

The Influence of the EU Council Presidency on National Coordination Mechanisms for European Agenda

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Abstract: *This article² examines the degree to which holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU (Presidency) influences CEE countries' national systems of European affairs coordination. It utilizes process tracing to map out the coordination mechanisms for individual countries along three dimensions: centralization, selectivity, and coordination tools (both technical and personnel-based). Making use of the critical junctures concept, which presumes disruption of fluent institutional development, the study explores whether the Presidency may indeed be one of these disruptive moments. It points out the significance of the Presidency not only at the European level, but particularly at the national level, as well. This national-level influence comes in varying degrees, depending both upon the dimensions involved and the individual states concerned. It confirms that personnel changes are the rule, and an influence on technical tools is also frequently exhibited. But it is more exceptional for centralization and selectivity to be affected, and this was confirmed for the Czech Republic (CR), partly for Poland and Lithuania.*

Keywords: *Presidency of the Council of the EU, coordination, centralization, comprehensiveness, tools, critical junctures, ECC countries*

Introduction

Substantial attention has been given to the coordination of European issues (Kassim – Peters – Wright 2000; Kassim et al. 2001; Sepos 2005; Dimitrova and Toshkov 2007; Gärtner – Hörner – Obholzer 2011). An important part of the coordination process is the Presidency, which forms a symbolic milestone in the evolution of EU agenda coordination systems, tests the state's ability to function as a rightful member of the European Union (EU) (Drulák, 2008, p.136) and allows the degree of compatibility with European principles to be investigated (Kaniok, 2008). In the late 1990s, Schout (1998, p.2) pointed to a lack of information on the significance of the Presidency and the underestimation of its functioning. But over the past decade, scholars have attributed to the Presidency various important roles (Elgström, 2003; Talbberg, 2006; Thomson, 2008; Kaniok, 2008; Bunse 2009; Batory and Puetter, 2013; Alexandrova and Timmermans, 2013).

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This study aims to contribute to what is known as the Presidency's significance, and to demonstrate its impact on national coordination mechanisms³. It utilizes a theoretical concept drawn from historical institutionalism (HI) which is known as *critical junctures*. Critical junctures are key moments in the development of an institution and the question is whether changes made to accommodate the Presidency are maintained in the coordination system, or whether the system reverts to its original status once the Presidency has ended. Evidence is provided that the Presidency had a significant impact in the CR and, to some extent, in Poland and Lithuania, as well. In addition, the Presidency reached the 100 percent influence in the area of personal tools created for the purpose of the Presidency and substantial influence in technical tools.

Those conclusions are showing that holding the Presidency affects the EU policy making, not only at the European level, but also at the national one. More importantly, this article expands our knowledge of the EU policy making at the national level and findings about coordination process of EU affairs and its formation. In addition, the article contributes to the understanding of the administration and organization of Presidencies in CEE countries, from both analytical and theoretical standpoint. At the theoretical level, the article is verifying the functionality of critical junctures and confirms that institutions are a stable part of historical development.

In terms of methodology, the paper uses process tracing, involving the study of individual countries followed by a comparison of five Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. These five countries—Slovenia, the Czech Republic (CR), Poland, Hungary, and Lithuania—are diverse in character: both large (Poland) and small countries (Slovenia and Lithuania) are included; countries positive on European integration (Slovenia) and Eurosceptic ones (CR); and countries whose public administration is highly politicized (Hungary, CR or Poland). Finally, the group includes countries that have held the Presidency under both pre-Lisbon (Slovenia and the CR) and post-Lisbon rules (Hungary, Poland, and Lithuania).⁴ It is expected that smaller countries will suffer from the lack of administrative staff for the management of the Presidency and some reforms in this sense will be needed (Panke, 2010; Thorhallsson, 2015). Another assumption would be that Eurosceptic countries will tend to centralise the system (Jensen, 2014) during the Presidency to be able to control the participating institutions. Countries holding the Presidency are more likely to become more comprehensive in EU affairs topics because of the mass media attention during the Presidency (Vizi, 2011, p.131). Finally, CEE countries which took the Presidency later than the others will be better stuffed with technical tools and therefore better prepared for the Presidency.

The paper is divided into five sections including this initial introductory section. Section 2 summarizes the research that has been done to date, and what knowledge exists about the Presidency. Sections 3 and 4 focus on the theoretical background, in

³ For the purposes of this research, a coordination system is understood to mean institutional facilities that administer the European agenda within a national state at both political and administrative levels. Attention is paid to the centralization/ decentralization of the coordination system as a whole, to main coordination bodies, to the personal staff and their trainings and to the technical tools established for the Presidency.

⁴ The Lisbon Treaty introduced Presidency trio which increased continuity of the Presidency and weakened its national character (Kaniok, 2010, p.19; Dostál, 2010).

particular the HI critical junctures concept, and methodological anchoring. Section 5 then employs process tracing and contains studies of selected coordination systems. Results are compared in the concluding section.

Reflection of the Research To-Date

Although scholars have undeniably paid attention to the Presidency (Kassim, Peters and Wright, 2000; Elgström, 2003; Tallberg, 2004; Schalk et al., 2007; Bunse, 2009; Batory and Puetter 2011) their interest has mostly been focused at the European level. Hayes and Renshaw (2007) deal with procedures and reforms of the Presidency in general. When it comes to the contain assessment of the Presidencies, it is the *Journal of Common Market Studies* that regularly publishes articles assessing achievements and failures of Presidencies (Kajnič, 2009; Beneš, Karlas, 2010; Ágh, 2012; Pomorska, Vanhoonacker, 2012; Vilpišauskas, 2014).

Deeper research into the national level is less extensive, as the studies of the impact of the Presidency on the domestic environment are. The research done to date has also been limited to descriptive and statistical studies that lack theoretical anchoring. But this is not to say that no studies have investigated the national level: Czech and Slovenian Presidencies have been explored from an Europeanization standpoint (Kaniok and Šteigrová, 2014; Klemenčič, 2008) or with a focus on the impact on public opinion (Kaniok, 2012). The Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies also evaluate individual Presidencies and monitor changes in organization of public administration staff (Fink-Hafner, Lajh, 2008; Kaczynski, 2011; Romsics, 2011; Šešelgyte, 2013).

Also monographs, complexly evaluating Presidencies, have been published for some CEE countries. Drulák and Šábič (2010) are assessing Presidencies in the terms of both goals of the Presidencies and national coordination. For Poland, Karolewski, Mehlhausen and Sus (2014) appraise the Presidency, but the domestic level has been left out entirely. In the CR, Kaniok (2010) analyses the Presidency paying attention to the domestic preparations and administrative stuff. For the rest of the countries such monographs are missing.

The research carried out to date demonstrates that the Presidency is a key event in the "life" of an EU member state, one whose influence extends to both the domestic and European levels. Kaniok and Šteigrová (2014, p.341) claim that studying of midrange impact of the Presidency presents a research challenge. Therefore, analysing the influence of the Presidency on the coordination of the EU agenda and the functioning of public administration offers a fresh perspective that may clarify which dimensions of national coordination are decisively impacted by the Presidency.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical basis taken here is that of HI, which considers institutions to have arisen as part of historical development (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p.9), defining them as "macro historical structures and regularities" (Schmidt, 2010, p.5) in which structures and

customs are the objects of study. HI stresses the development of institutions and their path dependency and also admits unexpected backlashes and unintended consequences that might occur during the development of institutions (Schmidt, 2010, pp.5, 10).

HI also makes use of critical junctures. The subsequent development of path dependency is based upon these turning points and it is difficult to reverse a process once set in motion (Capoccia and Keleman, 2007, p.342). According to Capoccia and Keleman, critical junctures represent “relatively brief periods with increased probability that decisions by actors will impact future development” (Capoccia and Keleman, 2007, p.348). Since they occur within an overall development process, critical junctures exist for a briefer period than the process itself, and their duration is determined by the will of the actors (Capoccia and Kolman, 2007, pp.348, 350-351). Ebbinghaus (2005, p.16) warns that critical junctures cannot be depended upon to occur.

In the present article, the Presidency is considered such a critical juncture; it interrupts the fluent development of path dependency in national coordination mechanisms. I assume that changes made while preparing and implementing the Presidency will influence the development of coordination. But the international and political significance of the Presidency is not the only important factor: also noteworthy is whether the requirements that have been placed on the country holding the Presidency are met. The Presidency tests the readiness of the national coordination system and represents a logistically and administratively demanding task that can only be executed with long-term preparation (Kaniok, 2010, p.72).

I inquire into whether the Presidency may be designated a critical juncture in the development of coordination systems in the countries I have chosen, with the aim of revealing whether causality exists between the Presidency and the subsequent form of coordination. To be specific, the research question (RQ) is: *Can the Presidency be designated as critical juncture in the development of national mechanisms for coordinating the European agenda?*

Methodology and Data Processing

The cases examined here consist in the coordination systems of the five countries of CEE that had held the EU Presidency by the end of 2013. They are: Slovenia (January to June 2008), the Czech Republic (January to June 2009), Hungary (January to June 2011), Poland (July to December 2011), and Lithuania (July to December 2013). The first step will be to observe their coordination systems via process tracing. A comparative methodology will then be utilized to assess their similarities and differences.

Beach and Pedersen (2013, pp.2-3; 14) define process tracing as a tool for the study of causal relationships. Process tracing tests theoretical assumptions and seeks out causal relationships between some X and Y: in the present context, the Presidency and the form taken by the coordination system.

To define the coordination systems, Kassim’s (2003) typology will be utilized; for countries that acceded to the EU in 2004 and later, the typology has been extended

by Gärtner, Hörner and Obholzer (2011). Kassim differentiates four types of systems: comprehensive centralizers, selective centralizers, comprehensive decentralized systems and selective decentralized systems (Kassim, 2003, p.103). Kassim's centralization dimension may be determined by examining the position of the institutions concerned. Centralized systems have a single key institution⁵ that bears responsibility for the general coordination and "unified voice" of governmental bodies. Decentralized systems, by contrast, are typical when actors act independently and coordination is left to line ministries. Kassim's second dimension focused on comprehensive versus selective approaches to coordination. Comprehensive systems are expressing on all documents deriving from the European level, and various governmental and nongovernmental actors are involved in the discussion. Selective systems are less ambitious, with a focus on highly topical and preferred themes (Gärtner, Hörner and Obholzer, 2011, p.84).

Kassim's model has been completed by dimension of tools that had been expressly created for the Presidency to provide its fluent functioning— personal tools such as staffing and capacity available for the national coordination effort, and technical tools such as databases and videoconferences between the government and the Permanent Representation.

Specifically, I map out the development of the coordination systems and determine whether the changes made during the preparatory phase and the implementation of the Presidency persist after its end. The critical junctures concept will be considered applicable if the changes are shown to endure for at least one year after the termination of the presidency.

The anticipated model of behaviour (in the first dimension) includes the centralization of some components within the institutional coordination structure (a ministry, the Office of the Government, or some other entities created for coordination purposes); or coordination competencies will be distributed among several institutions, thereby increasing their autonomy (for example, individual ministries or the Permanent Representation in Brussels).

With the second dimension, there may be a shift towards a more comprehensive system that comes about with the involvement of novel actors (interest groups and social partners) in the formulation of the national position. New ministries become involved in the coordination effort and the government actively expresses its opinion on all European themes. A shift towards selectivity, by contrast, will reduce the number of such actions and reinforce the government's position in formulating the national position.

Within the third dimension, that of tools, changes occur in personnel. Administrative staff is trained and then remain active in public administration either in keeping with plan or as a by-product of the Presidency. This results in an increase in the number of employees and represents a change in the personnel area that is both quantitative and qualitative. New technical tools are created to facilitate coordination and improve efficiency.

⁵ Dimitrova and Toshkov (2007, p.974) further differentiate four locations for the key coordination body: independent institutions, bodies operating under the auspices of the Prime Minister's office, bodies operating as part of the cabinet, and bodies operating under the MFA.

The following indicators and values will be examined:

Table 1: Possible values of individual indicators (dimensions)

Degree of centralization	Shift away from centralization to decentralization or vice versa.	No influence
Degree of selectivity	Shift away from selectivity to comprehensiveness or vice versa.	
Personnel tools	Creation of new tools and maintaining them	
Technical tools		

Source: Author.

The study also considers alternative interpretations. The first is due to Rational Choice Institutionalism (RI), which asserts change as the result of political decisions. Niemann and Mak (2009, p.9), characterize the Presidency as a calculation on the part of political actors who use it to promote their interests. To be able to ascribe potential changes to RI principles, these actors' ties to political decisions or changes in the government must be established.

Another alternative is sociological institutionalism (SI), under which changes follow from the logic of appropriateness. Institutions behave in the manner they consider proper and expected. There is an effort to fulfil expectations and thus to satisfy demands originating at the European level (Niemann and Mak, 2009, p.10). Coordination changes are also ascribed to institutional isomorphism, i.e., the adoption of coordination models from other countries (DeMaggio and Powell, 1983, p.149). For the Presidency to be considered a critical juncture, alternative influences must be excluded.

The analysis presented here was carried out using data from journals and articles on coordination, from Presidency evaluation reports, from documents originating in the individual ministries, the Office of Government or Permanent Representations. A few interviews (via email) correspondence were conducted during Autumn 2015, namely with Slovenian diplomat from MFA, Hungarian diplomat from Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels, Polish Director of Presidency Coordination of the MFA and Director of the EU Economic Department of the MFA and with Lithuanian diplomat from Permanent Representation for the EU in Brussels. Questions were formulated to find which technical tools had been created for the Presidency and whether they remain in the structure after its termination and how many people hired for the presidency stayed in the EU affairs administration after the Presidency.

Slovenia

The Presidency, in the first half of 2008 represented, according to Klemenčič (2008, p.2), a key Europeanizing event. From a centralization standpoint, a watershed moment had

already occurred in the 1997 when coordination centre shifted from the MFA (Dimitrova and Toshkov, 2007, p.974) to the newly established Government Office for European Affairs (GOEA), led by a minister without portfolio.⁶ Fink-Hafner and Lajh attribute the change to an effort to differentiate the EU affairs coordination from ordinary diplomatic matters (2003, pp.94, 99). Kassim's typology would classify Slovenia as a decentralized system⁷ (Gärtner, Hörner and Obholzer, 2011, p.89) because of fragmentation within individual ministries (Fink-Hafner and Lajh, 2008, p.27) and the uncertain position held by the GEOA in inter-ministerial disputes (Gärtner, Hörner and Obholzer, 2011, p.89).

Along the centralization dimension, the Presidency cannot be considered as a critical juncture. Coordination was placed in the charge of the GEOA and the MFA. The coordination model chosen to prepare the Presidency remained unchanged (Fink-Hafner and Lajh, 2008, p.37) until late 2012.⁸

In terms of selectivity, Gärtner, Hörner and Obholzer (2011, p.89) consider the system relatively comprehensive because attention is given to all European themes. European affairs were coordinated by all ministries, but the attention shown by the minister prior to 2005 and the State Secretary for European Affairs thereafter was inadequate (Klemenčič, 2008, p.23). The change and more active approach resulted from the Presidency. Klemenčič (2008, p.23) describes the dramatic change that occurred early in the preparations within the Working Group for European affairs led by the State Secretary and composed of representatives from individual sector ministries. The working group was dynamic; ministries began to emphasize European themes and included them in their regular agendas. The experience of the Presidency formed the basis for a "shift from passivity to more proactive coordination, at least in some policies" (Gärtner, Hörner and Obholzer, 2011, p.89).

Further evidence of increasing comprehensiveness of coordination came in the form of an agreement on communication between the government and nongovernmental organizations (Fink-Hafner and Lajh, 2008, p.43). Aimed at strengthening dialogue and improving the efficiency of the coordination effort, this channel remains unutilized, and neither parliament increases its involvement in the coordination process (Lajh, 2010, pp.122-123). Because of the openness and transparency of the system, the Presidency did not represent a critical juncture. To the contrary, Lajh observed a drop in communication between the executive and legislative branches of the government, as well as between the executive branch and civil society (2010, p.122).

⁶ In 2004, the government (led by the Slovenian Democratic Party) considered the dissolution of the GOEA but in the end, only office management was replaced by the State Secretary and thus the Prime Minister's role in coordination was reinforced. Stability of the coordination after the 1997 reform was attributable to the continuity of the liberal-democratic government, which did not change until 2004 (Dimitrova and Toshkov, 2007, p.976).

⁷ The key elements of the coordination system are: the Prime Minister and GOEA, who coordinate the European agenda on the inter-ministerial level and provide technical coordination (Fink-Hafnerová and Lajh, 2008, pp.27-28). At a lower level, the MFA and the Ministry of Finance bear the lion's share of responsibility for financial decision-making, and the Ministry for Public Administration is responsible for training public administration employees (Fink-Hafnerová and Lajh, 2008, p.29).

⁸ In 2012, the GEOA was dissolved and its key coordination competencies were transferred to the MFA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013).

Within the tool dimension, preparation for the Presidency launched a training wave among civil servants that led to increased awareness on European themes. From November 2006 until April 2007, 3472 civil servants took part in 144 seminars organized by the Academy of Sciences (Klemenčič, 2008, pp.21-23). Between 2005 and 2008, 310 temporary positions were created, one-third of which were utilized by the ministries to coordinate the Presidency; the remaining two-thirds were used to handle more general tasks within the coordination system. An example would be the Permanent Representation: its personnel capacity increased by 170 positions, 121 of which were devoted to the Presidency (Fink-Hafner and Lajh, 2008, p.42).

Krajnc and Svetlič (2010, pp.102-103) observed the influence of the training and increased personnel capacity on the coordination system two years after the end of the Presidency. Their study found that 66 percent of public servants focused on the Presidency remained employed in the area of coordinating European affairs.

To simplify the coordination and make it more effective, several technical tools were introduced such as regular video conferences between the Permanent Representation, the GEOA and the Prime Minister, and a system for inter-ministerial coordination involving regular ministerial meetings discussing thematic files. Both the personnel and technical tools were preserved in the coordination structure (Interview with a Slovenian diplomat of the MFA, 2015) after the Presidency.

Motivated by the Presidency, the administrative ranks of the country were complemented by a significant number of trained employees. The Presidency thus represented a critical juncture not only in the personnel area, but also in terms of technical tools. The first two dimensions, by contrast, remained out of play. The coordination model maintained its decentralized character, and the comprehensive form of the system was also conserved. Although great emphasis was put on a number of policies, communication with nongovernmental partners was weak.

Czech Republic (CR)

The CR held the Presidency in early 2009. Gärtner, Hörner and Obholzer (2011, p.90) place the CR in a group of (relatively) decentralized systems, although they admit that entities central to the coordination effort do exist.⁹ These entities coordinate the European agenda irrespective of theme. Currently, they include the Committee for the EU at the governmental and working levels, the Section for European Affairs, and the Government of the CR; formerly, the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs was also involved (Karlas, 2009, p.6). There are also Ministry Coordination Groups, which are symbolic of the fragmentation and decentralization present (Souček, 2011, p.197). Typical for this coordination model is a shift of competencies along an axis running from the MFA to the Government of the CR, and this is perceptible in the post of chairperson of the EU Committee (Galušková, 2012, p.31). The shift was reflected in the preparatory phase initiated in 2004 under Government Resolution 2299/2004, dated 16 November of that year. During that period, the coordination role was in the hands of the MFA. Then in

⁹ Cf. Karlas (2009, p.4) who defines the Czech coordination system as semi-centralized.

2006 it shifted to the newly-created position of State Secretary for the Coordination of the CR Presidency and in 2007, came to rest with the position of Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs, occupied by Alexander Vondra, the Deputy Prime Minister (Kaniok, 2010, pp.73-75).

As regards centralization, the position of the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs was a key-position, because it served as the centre of the entire coordination effort during the Presidency (Ifrah et al., 2008, p.19; Beneš, Karlas, 2010, p.70). Once the position had been created, the Government of the CR and the MFA began to battle for control over the area, and the centre shifted to the Government of the CR. When a new coalition involving ODS, VV, and TOP 09 was formed in May 2010, the position was abolished (Týden, 2010). Karel Schwarzenberg, then-Minister of Foreign Affairs, called the post of Minister for European Affairs redundant *“since the CR has already terminated its Presidency to the Council of the EU [...]”* (Mediafax, 2010).

The Czech case is unique and its HI potential must be assessed in the context of other events. Political discussion of the abolition of the position of Minister for European Affairs took place immediately after the new coalition was formed (in keeping with RI). In September 2011, the post of Minister for European Affairs was abolished in favour of separate positions both titled State Secretary for European Affairs, one under the Government of the CR and the other under the MFA. These changes induced a wave of decentralization in the system, but one still may not speak of a return to the pre-Presidency model, since the Section for European Affairs remained essentially intact. Government of Jiří Rusnok decided to abolish the post at the MFA and leave only the one under the Government of the CR. The redundant positions had been instigated by a political dispute between the then-Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Euractiv, 2014). From a long-term perspective, however, it was the centralized model of the Presidency period that took root in the coordination system (Marek and Baun, 2010, p.152). Since the criterion has been met, I judge the Presidency to have been a critical juncture in the development of the centralized coordination system.

In terms of selectivity, the coordination system has always comprised a large number of actors with a comprehensive approach to European themes (Karlas, 2009, p.4). The Ministry Coordination Groups had the opportunity to invite representatives of social partners, regions, and NGOs to take part in the discussion (Knutelská, 2013, p.11). Despite this, a comprehensive approach was reinforced during the preparatory phase for the Presidency. The Ministry Coordination Groups had greater latitude to formulate presidential priorities for individual sectors (Knutelská, 2013, p.12, Kaniok, 2010, p. 84). Kaniok and Šteigrová (2014, p.346) also note intensive involvement by civil servants in the coordination of the European agenda during negotiations.

During the Presidency, the CR developed contacts at both the European and national levels and became an open system for interest groups and state and nongovernmental actors (Kaniok and Šteigrová 2014, p.346; Knutelská 2013, p.14). Beneš and Braun (2011, p.71) speak of *“reinforcing the role of the Permanent Representation in the formulation of the CR’s position within the EU legislative process.”* According to Gärtner, Hörner and Obholzer (2011, p.90), the involvement of large numbers of actors in the coordination

process is the characteristic of a comprehensive approach today. The Presidency may be seen to have been a critical juncture that oriented the coordination effort in the direction of a thoroughly comprehensive system. In this context, Drulák and Šabič (2010, p.282) are speaking about deep socialization of the Czech politicians within the EU sphere during the Presidency.

4731 new and existing civil servants underwent training as part of the training programs. 338 new short-term positions were created during the Presidency, and although not called for in government plans, 175 newly hired employees remained in the coordination system even after the end of the Presidency (Kaniok and Šteigrová, 2014, p.345). This demonstrates both that personnel capacity increased and that administrative structures were improved in terms of staff knowledge of European law and negotiating skills.

During the Presidency, an inter-ministry Presidency Agenda Database was set up with the aim of gathering documents discussed at various levels by the Council of the EU (Kaniok, 2010, p.160). When the Presidency ended, the database was maintained, as a Database of European Policies (DAP), and today it serves as a communication channel for the EU Committee (Král, 2010, p.26). The Presidency brought about an intensification of the working level contract between the EU Committee and the Permanent Representation, making use of video conferences that have also continued to function (Beneš and Braun, 2011, p. 71).

Since it formed a critical juncture, the CR's Presidency was reflected in the way the coordination dimension functioned within all three dimensions. The system became more centralized when coordination came under the purview of the Office of the Government. The comprehensive nature of the system was reinforced. And the personnel capacity was also strengthened, with technical tools created for the Presidency continuing to be maintained.

Hungary

Hungary led the Council of the EU in the first half of 2011, and under Kassim's typology would be classified as a decentralized¹⁰, comprehensive system (Gärtner, Hörner and Obholzer, 2011, pp.89-90). Hungary demonstrated indecision as to whether to treat the coordination of European affairs like it did foreign affairs, or like national affairs. In the first two years after accession, the bodies in charge of coordination shifted from the MFA to the Office of European Affairs under the Office of the Government, and then back to the MFA again, which is where the coordination centre was situated in 2006.¹¹ After a change of government in 2010¹², the coordination effort continued to be conducted by the MFA; the new government renamed the department the "State Secretariat for EU Affairs (State Secretariat)"¹³ (Gärtner, Hörner and Obholzer, 2011, p.89; Batory, 2012, p.934).

¹⁰ Cf., Batory (2012, p.933) calls all coordination systems centralized. This claim is primarily based upon the fact that Batory studies the aggregation of coordination competencies in the hands of the executive.

¹¹ The Office of European Affairs together with a position for the coordination of EU agenda held by a minister without a portfolio was abolished by the new government in 2006 (Batory, 2012, p.929).

¹² The right-wing coalition of Fidesz and the Christian-Democratic Peoples Party took power.

¹³ No competencies of any body or any body's structure were affected (Batory, 2012, p.933). In this regard, the RI explanation may be excluded.

The MFA and the State Secretariat became the key entities during the Presidency (Hungarian Government, 2015a). The coordination model comprises a number of coordination levels: the inter-ministerial level sponsored by the Inter-Ministerial Committee for European Coordination (ICEC); the level of the MFA and the State Secretariat, subsidiary to it, which is responsible for the operation of the ICEC; and the highest political level, where coordination is implemented by the Cabinet (Batory, 2012, p.933; Hungarian Government, 2015a). The Hungarian case demonstrated highly stable development resistant to external influences. Along the centralization dimension, therefore, the Presidency cannot be considered to have formed a critical juncture.

Along the selectivity axis, since the 1920s the Hungarian system has been comprehensive, with the ambition of coordinating a broad range of policies (Batory, 2012, p.924). This comprehensiveness, however, has been weakened by the informal nature of channels that do not admit all input into the system. But the parliament takes an active role in coordination, despite the fact that the government is not bound to reflect its opinions under all circumstances (Gärtner, Hörner and Obholzer, 2011, p.90).

During preparations for the Presidency, the competencies of the ministries that formulated positions for the special Committee for the Presidency and the government were reinforced (Gábor, 2008). The Presidency became a permanent topic of discussion within the ICEC, whose task was to ensure that government positions were formulated in all areas (Hungarian Government, 2015b). NGOs were involved more intensively, in particular because of the requirement for transparency and equal opportunity for all actors (European Environmental Bureau, 2011, p.20). But there was no shift towards greater comprehensiveness. The Presidency did not represent a critical juncture for the coordination system, and the system may continue to be defined as a comprehensive one, particularly due to its tradition and the hierarchical nature of public administration in the country (Batory, 2012, p.933).

The 2010 change in government influenced the personnel component in the tool dimension. Six months before the beginning of the Presidency, national administrative structures and the Permanent Representation staff have been modified and Presidency has been ensured by 800 employees of the MFA (Vida, 2011). These changes did result in a lower average age for members of the administration apparatus; but the politicization of the state administration was such that it was not mitigated even by an event of the Presidency's magnitude (Romsics, 2011, p.28). The coordination effort was entrusted to young, proactive public servants who had language skills but no practical experience. Training programs started two years prior to the Presidency and were provided for both the older and newer generations of public servants (Romsics, 2011, p.26). A short-term goal of the program was to ensure the operation of the Presidency, but discussions took place on the midterm and long-term impact as well. Although no career plans were created, the Presidency gave rise to new employment opportunities for many employees of the MFA, for example at the Permanent Representation in Brussels. The great majority of these employees remained in their positions even after the Presidency had ended, reinforcing the level of professionalism, qualification, and the amount of information available to public administration (per an interview with a diplomat from Hungary's Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels, 2015).

In terms of tools, inter-ministerial meetings were utilized. They had already functioned prior to the accession to the EU, but now videoconferencing facilities were upgraded and installed at the MFA, the Office of the Government, and the Permanent Representation (per an interview with a diplomat from Hungary's Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels, 2015). Both tools have continued in operation as part of the coordination process to this day. By contrast a task force newly created to address unanticipated events (comprising representatives from the MFA, the Office of the Government, and the Permanent Representation) was dissolved once the Presidency had ended. The system of "files" containing framework mandates, priorities, and procedures for achieving consensus in thematic areas also turned out to have a limited lifespan. Once the Presidency had ended, the coordination effort returned to original procedures (per an interview with a diplomat from Hungary's Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels, 2015).

The experience of the Presidency had no impact on the degree of centralization or selectivity present. Nor was confirmed any RI potential, since key positions in the coordination system as a whole were maintained after the 2010 change of government. Hungary is, however, an example of qualitative personnel change. From the standpoint of technical tools, no critical juncture occurred, since the country made use of established and/or temporary mechanisms.

Poland

Poland took over the Presidency in late 2011. Kassim classifies the country as having a centralized comprehensive system. Its coordination centre lies with the Committee for European Integration, consisting of sector ministers. The Committee is led by the Prime Minister or the Minister for Foreign Affairs. It received assistance from the Office of the Committee for European Integration, resulting in the creation of a "Minister for Europe" with close ties to the Prime Minister (Kaczynski, 2011, pp.30-31). Gärtner, Hörner and Obholzer (2011, p.87) note that the coordination effort lays entirely in the hands of the executive.

Preparations were launched in June 2008, utilizing the coordination system then in place. The Minister for Europe was designated to act as agent for the Presidency, and was to work closely with the chairperson of the Committee for European Affairs, with support from the Office of the Committee for European Affairs (Kaczynski, 2011, p.35). Changes began in January 2010, when the Committee for European Integration was renamed the Committee for European Affairs, and the Office of the Committee for European Integration was transferred to the MFA (Kaczynski, 2011, p.31). The result was that responsibility for European affairs was now totally in the hands of the MFA. According to Radosław Sikorski, then-Minister of Foreign Affairs, the change helped ensure a successful Presidency (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010) and Europeanized the MFA (Kaczynski, 2011, p.31).

Competencies were distributed between the Office of the Government and the MFA. Although ties between the Minister for Europe and the Prime Minister were maintained, the coordination effort became decentralized. Preparations for negotiations in the Council of the EU were transferred to the MFA (Kaczynski, 2011, p.31). The reformed

system remained in place even after the Presidency had ended; these changes may thus be designated to have constituted a critical juncture.

A comprehensive system includes social partners in the decision-making process only on a consultative basis. Parliament must also be informed, but in practice is quite weak when it comes to monitoring the EU agenda (Gärtner, Hörner and Obholzer, 2011, p.88). An increased interest in communicating with NGOs was apparent from July 2009. At the December conference on the Presidency, 150 representatives of various NGOs were present. A public tender for the NGOs saw a total of 16 grants awarded for projects connected to the Presidency and its promotion (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012, p.91).

Eighty-three institutions were involved in the Presidency in all; each constituted a so-called Presidency contact point. These contact points were subsequently connected to form a network allowing information to be transferred between the coordination centre and the public administrative apparatus (Kaczynski, 2011, p.35). The initiative continued in use among the Visegrad Group even after the end of the Presidency (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014, p.29).

The Presidency caused no demonstrable shift in the system's selectivity, and it does not constitute a critical juncture. NGOs were involved with sharp intensity only when the country was actively involved in the role of the Presidency. Nor was the relationship between the legislative and executive branches intensified in any way.

Within the personnel dimension, 1200 people from various ministries were involved in the "Presidency corpus". Training programs targeted the Presidency as well as long-term preparation tied to the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty. One-year contracts were concluded with employees, and a system of financial benefits was launched to ensure the personnel involved would remain in their positions at least until the Presidency ended. To take care of logistics, approximately twenty new employees were hired (per an interview with the Director of Presidency Coordination of the MFA, Poland, 2015). Traineeships took place from 2009 until July 2010, involving fourteen visits to the European Commission and five visits to the General Secretariat of the Council (Kaczynski, 2011, pp.36-37). In late 2010, Brussels delegated responsibility to eleven officials for helping with preparations for the Presidency (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012).

At the end of the Presidency, civil servants were not dismissed, but rather redistributed and transferred. 70% of the new hires requested long-term employment. Employees who had helped with organizing the Presidency were transferred to less attractive positions centred around European themes, while experts in European affairs remained in their posts or were promoted. Up to 95 percent of the employees who had been trained remained active within public administration (per an interview with the Director of Presidency Coordination for the MFA, Poland, 2015).

The country created an inter-ministerial policy catalogue to set priorities, and this created a more fluent flow of information within the public administration apparatus (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012, p.119). Meanwhile, ministries made more intensive contact with the Permanent Representation via videoconferencing (per an interview with the Director of Presidency Coordination for the MFA, 2015). The above-noted Presidency

contact points were created and subsequently interconnected to create a communications network (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012, p.90). The catalogue that was created is still used to coordinate national positions within thematic areas, and videoconferencing has been maintained as well (per an interview with the Director of the EU Economic Department of the MFA, Poland, 2015). The network of contact points was dissolved after the termination of the Presidency (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012, p.90).

The Presidency in this case represented a critical juncture in several areas for the coordination system. It influenced the system's degree of decentralization by reinforcing the MFA. As regards the personnel, the number of qualified experts was increased, and they continued to work for the public administration apparatus. Technical tools were also mostly kept in place. The only dimension left untouched by the Presidency was that of selectivity.

Lithuania

Lithuania held the Presidency in the second half of 2013. The country possessed a centralized¹⁴ system (Gärtner, Hörner and Obholzer, 2011, p.88) which slowly moved from coordination under the European Committee of the Government during the accession period to 2009, when coordination responsibility has been assigned to the MFA (Vilpišauskas, 2014, p.100). Since that, the coordination system can be described as decentralised (Vilpišauskas, 2013, p.129). The MFA, with connections to the Permanent Representation in Brussels, bears responsibility for the preparation of COREPER meetings and plays a key role in the system (Gärtner, Hörner and Obholzer, 2011, p.88).

Lithuania commenced intensive preparations for the Presidency soon after joining the EU¹⁵. The country opted for the so-called "Brussels-based" system, which takes advantage of facilities in Brussels (the Permanent Representation) and maintains the autonomy of individual bodies¹⁶ (Šešelgytė, 2013, p.6). After the reform in 2009, the coordination of the Presidency has been entrusted to the MFA and the Minister of Foreign Affairs became a head of the coordination network. The Government Committee for European Affairs, composed of deputy ministers and headed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, formulated the main position within EU topics (Vilpišauskas, Vandecasteele and Vaznonytė, 2013, p.22), while logistic and technical issues has been managed by the European Union Council Presidency Department of the MFA (Šešelgytė, 2013, p.6).

The Parliamentary elections held during the preparatory phase brought a new coalition to power¹⁷, and this resulted in personnel changes in ministries. Key positions, however,

¹⁴ Department for the Analysis of European Policies and the Inter-Institutional Coordination Body (Gärtner, Hörner and Obholzer, 2011, p.88).

¹⁵ First meeting took place in 2005 and first Action plan of the Presidency preparations accepted in 2006 (Šešelgytė, 2013, p.6).

¹⁶ For smoother operation of the Presidency, ministers received a mandate from the Parliament to make flexible decisions. After the Presidency Parliament continues to grant mandates before every meeting of the Council (per an interview with a Lithuanian Permanent Representation for the EU in Brussels, COREPER II, 2015).

¹⁷ In 2012, a centrist-left-wing coalition took power (Vilpišauskas, Vandecasteele and Vaznonytė, 2013, pp.23-24).

were left untouched¹⁸ (Vilpišauskas, Vandecasteele and Vaznonytė, 2013, pp.23-24) and the MFA is keeping a key role in the system (per an interview with a diplomat at the Lithuanian Permanent Representation for the EU in Brussels, COREPER II, 2015). Due to changes in preparatory phase of the Presidency, the system has become decentralised with the MFA coordination responsibility. Therefore, the Presidency can be considered as a critical juncture in the Lithuanian centralization dimension. Vilpišauskas (2013, p.129) adds that most of reforms of the coordination system are related to the changes in ruling coalitions.

Seventy-seven institutions took part in the Presidency (The Baltic Course, 2014), which testifies to the comprehensive nature of the coordination effort. The LINESIS information system accepts documents from European institutions and allows for their exchange among national entities (Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, undated). During the preparatory phase for the Presidency, visits to Brussels were initiated, aimed at presenting European themes to both governmental and parliamentary actors (Vilpišauskas, Vandecasteele and Vaznonytė, 2013, p.24). As part of the LESSED project (Increased Efficiency in the Lithuanian System of European Affairs), thirty-three thematic studies were prepared to support Lithuania's position on these themes (Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2015). These projects supported a comprehensive approach, but did not represent a critical juncture within the second dimension.

In the personnel area, the Presidency brought about a redistribution of existing capacity within the administrative system, but no quantitative changes occurred. By contrast, only a minimum of new employees were hired on temporary contracts (per an interview with a diplomat at the Lithuanian Permanent Representation for the EU in Brussels, COREPER II, 2015). The Permanent Representation increased the existing staff from 85 employees to 188 using only civil servants who had been working in the public administration for a three-year period (Šešelgytė, 2013, p.6).

In 2010, a special unit was established at the MFA as the Department for the Presidency of the Council of the EU. It continued to function until 2014 and provided for staff training, communication and logistics (Vilpišauskas, Vandecasteele and Vaznonytė, 2013, p.22). Financing acquired from the structural funds was used to provide general training for employees of the MFA on European themes, network projects, the LESSES project, etc. (Šešelgytė, 2013, p.7). The government organized a training program maintained even after the Presidency, which has so far seen the participation of two thousand civil servants and diplomats. The country introduced a motivation system for civil servants who took part in the preparation and implementation of the Presidency (per an interview with a diplomat at the Lithuanian Permanent Representation for the EU in Brussels, COREPER II, 2015).

The System LINESIS which was already in place, served as a technical tool during the Presidency (Maniokas, 2009, p.6). The country intensified its communication with the Permanent Representation via videoconferencing (per an interview with a diplomat at the Lithuanian Permanent Representation for the EU in Brussels, COREPER II, 2015). While

¹⁸ Political parties represented in Seimas signed an agreement on not using the Presidency for political competition in October 2011 (Vilpišauskas, Vandecasteele and Vaznonytė 2013, p.23).

selectivity and technical dimension stayed untouched by the Presidency, centralization and the qualitative side of personal dimension represented a critical juncture.

Conclusion

This paper has traced the development of a set of coordination systems to determine whether the Presidency may be designated a critical juncture in the development of coordination systems in general. The influences observed are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Evaluation of the impact of the Presidency along the dimensions examined

	Degree of centralization	Degree of selectivity	Tools	
			Personnel	Technical
Slovenia	no influence	no influence	critical juncture	critical juncture
Czech Republic	critical juncture	critical juncture	critical juncture	critical juncture
Hungary	no influence	no influence	critical juncture	no influence
Poland	critical juncture	no influence	critical juncture	critical juncture
Lithuania	critical juncture	no influence	critical juncture	no influence

Source: Author.

From the five cases selected, the greatest impact of the Presidency was felt in the Czech Republic, Poland and Lithuania. As regards to the dimensions explored, the personnel component of the tools dimension was influenced by the Presidency in every case. In terms of technical tools, influence was noted in more than half of the cases. Dimension of centralization was also affected in three cases. By contrast, the selectivity of the coordination system was immune to the influence of the Presidency everywhere except in the CR. Why should this be true? Why are some countries and dimensions susceptible to greater influence than others?

The case of the CR is specific, and the pre-Presidency situation in the country's coordination system offers a clue as to why its influence was so strong. The CR typically evidences "decisiveness" in coordinating the EU agenda. This has been demonstrated since 2007 by the shifts that have taken place in the locus of coordination involving the MFA and the Office of the Government. Stabilization of the coordination mechanism with the creation of the position of Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs came

only with preparations for the Presidency. The coordination mechanism continued to be centered in the Office of the Government even after the Presidency, in the person of the State Secretary. The Presidency was a significant event for the CR which initiated changes in the country's rather unstable and changeable coordination environment.

Contrary to CR, Poland and Lithuania used a different logic: the coordination efforts shifted from centralized to decentralised. Both countries reformed their systems during the preparatory phase and rely on the MFA. The cases of the CR, Poland and Lithuania show that changes along the centralization-decentralization axis do not always occur in the same direction. In addition, decentralized systems seem to be more appropriate for the Presidency period. Poland and Lithuania indicate that distraction of actors involved in coordination and their flexibility might be an effective way how to hold the Presidency. By contrast, the case of the CR confirms the connection between the Euroscepticism of the state and the tendency to centralise the coordination system during the Presidency.

Regarding the systems examined, all of them had been of a comprehensive character prior to the Presidency and this continued to be so after it. In the CR, the Presidency was a number one priority, and this was reflected in the preparatory phase. The politicization of European themes impacted the CR to a greater extent than it did to other countries - the significance of European themes grew with the number of actors involved in the coordination process. The system's comprehensiveness was predetermined by selecting a combined model for the Presidency. Ministries acquired competencies within the coordination process, and nongovernmental actors were invited to take part in preparations. The above set presumption about comprehensiveness of coordination systems seems to be true. Attention, paid to the country holding the Presidency, causes pressure on inclusiveness of systems.

The Presidency had 100 percent influence over the personnel component of the tool dimension. It is not unexpected that countries would resort to personnel changes during the preparatory phase, since their concerns about the task ahead bring on precisely such changes. For inexperienced countries, the Presidency represents a test of capacities and professional readiness. It is the most significant event to occur since their accession to the EU and integration into its structures, and it provides an opportunity to test the functionality of their coordination system in actual practice. The impact is both quantitative (increase in the number of civil servants) and qualitative (increase in the level of professionalism and training). Civil servants received training in all countries, whether that involved strengthening of administrative capacity as in the CR and Slovenia, or prompted the utilization of existing capacity as a Lithuania. It follows that not all small countries need to extent administrative capacities during the Presidency, as it has been shown in the Lithuanian case.

Technical tools were also important. In the CR, Poland, and Slovenia, such tools were created and maintained even after the Presidency; in other countries, the lifespan of the technical tools did not exceed the period of the Presidency (Hungary) or the country made use of existing mechanisms (Lithuania). The creation and utilization of technical tools is associated with a country's readiness for the Presidency as well as the time period during which the country was at the helm. For the CEE countries, the first to hold the Presidency,

technical tools and overall coordination represented a greater challenge. Other countries had more time for modernization and the preparation of technical facilities.

What is revealed, then, is that the Presidency has had an impact that extends beyond the European level (Tallberg, 2004; Schalk et al., 2007). National environment of Member States is impacted as well, both over the short term and the medium term (Kaniok and Šteigrová, 2014). The analysis presented here has demonstrated the influence of the Presidency on the national level (Klemenčič, 2008) and pointed out example cases in which coordination mechanisms were significantly impacted. The Presidency has been shown to have acted as a tool for Europeanization in the CR (Klemenčič, 2008) and to some extent in Poland and Lithuania as well. For CEE countries, the Presidency was a premiere. It remains to be seen what potential it might have to influence coordination systems once the Presidency has been held repeatedly. Future research will indicate whether coordination systems become immune to the influence of repeated Presidencies, or whether each new Presidency provides a novel impulse for change within the coordination system.

Last but not least, the paper uses the concept of critical junctures which proves to have an explanatory ability in this case. This does not only mean that Presidency has a potential to be a critical juncture for national coordination systems, but also that the concept itself is functioning and forming policy at national level. The same theory applies to HI and its notion of institutions' ability to push historical development ahead.

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