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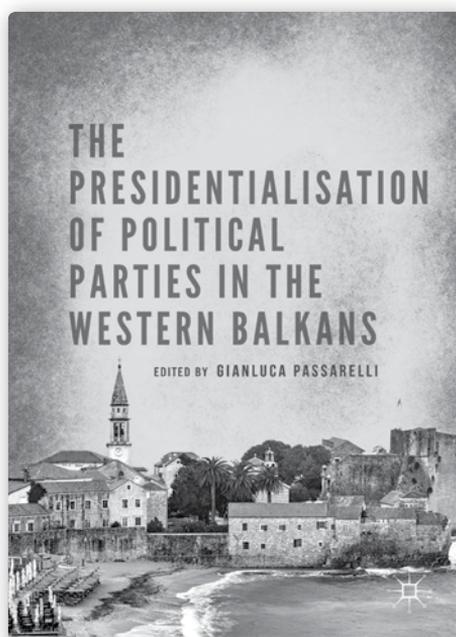
Gianluca Passarelli (Ed.)
THE PRESIDENTIALISATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES
IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Palgrave Macmillan, United Kingdom, 2018, 231 pages
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Montenegrin think tank Centar za monitoring i istraživanje - CeMI (Centre for Monitoring and Research) organized within the framework of international scientific research project on the presidentialisation of political parties in February 2017 its second Balkan Comparative Electoral Study Conference, which findings are published in the book reviewed here.

Its editor, an Associate Professor at Sapienza University, states that “the presidentialisation of politics is a widespread and ongoing political phenomenon that has affected most of the so-called contemporary democracies”. Therefore it is important to point out that concept “presidentialisation” also refers to “personalization” and “centralization”, where a “centre”, respectively a person, mainly President has political influence.

The book aims to comprehensively explain levels of party presidentialisation in the Western Balkan countries, including semi-presidential



cases (Croatia, Macedonia¹, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia), parliamentary regime cases (Albania and Kosovo) and peculiar presidential case (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

The first chapter dwells on common undemocratic past of political parties in the Western Balkans, which

¹ The book was published before the country changed its name to North Macedonia.

derives from communist governments such as Yugoslavia and Albania. The legacy of the past stands out: Albania as one of the most closed societies under the communist ruler Enver Hoxha had to heavily face with its authoritarian past, while Bosnia appears as the case of a failed democracy. Croatia had strong impact of its past and faced with “incipient democratization and residual authoritarianism” (Cohen and Fraser 1997), but managed to become quite democratic state. Kosovo, after the war, created space for political pluralism, establishment of democratic institutions and multi – party system. Macedonia faced with ethnic division and conflict, which affected the electoral reform and the situation in general. Montenegro in terms of becoming democratic state was quite unique comparing to other states and its democratization was preceded with Europeanisation. Serbia’s path towards democracy was quite difficult due to Milošević’s legacy, abuse of power and democratic procedures. Slovenia was the only country, which was regarded since its independence as “free” and still is considered as state with good democratic status, even though it deals with some recent weaknesses.

The nature of political parties has changed since the beginning of 1990’s and they all resulted with different outcomes. Nowadays, the political parties in the Western Balkans are considered as different in general and are also considered different comparing to the European parties

in the aspect of their origins, organization and structure. However, these political parties do show similarities in terms of centralization of power of the leadership.

Passarelli and other 14 experts from the Western Balkan countries gave a valuable contribution about current status of presidentialisation of political parties in the Western Balkan counties. Editor briefly summarizes the book in the first chapter, where he comments main elements of Western Balkans governments, such as process of democratization, legacy of the past, creation of new states and formation of governments, political parties and presidentialisation.

Eight countries are presented in each chapter by their experts in which differences and similarities as well as various issues are discussed, such as institutional change, direct election of President, mitigated presidentialism, role of ethnics, limited semi-presidentialism, leaders and parties, parliamentary constrains and institutional limits.

Author Dario Nikić Čakar, an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb, argues in the chapter on Croatia that institutional change matters. Čakar analyzed presidentialisation on political parties from 1990 to 2016, focusing on question if presidentialisation of political parties is a force to be reckoned with. He clarified that political parties in Croatia are characterized as leader-centered organizations

and that leaders are prominent “public faces” having an impact on electoral performances of their parties. He further argued that the growing presidentialisation dynamics in Croatian political parties can be better explained by their genetic features than by constitutional factors considering that Croatia, even after constitutional reform in 2000, remained centralized and presidentialised.

Author stated that party system in Croatia is an interesting social lab for testing thesis on presidentialisation of political parties as it proves high variability in the independent variables, which explain the phenomenon of presidentialisation of political parties. Čakar took into consideration party genetic approach when analyzing Croatia and thus proved clear trend towards presidentialisation of political parties. Genetic features established a path for development of highly cohesive, disciplined and centralized parties where leaders are independent and autonomous from organizational restraints and internal mechanisms of accountability. Čakar concluded that party leaders are characterized with a high degree of autonomy in intra-party decision-making, strong power, leader-oriented campaigns, and monarchial style of prime ministerial leadership.

Authors Spasojević Dušan, Assistant Professor, and Stojiljković Zoran, Professor, both at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Belgrade, argue in the chapter on Serbia

about the direct elected President. Authors analyzed the impact of institutional design and party genetic characteristics. They also indicated that political parties in Serbia are perceived based on their leaders and that the study of presidentialisation of political parties in Serbian case is interesting for the following reasons four reasons.

Firstly, Serbia belongs to a group of countries with weak, institutionalized and relatively young party systems; secondly, existing constitutional rules in new democracies are not exogenous for political parties but imposed by the most influential amongst them to support their particular interests; thirdly, party leaders in post-communist democracies operate within institutional frameworks of minimal or electoral democracy with without functional check and balances which makes party leaders and presidents strong, influential and potentially damaging for democratic regime (partitocracy and party despotism); fourthly, the outcome of presidential election can lead to cancellation of agreed governing coalition and formation of a new government.

Author Suad Arnautović, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Sarajevo, argues in the chapter on Serbia about mitigated presidentialism. According to author, strengthening presidentialisation of political parties is based on several factors which can be found in the constitutional structure, elector-

al system and genetic features of ethnic political parties. Political parties and their structures are influenced by divisions based on religious and ethnic characteristics. The presidentialisation is present in Bosnian parties and its importance is increasing.

Authors Dane Taleski, an Adjunct Professor at the South Eastern European University in Tetovo, Viktor Dimovski an Adjunct Professor at the University American College in Skopje and Lura Pollozhani, PhD Candidate as well as University Assistant at the Center for Southeast European Studies at University of Graz, argue in the chapter on Macedonia about the role of Ethnic. They researched intra party democracy, which resulted with diverging results, where left-oriented party have more intra-party democracy and all other parties have similar and low intra party democracy. Main political parties analyzed by the authors are main centre-left SDSM, the main centre-right VMRO-DPMNE and the dominant Albanian Party DUI. According to the authors, political parties' features proved to be relevant in the process of presidentialisation and there is difference between parties created by diffusion and parties created through penetration. The former faced barriers to party presidentialisation due to the need to balance the different groups in the dominant coalition, while the latter were able to combine the charisma and centrality of the leader in order to go towards centralization.

Authors Zlatko Vujović, a co-founder and President of Montenegrin Think Tank CeMI as well as a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Political Science at University of Zagreb, and Nikoleta Tomović, a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Political Science in Belgrade argue, in the chapter on Montenegro about a limited semi-presidentialism. It is well known that political parties in Montenegro are established even before the new institutions and party presidents are dominant figures. They analyzed impact of constitutional structure and impact of party's genetic of presidentialisation of political parties in Montenegro and they are of opinion that party presidentialisation is possible based on increased impact of party's origin. Authors, amongst others, concluded that Montenegro is an atypical model and can be seen as strong "presidentialisation" in a political system with weak president.

Authors Danica Fink – Hafner, a Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana as well as Head of the Political Science Research Programme, and Alenka Krašovec, a Professor at the same faculty, argue in the chapter on Slovenia about leaders and parties. Slovenia, in many comparative political analyses, is perceived as semi – presidential system but more as premier – presidential form (Samuels and Shugart 2010: 31, 41).

Authors measured scope of presidentialisation of parties (as proces of centralisation of leadership) by us-

ing indicators such as: candidate-process selection processes, leader – selection processes, policy-making powers, and electoral campaigns, what resulted in that presidentialisation in Slovenia is rather a process than a fixed situation. According to them, political parties in Slovenia were strongly influenced by the centrality of party leaders at the beginning of their development and in the process of adaptation to the new political and institutional context. Eventually, personalization and presidentialisation of political parties are present in Slovenian political parties.

Author Afrim Krasniqi, an Executive Director of Albanian Institute for Political Studies and Professor at Academy of Albanian Studies, presents the chapter on Albania about parliamentary constraints. According to him, Albania faced with many shortcomings during its transition from a closed society to a functional democracy. Constitutional and legal framework on political parties and elects contain elements of great powers of political leaders and vertical system of decision – making. Political parties and party system in Albania do not really differ in programmatic and ideological aspect. Party leaders are in their position for long time, parties are highly centralized and share common political background and as they are quite closed they should be more competitive, developed and representative.

Author Albert Krasniqi, a Senior Researcher at Kosova Democratic In-

stitute (KDI), prepared the chapter on Kosovo about institutional limits. He assessed trends of presidentialisation in Kosovo's political parties which were formed in three stages. Firstly, 1989 – 1999 as social opposition against the oppressive regime – *catch all model and no clear ideology with centralized decision making*; secondly, 1999 – 2004 post war new political parties, political pluralism – *catch all model and no clear ideology with centralized decision making*; and since 2004 – cadre and mass parties.

Kosovo political parties main division is based on parties' attitude towards the war, respectively parties are divided into military wing and pacifist wing. Political parties transformed from a leftist one-party communist system into a right-wing one party system. Author stated that various differences of political parties in reality represent similarities in terms of internal organization, non – inclusion of members in decision making, influencing members of Assembly in their decision – making, lack of financial transparency and election of leaders without counter – candidates through open voting.

The book “The Presidentialisation of Political Parties in the Western Balkans” has its targeted audience, but other interested readers will find it useful, since it book offers a very comprehensive and in-depth quality information on presidentialisation of politics in Western Balkan countries.