

Jean Monnet once expressed: 'Nothing is possible without men; nothing is lasting without institutions'. Beginning in early 1970s, the European Union developed an effective system of collective leadership in and through the **European Council**, which facilitated the integration process despite radical changes in the size and character of the EU and the emergence of a generation of leaders who are only hardly comparable with their predecessors. Yet, in the European Union that now includes 27 Member States, reaching consensus in the European Council is beginning to be difficult like never before, which may possibly handicap or partially hinder progress in the EU project.

Consequently, the principal aim of my research is to succinctly analyze the aspects of the EU leadership. I will assess the future of the highest authority of the European Union (in EU 27), which is the **European Council**- often regarded as the mover and shaper of the EU integration. To be consistent with my assessment, I discuss:

- The central managerial role of the office of Presidency
- The pre EU Council institutional arrangement of the EEC
- How, where, and why the EU Council emerged and what role it played in the process of the European integration
- What reforms the EU Council went through, and which in particular made it into successful executive body that shaped the EU
- What was the EU Council before the major enlargement on May 2004 took place

Further, French and Dutch referenda expressed peoples' lack of confidence in the way Europe has been led, which sent signal that the European Council ought to become more accountable to those in a position to scrutinize its members (national parliamentarians and citizens rather than the EU Parliament). The **Constitutional Treaty**

is dead by now, though, it had little to say on these matters (e.g. accountability of the EU Council), as it failed to acknowledge the EU Council status as the highest authority in the Union. However, I briefly discussed some of the proposed reforms in respect to the EU Council.

The overall discussion in the work is conducted in a way as to conclude that even the EU happens to be 'in crisis' at the moment, the future of this remarkable institution is not desperate, nor lost. Quite opposite, one of the positive features of the current crisis is that it poses another challenge for **EU Council** to further develop and deepen its existing structures and therefore prove its unique and undeniably significant role in fostering the EU integration. And that the 'crisis' offers fresh opportunities for **new EU leaders** to find pragmatic and at the same time optimistic solutions for the future of the European Union. So, the EU continues to stand out as a unique example that mastered unprecedented successes in contemporary political-economic history. The successes are peace, stability, solidarity and single market supplemented with common currency.