

Jeff Lovitt: "There Needs to be the Scope for Candidates from any Party in Europe to be a Candidate for Any Country"

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Jeff Lovitt, a leading European expert in policy-making took part in the concluding online-chat of a series of thematic internet-discussions "Now - interacting with the EP!".

Lovitt is Executive Director of PASOS (Policy Association for an Open Society), a network of 37 independent think-tanks spanning 24 countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. PASOS is a partner of the ["Now - Interacting with the European Parliament!"](#) Project implemented by the European Institute, the Centre for Policy Modernization and Europe Gateway and co-funded by the EP through DG Communications.

The discussion aroused great interest with the main topics it introduced: the challenges faced by the Czech EU Presidency, the future of European institutions with or without the Lisbon Treaty and the attitudes towards the up-coming European Parliament elections.

Lovitt said that all "pros" and "cons" of the Lisbon Treaty are well known. However, he warned that "a real row" could occur about the decisiveness in quality majority voting since it was not acceptable for some countries. "Real decisiveness requires political will and mature cooperation among the member states... The Lisbon Treaty should help, but is not the core basis for political unity and cooperation." The European expert answered a number of questions regarding the attitudes of the citizens for their participation in the EU elections and about the interrelation between the institutions in Brussels and the society.

"Of course, democracy is essential to the EU to prevent it being an elite project, but there needs to be the scope for candidates from any party in Europe to be a candidate for any country. This is why momentum is gaining ground for a directly elected EU President" he added.

According to Lovitt, having direct elections in all 27 member states does not mean that there is a single common constituency "or there would be common parties across different countries".

The Executive Director for PASOS expressed his view about the national dimensions of the euro-wide issues in EP. "The EP's most effective role is as a watchdog, scrutinizing and improving and, where necessary, proposing legislation, and of course holding the Commission to account. They can be very effective here if they make a commitment in this area - and they have some more power under the Lisbon Treaty - but very few MEPs really listen to their constituents at home and, when they do, it is on local issues, not euro-wide issues".

Lovitt underlined the importance of the presidencies of the new member states: "I do not think the EU is becoming remoter, and I think the interest in the EU presidency of a new member state, plus the focus on the pros and cons of euro membership, offer the scope for important debates at the national level, as

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do issues such as a common energy policy. I think these issues resonate locally, but the question in each country will be: will these be issues debated by the national media and the candidates in the respective EU countries."

Lovitt said that the Czech Presidency "performed reasonably well" in spite of the changes in governments.

"Would France have negotiated better between Ukraine and Russia on the gas dispute? I doubt it", he pointed out.

According to the expert, nobody noticed Slovenian presidency of the EU and the expectations of Prague holding the EU Presidency were very high. "The big challenge facing the Czechs now is the Eastern Partnership summit on 7 May... With the crises in Georgia and Moldova now, the Eastern Partnership initiative is in a mess - the state of democracy is extremely weak in all six countries, with the exception of Ukraine" he highlighted.

"If they /the Czech government/ can maintain a well organised management of summits, and the handover to the technocrat government is smooth, it might go down as a reasonably well managed presidency", he explained.

Asked about the lack of concrete position of the Czech Republic regarding the EU enlargement, Lovitt admitted this was "a lost opportunity". In his opinion EU enlargement beyond Croatia is not on the table for the French and Germans: "It /the enlargement/ will require a stabilisation of the economic situation, and strong lobbying from pro-enlargement countries, in particular the new members, but together with supporters from the original EU 15, in particular the UK."

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You can read the full text of the online discussion [here](#) , in "Interactive" on the website of "Now - Interacting with the European Parliament!"

Read a [synopsis with the highlights of the event](#) in "Analyses" on EUROPE Gateway and in ["News"](#) in the web-page of "Now - Interacting with the European Parliament!" in Bulgarian.