

Preliminary Suggestions for a G20 Summit Secretariat

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Background

At Pittsburgh G20 leaders decided to establish the G20 summit on a permanent, annually recurrent basis. This raises the question how the G20 summit will be organized. G8 summits have been organized by the country hosting the event. G20 ministerial meetings have been organized by a "troika" of sherpas consisting of the current chair, as well as the immediately preceding and succeeding chairs.

One of the criticism of the G8 summits was the lack of continuity and implementation monitoring. The G20 summit will have to demonstrate that it can do better. However, with the increased number of participants relative to the G8 and the likely more comprehensive agenda of the G20 summit relative to the G20 ministerial meetings, the preparation and follow-up process for the G20 summit will be more complex and demanding as it involves many more players and less continuity in leadership. Finally, in order to ensure its legitimacy and effectiveness, the G20 summit also will have to liaise regularly with non-member countries and institutions and communicate its messages to the broader publics world-wide.

One way to address this challenge is to set up a G20 summit secretariat. And this option is further developed below. However, concerns have been expressed that leaders would not want to see a bureaucratic structure take over the G20 summit, or that the existence of a heavy secretarial structure could undermine the commitment by the national executive agencies to and their engagement in the G20 summit processes. The challenge will therefore be to keep any secretariat structure small, unbureaucratic and driven by capitals.

Alternatively, other options could be considered to ensure effective logistical and technical support for the G20, cross-posting of high-level staff from countries that have had the G20 chair in the past to countries taking on this role (this is currently being done in the case of Korea's summit chair in 2010). Stronger liaison contact points and implementation reporting requirements could be established in the key international institutions that are tasked with follow-up on G20 summits. Or existing structures could be asked to provide support (as was the case with the OECD in the case of the "Heiligendamm Process" of the G8).

The remainder of this note further explores briefly the option of setting up a secretariat, based on the assumption that the G20 finance ministers' troika approach will also apply to the G20 summit. If this option is regarded as attractive in principle, it would have to be further developed in detail.

Structure, staffing, location and funding

Formally the secretariat would consist of the three G20 summit sherpas of the current troika. There would be no separate "Secretary". The secretariat will have a small staff, headed by a "Chief of Staff" or "Administrator", who would be seconded for a period of up to three years from one of the member country administrations. Technical staff would be seconded for up to three years from member country administrations and from participating international organizations, with no more than one staff per thematic area covered by the summit agenda. In addition there could be a small number of logistical support staff for the preparation of the annual summits. The secretariat location would be located in the capital of a troika country (preferably in one of the emerging market members) and hence rotate every three years. The small budget of the secretariat would be funded in equal parts by the members of the current troika.

Functions

The secretariat will assist the troika in the following areas:

- Preparation of the summits (agenda, technical background, logistics, etc.)
- Follow-up of summits (monitoring of implementation, etc.)
- Managing relations with non-member countries and organizations
- General communications

Name

In view of the possible sensitivities about the formality of a new secretariat structure, it may be better not to call the proposed administrative support a "secretariat" but instead refer to it as "G20 Summit Staff."