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The arrival of Sweden at the tiller of the EU for the next six months has raised hopes of a functional and practical Presidency of the Union. Tackling Europe's economic woes and finding consensus for a post-Kyoto environment deal will be two of their toughest tasks. Ministers from the EU Presidency country are obliged to report to MEPs so PM Fredrik Reinfeldt, Foreign Minister Carl Bildt and Europe Minister and ex-MEP Cecilia Malmström will be regular visitors to Brussels and Strasbourg.

On 15 July Prime Minister Reinfeldt will unveil his programme for the forthcoming six months to MEPs in Strasbourg.

Some of the priorities of the Swedish Presidency are managing the financial crisis and unemployment and addressing climate change - especially the search for an international agreement in Copenhagen in December.

Other important issues for the six months ahead include cooperation in justice and home affairs and an EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea aimed at tackling the appalling pollution that blights the sea as well as building economic cooperation among the States that border it. The Swedes will also have to continue the work on EU enlargement and the future of the Lisbon Treaty with the referendum in Ireland on the treaty likely to be a landmark.

## **Presence in Plenary**

The head of state or government also returns to the Parliament at the end of the six months for a "taking stock" speech and a debate. Depending on events - the second meeting can often be more highly charged than the first.

A minister from the country holding the presidency attends all plenary meetings during the six months to make statements and answer questions from MEPs.

EU leaders meet twice a year in the European Council to set the political agenda for the EU. Ahead of each meeting Parliament's President tells leaders where MEPs would like the EU to concentrate its efforts.

## **Informal meetings have a role**

As well as attending the Parliament's committee twice, Swedish Ministers and MPs will also hold many formal and informal contacts with MEPs.

The co-decision legislative procedure means frequent meetings with Parliament's rapporteurs and the political groups. As the Presidency Chairs all the meetings in the Council of Ministers, its role as a seeker of compromise on legislation is vital.

The next country to hold the Presidency will be Spain in January.