

The Prime Minister, Tony Blair, addresses EU delegates.



“ The UK Presidency achieved a large part of its planned agenda and the agreement brokered by the Presidency on future financing, together with the opening of membership negotiations with Turkey, were both substantial achievements.”
Richard Whitman, The Federal Trust

AT THE HELM

Holding the Presidency of the European Union (EU) is one of the most significant diplomatic challenges that any government faces – and the UK’s Presidency between July and December 2005 was no exception.

With a series of important issues on the agenda, the Cabinet Office had the job of coordinating EU work across government and supporting the Prime Minister on EU issues. The Cabinet Office’s European Secretariat team was at the heart of this – they managed policy and guidance, as well as the preparation needed in the months beforehand.

Diplomatic challenge

Presidency of the Council rotates between the EU member states. The last time the UK held the presidency was 1998.

The UK Presidency needed to make progress on a number of difficult issues, including the EU budget, opening talks on Turkish membership of the EU, reform of the EU sugar industry, how best to regulate chemicals, counter-terrorism issues and Africa.



Across the UK

Edinburgh

The Better Regulation Executive, responsible for ensuring that the administrative burden on businesses in the UK is manageable, hosted the European Better Regulation Conference.

Manchester

The e-Government Unit, responsible for ensuring that electronic government services meet the needs of customers, held an innovative ministerial conference on Transforming Public Services.



Delegates applaud speakers at the Competitiveness and Consultation EU conference.



Newcastle

The Corporate Development Group, responsible for human resources and learning and development across government, hosted a successful meeting of the Directors General of Public Administration.



Gateshead Millennium Bridge.

Results

The UK Presidency of the EU was one of the most successful of recent years. Here are some of the key achievements:

- **A deal on the EU budget for 2007 to 2013**, which was significantly lower than originally proposed.
- **Talks with Turkey to become a Member State** – a hugely important step for Turkey, the EU, and our relations with the Islamic world.
- **Talks with Croatia to become a Member State.**
- **'Candidate status' for Macedonia**, which allows them to begin talks to become a Member State.
- **Agreement on the first major reform of the EU sugar regime** for 40 years, which will save EU consumers between €3.5 billion and €4 billion each year from 2010. Also, agreement on assistance of €40 million for the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries affected by this reform.
- **Endorsement of a new EU counter-terrorism strategy** and agreement that phone and internet data will be stored for use in criminal and terrorist investigations across Europe. There was also agreement on a strategy to prevent the recruitment and radicalisation of terrorists – an important weapon in the war against terrorism.
- **Improvements in the quantity and quality of development aid** which includes: **targets to double EU aid to \$80 billion** per year by 2010; the EU providing 60% of approximately €4 billion pledged for the Global Fund to Tackle AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria; and launching the International Finance Facility for Immunisation (IFFIm), which is expected to prevent five million child deaths over the next 10 years.
- **Agreement of an EU–Africa strategy** which will enhance the EU's support to Africa and provide strategic direction to the EU's partnership with Africa.
- **Significant progress on improving EU regulation**, which will lead to better quality legislation – including the withdrawal of 68 pending laws and a **commitment to simplify over 220 pieces of legislation** affecting 1,400 legal acts.
- **Agreement of a package on the REACH law** (Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals), which will **achieve proper protection of human health and the environment** by making business responsible for chemical safety and by researching and developing more products.