

Christiansen emphasises the role of the Council Secretariat in key developments in the past decade. It is a role of mediation between the Member States' positions in the Council. He also stresses its importance in the inter-institutional setting of the EU legislative process. The Secretariat can rely on different resources other bodies do not have access to: legal expertise, bureaucratic memory of past decisions and proposals, staff part of related informal policy networks, privileged access to the Presidency. Other structural factors work to the advantage of the Secretariat: its permanency within the Council structure against the background of a rotating Presidency, and its privileged position presenting ministers or national officials with legal advice. The decision to host the Council meetings in Brussels since the Nice Treaty provided the Secretariat with further impetus as it was another shift of decision-making from national capitals to the centre. All in all, the Secretariat provides guidance and advice that national officials and ministers depend on. However, the Presidency format might change, and the operation of the Council would be modified. The power of agenda-setting and chairing the meetings could be held by the Secretary General, which would further enhance the importance of the institution. However, changes resulting in a greater permanency of Member State representatives, as well as less sectoral councils, greater transparency and 'democratisation' of the treaty reform process (all discussed in the Future for Europe Debate) would undermine its role. It should also be noted that within the intergovernmental vs. supranational debate, the former is being redefined as the executive responsibility of the Council rather than interaction among governments. At the time of the writing of the article, there were only suggestions of the creation of a President of the European Council, the impact of which on the Secretariat was not clear, according to the author. In conclusion, one should acknowledge the important role the Council Secretariat has gained in the past decade. It has become the subject of on-going reform negotiations rather than an object of reform, as well as a recognised player in the EU's legislative and treaty reform processes.