Czech Presidency Representative (chair)

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Confidential: for the assigned participant only. Do not share with other participants. Positions are fictionalised for educational purposes and inspired by, but not identical to, publicly reported positions.

The chair in this scenario. You hold the rotating Presidency of the Council and you chair this conference. You do not vote, on anything. What you have instead is the floor, the clock and the record. You decide the speaking order, you call the state of play in the middle of the negotiation, you run the five steps of the Final Act at the end (the Commission tables, the funds package is voted, the candidates respond, the Parliament signals, the Council decides), and you keep the Council record: what was decided about each candidate, who objected in what words, and the one-sentence note attached to each decision. Any member state may propose a note; you enter it unless another member state objects, and you take proposals before the vote on each candidate so that voting does not turn into drafting. The Commission proposes, the Parliament signals, the member states decide; you make all of that happen inside two hours.

Your delegation: the Czech Presidency (solo)

The Czech Republic took over the Presidency of the Council on 1 July 2022, the first Presidency of the war. Its declared priorities are Ukraine, energy and the resilience of democratic institutions, and it has invested heavily in the summit taking place in Prague today. A Presidency is judged on whether it produced a result. It is also judged on whether it was fair, and those two judgments can pull in different directions by the end of a long evening.

Your own government's position on enlargement is supportive and unspectacular: in favour, in principle, of both the Eastern and the Western Balkan tracks, without a national stake sharp enough to make you suspect. That is exactly why you are in the chair.

Decision rule: you do not vote. Your power is procedural, and it is considerable.

Your role

Motivations and constraints: Your aim is a conference that produces decisions rather than a communiqué about future decisions. You would like every candidate to leave with something, because a conference that advances three countries and stalls five will be reported as a failure of the Presidency. You need the Commission to table something the Council can actually adopt, so keep in contact with it during the negotiation and warn it early if its sheet is going to be rejected. You should protect the small delegations: with this many roles, a solo candidate can go seventy minutes without being spoken to, and if that happens the fault will be seen as yours.

Red lines: You do not take a substantive position of your own in public. You do not let a block pass in silence: if a member state refuses, it says why, on the record, in one sentence. You do not allow the steps of the Final Act to be reordered, and you do not let the Council negotiate during the voting; an objection is recorded and the room moves on.

Style: Formal, brisk, scrupulously even-handed in plenary. Cut speakers off politely and visibly on time, starting with the first speaker, so that being cut off is normal rather than a rebuke. In the Final Act, announce each step before it happens. When you summarise, summarise what was said rather than what you would like to have been said. Outside plenary you can be much more active: a Presidency that spends the negotiation shuttling between the Commission, Hungary and the candidates is doing its job.

Confidential (for you alone): Your Presidency has one quiet interest of its own. You would like this conference to be remembered as the moment the Union proved it could handle enlargement without institutional reform first, because the alternative argument, that the Union must change its own treaties before it admits anyone, would consume the next several years and is being made most forcefully by France. You are therefore quietly on the side of anyone proposing concrete steps now, and quietly unhelpful to proposals that make progress conditional on the Union reforming itself. You should never say this in plenary. You also know, because your officials have told you, that the Commission's sheet is likely to be too demanding for at least two candidates: if you can get the Commission to talk to the candidates before it tables, you will save the room fifteen minutes and possibly the result. Use the state of play at 1:05 for that: a chair's summary that names the two hardest files is a legitimate way of telling the Commission what it cannot table.