

**POLICY BRIEF**  
***Setting Europe's Agenda:***  
***The Commission Presidents and Political Leadership***  
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Active political leadership by Commission presidents means strategically transferring political ambitions of a Pan-European scope into consensual agendas (*agenda-setting leadership*) that can be effectively mediated through the intra- and inter-institutional arenas of decision-making at a European level (*mediative-institutional leadership*) and gain support among European public spheres (*public leadership*). In fact, since the European Commission is vested with the right of initiative, shaping and influencing Europe's agenda through strategic agenda-setting is the president's primary political opportunity to exhibit political leadership. This policy brief thus focuses on the strategic timing and substance of presidential agendas. In doing so, it evaluates the agenda-setting strategies of three former incumbents Walter Hallstein, Jacques Delors and José Barroso, who presided over the Commission at least for two terms.

The brief reveals two main results. First, the distribution of speeches during each presidency showed that supranational agenda-setting is more successful when there is a strong push and outreach strategy towards delivering the main topics of an agenda at the beginning of each term. For example, Walter Hallstein gave most of his speeches in the first phase of his presidency. Jacques Delors' agenda-setting entailed greater fluctuations; nonetheless, he was particularly keen to address his agenda both as directly and frequently as possible at the beginning of each of his three terms. Barroso instead followed a cyclical development of speeches in which he delayed his strong outreach until the middle of each term, which was, as a result, much less efficient in successfully setting the main goals of his incumbency.

Second, successful supranational agenda-setting is not necessarily about inventing new issues, but carefully setting a small number of coherent topics with an integrationist impulse and strategic follow-up. Hallstein addressed no more than four main topics, with a strong focus on the EEC's supranational character. Delors placed about seven central topics on his agenda, which he developed strategically via the method of *engrenage*, reaching from the completion of the single market to the establishment of the EMU. Barroso's main political agenda featured no less than eight broad topics, encompassing economic growth and European values alongside financial coordination and climate change. Whereas Hallstein's and Delors' main topics provided strong thematic continuity, focus and consistency, Barroso's agenda rather appeared overloaded and diluted. Unlike Delors, Barroso hardly delivered his topics with a clear strategic follow-up.

In summary, Delors almost perfectly fulfilled the two demands of supranational agenda-setting. Thus, in many areas of his presidency, Delors did not only successfully set the agenda of the European Community, but concrete steps of European integration were directly associated with him. By contrast, Barroso hardly met these demands, and therefore had greater difficulties in substantially influencing the EU's agenda. Although Hallstein's agenda-setting, with its strong push for further supranational integration, represented a central contribution to the EEC's early development, his singular focus on the realization of the Treaty of Rome was less successful during the later stage of his incumbency. This also indicates that a successful agenda needs to match and be securely rooted in the situative context of each presidential term.

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