.”*⁴⁷ This document could be seen as a first step in bridging the gap that was perturbing Europe at that period. When Simitis was asked whether the EU accepted fully the sovereign role of the US President, he stressed that compromises are required in order to form joint statements⁴⁸. The Greek Presidency could feel proud for persuading its European partners to let their initiative appear as a EU Declaration⁴⁹. In addition, the relations between the opposing camps were normalized. The meeting of the German chancellor Gerhard Schröder with the British Prime Minister Tony Blair in Hanover⁵⁰ could be considered as an effort to recover the lost EU unity. In addition, US Foreign Minister Colin Powell visited Berlin⁵¹, the last stop in his tour in Europe.

In the Thessaloniki European Council, discussions on Iraq were similar to discussions in the ceremony for the signature of the Accession Treaty as well as in the two previous General Affairs Councils. EU expressed its satisfaction for the approval of UNSCR 1483, driven by the new cooperation spirit in the framework of the International Community⁵².

Conclusions

In view of the aforementioned, we can draw the conclusion that Greece on Iraq followed the problem solving approach. The Greek Presidency played more or less, the role of the broker and of the consensus builder trying to find a common

⁴⁶Adam Kyra, “One day thriller with the document on UN-Iraq”/«Ολοήμερο θρίλερ με κείμενο για ΟΗΕ-Ιράκ», Eleftherotypia, 17/4/2003.

⁴⁷“Informal European Council: Athens Declaration”, 16/4/2004
<http://www.eu2003.gr/gr/articles/2003/4/16/2531/>

⁴⁸ Papadiochos K., “A ‘Bridge’ with US through UN for Iraq” /«‘ Γέφυρα’ με Αμερική μέσω ΟΗΕ για Ιράκ», Kathimerini, 18/4/2003.

⁴⁹ See footnote 48

⁵⁰ 15/4/2003

⁵¹ 16/4/2003

⁵² The Spring European Council, 21-22/2/2003, http://www.eu2003.gr//multimedia/doc/2003_3/751.doc

denominator and “forgetting” how it would act as a sole country. Therefore, its conduct was not driven by concern for its own interests. The country could be accused of not managing to surpass the common denominator, of not managing to take a real inventive solution and of being more or less reactive. However, the solution, at that time was to make EU member states follow a common line on the issue of Iraq. Therefore, the objectives of the Greek Presidency were realistic. If the objectives would have been to surpass the common denominator, no result and no consensus would have been reached.

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