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How Much Left Do We Have from “Honest Brokers” in the EU?

Effectiveness of the EU Presidency under the Lisbon Treaty Regime.
Case of the Central and Eastern European Member States.

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INTRODUCTION

At the time the Lisbon Treaty came into force on 1 December 2009 it thoroughly affected the presidency of the Council of the European Union. Its most recognizable functions that allowed member states at the helm to be one of the political leaders of the EU for six months were bounded by the President of the European Council and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. After almost a decade of the implementation of the Lisbon treaty it is time to assess how the role of the EU presidency has changed in practice and what new behavior of the presidency can be observed in the post-Lisbon reality.

Researchers focused on analyzing the EU presidency developed several models that help us evaluate the presidency. Usually those models are based on dual distinction. EU presidency can serve as an impartial moderator (“honest broker”) of the general European agenda which helps to push forward issues of general interest. Member state holding the presidency of the Council of the European Union can change the agreed pan-European agenda and complement it with topics important from a particular point of view of one or few countries. The presented distinction assumes however that the presidency holds a broad spectrum of administrative and political instruments allowing it to play a role of an important leader within the EU institutional framework. This seems too optimistic when we take into consideration systemic changes introduced by the Lisbon treaty. That is why a hypothesis which is going to be verified in this article says: post-Lisbon EU presidency is gradually overwhelmed by the role of technocratic manager and that is why the political aspect of presidency is slowly pushed out.

In the analysis the author will use three dependent variables which influence the role of the EU presidency. First is low level of political coordination of the preparation of the presidency at the national level. If the responsibility lies by the government’s plenipotentiaries or deputy ministers and not by higher political level officials like foreign affairs ministers this shows that a member state has no illusion about the political potential of the post-Lisbon presidency. The same indicates domination of the safe objectives of the presidencies. Continuing the regular legislative agenda of the European Commission or the European Council conclusion as well as facilitating the discussion on important EU issues in order to amplify them in the public debate are easier to manage and less risky than pushing through some particular goals which are not shared by other EU members. The third variable refers to results achieved by the EU presidency serving as a technocratic manager. The outcome of the presidency should be better in those

objectives which are safe rather than in those which rise political risk and expose member states for excessive critique.

Methods which are going to be used in the article to verify the stated hypothesis are institutional analysis, text analysis and comparative approach. The article itself consists of five main parts.

First of all, the changes introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon regarding the formula of holding the presidency of the Council of the European Union will be presented in a general outline. This issue will be considered from the perspective of changes in the EU political system of exercising power.

The second part of the paper will present a project perspective assessment as a new model for the evaluation of the EU presidency. This theoretical model was initially developed in 2012 in the book *Skuteczność polskiej prezydencji w Unii Europejskiej* (trans.: The effectiveness of the Polish presidency in the European Union) edited by professor Krzysztof Szczerski (2012). A thesis standing behind this approach says that after the treaty of Lisbon has come into force, and has changed crucial functions of each presidency, we cannot any more consider a country chairing the Council either as honest broker or as a representative of her own national interests. That is why we can observe that presidencies became less political and more technocratic focused on organized administrative procedures.

The third part of the paper is presenting institutional changes in public administration that have taken place in five countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which in 2011-2018 have been holding the EU presidency. With the comparative method the author will analyze one large country from the region (Poland), three medium-sized countries (Hungary, Bulgaria and Slovakia) and one small country (Lithuania).

In the fourth part, the author will examine general objectives each of the above listed EU Member States have set for themselves during the presidency of the Council of the European Union. According to the project assessment perspective, the role of the presidency can be assessed by description of objectives' character. This input oriented evaluation focuses on analyzing objective's content and the way of their planning what shows us the ambitions of a country concerning how the role of the presidency should look.

The fifth part, which is going to conclude the paper, will consist of a brief summary the objectives of which given presidency have been achieved. This will contribute to the final verification of the hypothesis in the article.

MODEL OF THE POST-LISBON EU PRESIDENCY

“Honest broker – national interests' representative” model of assessing the EU presidency – we can call it a/the? traditional one – seems to be the most popular and deeply rooted one in public consciousness. It was widely used in the pre-Lisbon times¹. But we can still observe the behavioral approach to the EU presidency evaluation among the researchers. The semantic layer of traditional model of evaluation is easy to identify in opinions formulated from different perspectives. Realists may assess to what degree a given country has tried to execute its own interest according to subjective understanding of *raison d'etat*. Sociologists focus on public opinion perception of the results of six-months staying in charge of the EU political processes. The media concentrate on marketing potential of the presidency fueled by cultural events or on analysis how the Presidency

¹ See i.a.: Schout, 1998: 2-10; Schout-Vanhoonaeker, 2006.

was seen by the national and foreign media (Lipiński, 2013). We can find even more nuanced assessment approaches that focus on management proposing the contingency theory as the most adequate one for presidency day-to-day reality.²

The traditional model of assessing the EU presidency – no matter which of the above perspective we choose – determines political leadership a member state has to undertake. Behind this lies a common conviction assuming that the country holding the presidency first of all needs to show itself as an impartial mediator within the EU political environment, the bloodstream of which is notably based on negotiation processes (Toneva-Methodieva, 2015). Only then and without too much flaunt member state it can smuggle its own national priorities into the general EU agenda. Thus in political practice the EU presidency concentrates on reconciling different interests of member states on the one hand and on the other hand not to abandoning its own preferences. Therefore, the member state standing at the helm of Council of the European Union is expected to show its leadership of highest probe. This means pushing forward issues is important for deepening the integration processes, solving the conflicts where and when they occur and at the same time trying to do this all in line with national preferences of this member state. Adriaan Schoutin 1998 described such presidency following the mentioned role “a juggler who has to keep three balls up in the air on a windy market square” (Shout, 2006: 5-6).

The effectiveness of bringing to life the leadership function depends on the country's ability to use formal and informal powers in order to award or coerce the parties during the political negotiations (Toneva-Methodieva, 2015: 147-150). Jonas Tallberg pointed out that necessary condition for effective political bargaining is a country's structural potential, described by economic power, size of territory, population, military and administrative capabilities (Tallberg, 2008: 687). Making satisfactory use of member state's structural potential means at the same time to start up sufficient resources, i.e. financial, human, infrastructural, political capital³. The bigger the state is, the less severe the costs of presidency are. Thus the leadership function of the EU presidency is asymmetrical. Bearing in mind the changes introduced by Lisbon treaty, it is also time-bounded and divisible due to not only trio presidency but most of all transfer of most important functions to President of the European Council and High Representative of the Union. Thus it is justified to ask whether the expected outcome of the presidency's political action within the EU is worth the resources engaged?

The traditional model of EU presidency assessment based on the leadership category when analyzing the effectiveness of the given presidency focuses on the outcome (or output as system theorists call it) of the six-month period being at the helm. It stipulates that we have to confirm whether the objectives set by a member state for six-months were achieved or not. But on what should the assessment focus when, according to Lisbon treaty rules, we redefine the behavioral model of the presidency?

As the Lisbon Treaty entered into force on 13 December 2009 competencies of the institution of the EU presidency significantly changed. It is not a subject of this study to focus on institutional arrangement according to Lisbon treaty provisions. It is enough to mention here three reasons that are affecting current functions of the presidency. Firstly, is the creation of the permanent President of the European Council, what is in fact a result of broader change, namely an institutionalization and formalization of functioning of the

² This approach suggests that every situation in which the presidency is put produces demands for the presidency and requires its activity (providing supply). See: Kietz, 2007; 2008

³ Estimated cost of the EU presidency for the member state is between 50-100 million euros. Absolute minimum amount of human resources that builds an administrative back-bone of the presidency is 1,200 experts. See: Belova-Kochev, 2018: 270.

European Council. Second, competencies of the presidency were diminished by a new institutional position of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Third, new organization of performance framework for the presidency, i.e. a group presidency of three member-states, was introduced⁴. What will be crucial in further considerations however, is the functions of the presidency.

Based on a structural and functional approach we can distinguish five functions which every presidency in the EU ought to fulfill. Those are mediating function, administrative function, planning function, coordination function and representative function (Węc, 2009: 40; Nowak-Far, 2010: 220-224).

Mediating function requires presidency activity on each stage of negotiation processes. Member state holding the presidency should poll the positions of various participants of bi- and multilateral negotiation in which such actors like European Commission, European Parliament and third countries are involved. Next step is to mediate for preparing and finally reaching the compromise in disputed questions. Eventually the role of the presidency is to develop and propose a position covering the issues raised by the widest number of actors (state and institutions) taking part in negotiations. For efficiently fulfilling this function and gaining the trust of other member states, the country holding the presidency should obey the neutrality rule and conduct transparently.

Administrative function. In this case tasks of the presidency are brought to preparing a half-year working calendar of the Council of European Union. Presidency's role is also to prepare and implement the agenda of different Council's formation, COREPER I and II and working parties as well. According to this function the country holding the presidency should provide all necessary working papers to the delegations of member states during the half year of chairing the meeting in the Council's formations, committees and working parties. While fulfilling this function an efficient cooperation with General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union and with the Permanent Representation of a given country holding the presidency in Brussels is necessary.

Planning function. After Lisbon treaty has come into force the long term programming is right now in the hands of the European Council chaired by its permanent President. The main task of the presidency has been limited to operational programming which means that the country holding this post is especially obliged to prepare an 18-months program of trio (i.e. one group presidency) and program of actions for a half year period. However, in every 18-months program there is an introductory section which sets the whole document in the context of long term strategic orientation of the EU. In order to make those programs more accountable objectives and priorities set in the mentioned documents should be clearly defined and put in hierarchical order. While working on those programming papers each presidency should co-operate with European Council, European Commission, European Parliament and Council of the European Union. In the last body the Presidency works together with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in terms of setting the program of the Foreign Affairs Council. The list of actions to be undertaken by the Presidencies especially ought to correspond to the annual legislative plans of the European Commission. Another guideline for countries preparing to hold the presidency is that there should be a visible continuity between programs of different Presidencies. A continuity rule means that programs have to contain hitherto presidency's achievements in a given field (for example

⁴ More detailed and comprehensive description institutional changes influencing the Presidency and its functions one can find in Węc, 2009: 35-45.

in enlargement policy) and assume that interrupted or not finished tasks will move forward.

Co-ordination function. The country holding the presidency should assure an efficient coordination of work within the Council. This means that collaboration ought to take place between different Council configurations but also efficiency, cohesion and continuity of activities have to be secured at the level of working parties, committees and COREPER functioning within the Council. The presidency has to guarantee a coordination between Council and other EU institutions. This especially applies to the presidency taking part in the name of the Council in legislative activities in the forum of informal triad and Conciliation Committee. This task is also an aspect of inter-institutional representation to which the presidency is obliged as well.

Representative function. We can distinguish two aspects of this function. The first one is the internal representation which concerns i.a. performing in the European Parliament and taking part in the work of European Parliament's commissions. Presidency should be also visible during the meetings of the European Council without detriment to the functions and obligations of other bodies like the President of the European Council. The second aspect of the representative function is an external representation. This concerns the relations of the EU with third countries and international organizations. It is High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy who has leading role in this field. There are some areas however, where the Presidency can play more visible role. For example it is solving international crises with cooperation and support of the High Representative and President of the European Council. Presidency can also conclude international agreements with third countries or international organization and represent the EU at international conferences.

Lisbon treaty has put more accent on the more managerial and technocratic functions of the presidency (co-ordination, administrative, mediating) than on those underlining its political leadership role (planning, representative). New rules pushed political presidency into shadow. Leaders of member states holding the mentioned post are not visible to the European public opinion the same way as the president of the European Council and even the president of European Commission are. To prove it just analyze who "gives the face" to the main political initiatives in the EU or explain the extraordinary events (like migration crisis or breaching the rule of law) that show up in the EU quite frequently lately. It is either the president of the European Commission or European Council. We can meet the political representative of the presidency mostly in the EU "family photos" or its signature under the conclusion from the Council's formation meetings. Despite this, EU presidency, especially in new members states or in those which are going to chair the Council of the EU for the first time, is a big political event. It is described as a test of maturity in term of political and administrative capability.

It seems that current presidency formula is the idea of even more enhanced *responsabilité sans pouvoir* (eng. responsibility without power) (Tallberg, 2003: 2-4; Dewost, 1984: 31). Responsibility in this case shows up in coordination of legislative process in different formations of the Council of the EU and its working groups. It is expected from the presidency that it will mediate between conflict interest and build the broadest possible consensus over the legal and political issues in the Council (Peterson-Bomberg, 1999: 35; Westlake, 1999: 50; Ludlow, 1995: 157; Schout-Vanhoonacker, 2006: 1054). This expectation is so strong that it effectively suppresses any possibility to articulate national priorities more openly. Eventually a member state after forwarding the presidency to the next country changes its rhetoric into a more critical one (Virostková, 2016).

A more suitable description for the member state holding the presidency is like that of a technocratic manager, whose only task is to implement properly and without bumps the project called “half-year of member state’s presidency in the Council of the EU”. The range for implementing the political aspect of the presidency, if it is possible at all under those circumstances, has radically shrunk. That is why we need to work on a better description apparatus which could explain the conduct of the presidency and the effectiveness of its actions in the post-Lisbon times.

PROJECT ASSESSMENT PERSPECTIVE – A NEW MODEL FOR ASSESSING THE EU PRESIDENCY

As it was proved in current institutional, legal and systemic regime of the Lisbon treaty the EU presidency is doomed to be most of all technocratic. Consequently, any political face of the presidency that can implement the member state’s national preferences during six months is bounded by highly demanding administrative function. In order to honestly assess the conduct and achievements of the post-Lisbon presidency we need to find more adequate indicators of a technocratic character of the EU presidency.

A new behavioral model for assessing the EU presidency stipulates to see the presidency as a project, what, according to the project management guidelines, allows us to broaden the assessment categories or indicators. It is not only the assessment on the output side of the presidency, but a more nuanced approach that concentrates on the input side. Therefore, the latter embraces also ex-ante assessment concentrating on preparation of the presidencies and explaining what the ambitions of the member state are to be at the helm of the Council.

In the book *Skuteczność polskiej prezydencji w Unii Europejskiej* edited by Krzysztof Szczerski published after the Polish presidency in the second half of the year 2011 a new theoretical model for evaluation of the presidency was proposed. Explaining the presidency by the category of a project was dictated by the assumption that a universal instrument for every technocracy is a project-approach behavior and its effective management. First prerequisite for proposing project assessment perspective was a high similarity between definitions of a project and the role of the presidency. In the literature, a project is defined as an activity:

- aimed at accomplishing objectives;
- involving many actors to this task, arranged in specific organizational structure (in case of presidency this concerns especially a national administration);
- characterized by definite beginning and end;
- different from routine procedures of a given organization (in case of presidency: the procedures of national administration);
- characterized by unrepeatability (country holds presidency once every several years)⁵.

Secondly, in the case of both – presidency and project – we can distinguish three stages of realization: planning, implementation and evaluation. The first one pertains an

⁵ The most common definitions of a project, prepared by the leading institutions in project management, point at its temporal and purposefulness character: Project Management Institute, 2004: 5-6; European Commission, 2004: 8-9. Definition presented in the article, beside temporal and purposefulness, includes also an administration and organizational aspect of every project, which in my opinion properly corresponds with the character of presidency: Pawlak, 2001: 7-9.

objectives' programming, preparing the human, administrative and financial resources. In the second stage, all prepared resources and plans from the planning phase are put into practice, during the defined time. The last phase concentrates on the outcome of the project which evaluation is important for the public opinion and political opposition.

Thirdly, the project is obliged to achieve material or non-material results. The same expectation is formulated towards the presidency. The project management applies the rule of accountability to this situation and uses two kinds of indicator - performance and outcome indicators - for measurement of undertaken actions. However, we need to be aware of the problem of referring the outcome indicator to the presidency. The methodology stipulates that the outcome is measured by non-material impact on an indicated subject of project's intervention. In contrary to the for example educational project in the case of the EU presidency we cannot distinguish a concrete social group that will benefit from the undertakings. The presidency is aimed generally at all institutions and actors functioning within the system of the EU. Another barrier for a proper measurement of outcome indicators is also a short period of chairing the Council. An impact of a public intervention is visible in longer period of time. Thus, six, twelve or even eighteen months are not enough to measure the effects of presidency activities in line with the outcome indicators.

In project management indicators are broadly used to show the material effect of the project. Theoretically it is possible also to define such indicators in that case of presidency (for example adopted legal acts, signed agreements etc.). However, this still omits the political nature of the EU presidency which is ineradicable when we are dealing with the sovereign state and not supranational institution. In order to avoid problematic elements of traditional indicators, but not to violate the rule of accountability, the adequate benchmarks for measuring the presidency's effectiveness refer to the nature of presidency's objectives. On the one hand this proposal is based on project management guidelines that objectives need to be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant or realistic and time-bound (SMART rule) (Szpak-Dulak, 2012: 34). On the other hand, belief that the nature of presidency's objectives is an accurate category for assessing the presidency rises from agenda shaping competencies. Before Lisbon treaty entered into force this feature described the political nature of the presidency held by sovereign state (Thomson, 2008; Tallberg, 2004: 1019-1020; Warntjen, 2007). Today this competency bounded however, allows member state to control the legislative process in the Council phase, smuggling the amendments to the legislative proposals or used most suitable negotiations strategies empowering the presidency to achieve its objectives.

Following the above stated assumption we can distinguish three pairs of categories describing the character of the objectives, which indicates the ambitions of the incoming EU presidency (Dulak, 2013: 104):

- a) innovative objective/continuity objective,
- b) firm objective/soft objective,
- c) agreed objective/individual objective.

The first pair refers to the content of the objectives. It describes whether the presidency decides to put an issue on the agenda, which has not been previously raised by other presidencies, or has not been on the presidencies agenda for a long time. Those objectives refer also to the situation, when presidency proposes a new, unconventional way of dealing with a given subject. Continuity objective on the contrary concerns those matters, chosen by the presidency, which carry on current processes and initiatives. Despite that in the post-Lisbon model presidency continuity objectives are dominant, the presence of

innovative objectives points at ambitions of a country chairing the Council to shape the European policies according to its ideas and conceptions.

The second pair of objectives' character refers to the predictable results of a given objective. In the case of a firm objective the presidency expects to conclude documents which are legally and politically important for the actors within the system of the EU. The examples of such documents are secondary legislation acts, bi- and multilateral agreements, compromises reached in the Council over particular policy issues, but also reports, conference's conclusions and *sui generis* legislation (resolutions, guidelines, etc.). Other examples of firm objectives are those initiatives which result in introducing a new mechanism or institution within one of the European policies or initiation of the formal or informal meeting of a new body, for example at the margin of the different Council's formations meeting.

The third type of objectives shows whether the given objective has a cooperation capacity. In other words, an agreed objective is the one which has a potential to gather broad support from other member states or EU institutions. In a post-Lisbon presidency model the majority of the objectives chosen by the member state holding the post needs to be agreed ones. Therefore, all objectives that continue the common EU agenda are simultaneously agreed among the member states within trio and with EU institutions. However, it is still possible that the presidency will force through an objective which continues the EU agenda but has no potential to gain broader support which eventually makes it an individual objective. Thus, the presidency, acting rationally, will strive to gain support of other member states or institutions either at the planning or implementing phase, for a particular issue which is important for its presidency agenda. Among the methods of getting support there are alliances forming inside the Council; earning a goodwill of important institutions in the legislative process, i.e. European Commission and European Parliament; initiating less formal lobbying groups, like friends of the presidency. The clearness of this category of objectives is better seen when we analyze the EU presidency objectives at the lowest level of ministerial goals or the Council's formation agenda.

When dealing with the program of the EU presidency we encounter different levels of objectives. Those are i.a. trio presidency goals, general national priorities for the presidency time, operational objectives for each of the configurations of the Council of the European Union and also detailed ministerial goals. Ministerial or trio presidency priorities referring to the configurations in the Council are very detailed which is the consequence of the legislative agenda of the EU and political schedule of the EU institutions. Of course, it is possible to assess them through the above presented three types of objectives, but the member state holding the presidency has little field left to select or cut out them from its program. That is why the general national priorities are more interesting research subjects because they indicate the broad vision of what outcome is expected by the member state. That is why these kinds of objectives will be a subject of empirical research in the following part of the article.

INSTITUTIONAL ADJUSTMENT OF THE NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION TO THE EU PRESIDENCY

The rational choice institutionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism stipulate that the aim of institutions is reducing the transactional costs of bargaining between actors. Thus certain formal institutions as well as informal ones are created and systematically maintained by political actors to maximize their utility, which in politics means to achieve optimal level of fulfilled preferences. Conforming (adapting) an organization of this part of public administration of a member state that will face the challenges of the leadership in the Council of the European Union is imposed exactly by the willingness of achieving satisfactory outcome of political transactions within the institutions of the EU. The outcome has to be consistent with the national preferences forged during the political rivalry over the EU issues. However, at the time of taking the office of the presidency another kind of exogenously formed preferences is imposed on the member state i.e. an expectation of being the impartial mediator and gatekeeper of neutrality. Taking into account the systemic changes introduced by the Lisbon treaty it is reasonable to predict the clash of those two contradictory preferences of the member state holding the presidency. The fourth chapter is describing the adjustment of the public administration of the incoming six-month leader of the Council of the EU. It is supposed to show to what extent a new limited role of the presidency is perceived at the national level by the member states. The higher political level of national authorities is directly involved in preparing the presidency, the poorer understanding of the consequences of the Lisbon treaty. The litmus paper in this case is the position of the main leader of the government's preparation for the EU presidency.

In most of the analyzed countries the responsibility for the preparation of the EU presidency of a given member state was laid in the area of competences of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Organizational arrangements were diverse however. The Hungarian government appointed two government commissioners. One was responsible for the general overview of the preparations of the Hungarian presidency and shared his/her responsibilities with the Minister of State for EU Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He/She served as the organizational, logistic and operational head of the Hungarian EU presidency. Thus its function had a horizontal dimension which allowed it to cover inter-ministerial coordination in all aspects referring to the presidency (including communication and budget) (EU2011.hu) and also initiated government action in these matters. The second government commissioner had more precise responsibilities covering the preparation of the Hungarian position for implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. These solutions clearly showed that the government tried to give the high political meaning to one of the issues which is important for Hungary.

Poland's government on 15 July 2008 established the post of the Government Plenipotentiary for the Preparation of Government Administration Bodies and the Presidency of the Council of the European Union by the Republic of Poland (Dz.U. 2008 Nr 133 Poz. 843). Mikołaj Dowgielewicz, then secretary of state in the UKIE and later a secretary of state in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was appointed at this post. His scope of responsibilities was broad and referred to coordinating the activities of government administration bodies; coordinating the preparation of the program, calendar, goals and priorities of the presidency of the Council of the European Union; initiating and coordinating the preparation of legal acts preparing government administration bodies for the presidency; supervision on finances needed for the programming and running of the presidency.

Lithuania had a more dispersed model of coordination of the preparation for the EU presidency. In 2009 the Lithuanian government gave the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a central role in coordinating the preparations for the EU presidency (Vilpišauskas et al., 2013: 21-22; Čeponytė, 2015). MFA served as horizontal coordinator, whereas practical coordination with line ministries has been based since 2011 on the network of coordinators. Political coordination has been ensured since 2009 by Government Commission on EU affairs gathering at the level of deputy ministers and chaired by the minister of foreign affairs.

Similarly to Lithuania Slovakia also used dispersed model of coordination, although with the clear hierarchy. Organizational structure of Slovak presidency in the EU was coordinated on two levels (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, 2013: 12-13; Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic, 2016). At the top of hierarchy stood the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, which was responsible for overall coordination of the presidency. A coordination body established on the first level of mentioned structure was Inter-ministerial Coordination Committee for the Preparation of Slovak Presidency 2016. It started operating in 2012 and consisted with state secretaries of ministries and the Head of the Government Office. The committee was chaired by the State Secretary of the Foreign Affairs Ministry who was concurrently the government's plenipotentiary for EU presidency preparation. Committee served as "expert advisory governmental body on the preparation of Slovak EU presidency in 2016, advised ministries and other central bodies of state administration in all aspects of the preparations and put forward relevant proposals to the government" (Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic, 2016). Specific issues like budget matters, human resources, public service training. Logistic, security, cultural and media coverage were overviewed by working groups working under the auspices of the Inter-ministerial Committee (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, 2013: 15). Second level of the Slovak EU presidency coordination organization was composed of sectorial working groups established in ministries and other central bodies of state administration. They were responsible for preparing the agenda and ministerial objectives as well as coordination the legislative processes at the appropriate formation of the Council of the EU specific area.

Bulgaria, the last analyzed country, encountered institutional turbulences during the preparation for the EU presidency. On 14 January 2015, the Bulgarian Council of Ministers established a National Coordination Mechanism for the preparation of the Bulgarian Presidency within the framework of the existing Coordination Mechanism of the European Union. The Deputy Prime Minister for Coordination of European Policies and Institutional Affairs Meglena Kuneva (BTA, 2015) was designated as National Coordinator for the preparation of the Republic of Bulgaria for the Presidency of the Council of the EU. However, after the Brexit in June 2016 the European Council changed the order of the EU presidency schedule. Estonia which was supposed to hold the EU presidency in the first half of 2018 r. substituted United Kingdom's shift in the second half of 2017. Subsequently Bulgarian presidency was moved back to the first half of 2018 which meant that Bulgaria needed to increase her efforts to finalize all planned preparation six months earlier than expected. This resulted in changes in national mechanism for coordination of the Bulgarian Presidency. However, the government just after the UK Brexit referendum was still considering two options - a presidency in the first or second half of 2018 (BalkanInsight, 2016). At the end of August 2016 Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov became the national coordinator for the preparation of presidency. Each of the

field of preparation was assigned to the members of the Council of Ministers⁶. Thus the national mechanism of coordination for the presidency got the highest priority in day-to-day work of government and the adjustment activities were shifted from the bureaucratic path to the political one.

At the beginning of May 2017 a new organizational unit of the Bulgarian government has been established – Ministry for the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of EU 2018. On 4 May Narodno Sabranie elected Lilyana Pavlova, former long-serving Minister of Regional Development, as the minister in charge. Since then all government's activities referring to the EU presidency have been transferred to the separate institution which had a unique structure of its own. The structure reflected all important issues like communication, public procurement, administrative and logistic that Bulgaria had to face before the EU presidency started⁷.

An important change has been introduced within the organizational structure responsible for the presidency preparation. On 29 August 2017 the government established a new body – Coordination Board for the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Its responsibility focused on the operational supervision of the negotiation process of all stakeholders within the Council of the European Union. The Bulgarian government's decision showed how much pressure and importance are put on a seamless process of technical negotiations over the EU legislative proposals. The Board is responsible for providing guidance on the manner in which the negotiations are conducted. At the same time, the Board supports also the national officials and institutions responsible for brokering the positions of other member states. The Board is chaired by the Deputy Minister for the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2018, responsible for relations with the European Parliament. Other members of the Board are: head of the Prime Minister's political cabinet, deputy ministers, representatives of the governing bodies of other institutions and departments, the Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the EU, the directors of the Directorates "EU Coordination" at the Council of Ministers and "Policies and Institutions in the EU" in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BTA, 2017, BNT, 2017).

GOALS OF THE PRESIDENCY

HUNGARY

The Hungarian EU presidency proposed four general priorities. The first one was called "Growth, jobs and social inclusion" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, 2011: 6-8). The name implied multithreaded activities, which were mostly continuing the European Commission's initiatives started before. At the top of the list was to reach final compromise by June 2011 on the European Commission's legislative proposals for

⁶ The Prime Minister was responsible for the overall management and control. He was assisted by Coordination of EU Affairs Directorate settled in the Council of Ministers Office. Deputy Prime Minister for European Policies Coordination and Institutional Affairs Meglena Kuneva was responsible for the logistics and coordination of the Presidency's team. Deputy Prime Minister for EU Funds and Economic Policy Tomislav Donchev coordinated the preparation of the infrastructure (ex. Buildings) needed for the presidency events. Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Roumyana Buchvarova was responsible for security. Minister of Finance Vladislav Goranov oversaw the budget, Foreign Minister Daniel Mitov was responsible for the communications strategy and the Minister of Culture Vezhdi Rashidov – for the cultural program, see: BNT, 2016.

⁷ See official web page of the Ministry of The Bulgarian Presidency of the EU Council (<http://bg-eupresidency.gov.bg/en/home>, accessed 10.05.2018).

enhanced economic governance⁸. According to the conclusions of the European Council from December 2010 an arrangement that establishes the European Stability Mechanism had to be finalized and following this the decision on the necessary Treaty amendment - had to be adopted by March 2011. Hungary declared its assistance by starting up a new European System of Financial Supervision from January 2011 and which task was to strengthen the surveillance on the financial market institutions. Another activity within first priority provided the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy by launching for the first time the European semester and implementing especially its flagships: the Innovation Union and Digital Union. Hungary planned also to adopt Council's conclusions on other flagships initiatives of the Europe 2020 strategy i.e. Platform Against Poverty and on Resource Efficient Europe. Special attention was paid to the first one because Hungary focused there on a topic that had not been explored before and which lay in its national interest. The Hungarian EU presidency planned to endorse EU Framework on National Roma Integration Strategies which should have helped member states to correctly address child poverty, education and job problems. Proposing EU Framework on National Roma Integration Strategies, which highlighted the Roma issue, was strictly individual goal and innovative one (Vizi, 2011: 126-129).

Within the second priority - "Stronger Europe - building on the foundations and protecting the future" - Hungary strived to strengthen cooperation in the field of food, energy and water policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, 2011: 9-10). The main point here was to review the Common Agricultural Policy and to launch preparatory discussions of strategic importance on the future of the CAP and cohesion policy as a basis for discussions on the multiannual financial framework 2014-2020. Regarding the energy policy, the presidency flagship initiative was to be special meeting of the European Council in February 2011 which should have provided political orientation to building key infrastructure and financing necessary investments, as well as harmonizing national technical regulations. The Hungarian EU presidency wanted to ensure the implementation in the EU the decisions of the UN Climate Change Conference from Cancún adopted in December 2010. In this regard Hungary devoted special attention to management of extreme water-related events. This last area is associated with a very important strategy for Hungary, adopted in early December 2010, the macroregional European Danube Region Strategy the implementation of which was also the priority of the Hungarian Presidency. The second priority can be described as continuing with mainly soft results expected but we can also find innovative but agreed objectives as in the case of management of extreme water-related events and implementing European Danube Region Strategy.

The third objective of the Hungarian Presidency - "A Union close to its citizens" - concerned such issues as the further implementation of the provisions of the Stockholm Program, protecting fundamental rights, the extension of the Schengen area to Bulgaria and Romania, and the protection of cultural diversity as a European value (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, 2011: 11-12). Contrary to the last two initiatives, especially in the first two ones Hungary declared to achieve firm results. Regarding the implementation of the Stockholm Programme Hungary put an emphasis to adopt a common set of rules on succession, what would make cross-border relationships easier. The presidency intended also to adopt Council conclusions that would help make "better use of the possibilities provided in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, 2011: 12). During its presidency Hungary

⁸ It comprised of improving fiscal discipline, extending economic surveillance, deepening co-operation, strengthening the institutions and establishing the European Stability Mechanism by mid 2013.

intended also to ensure that citizens can use the instrument European Citizens' Initiative as soon as possible. The third objective can be described as continuity one.

The fourth objective of the Hungarian EU presidency called "Enlarging responsibly and engaging globally" referred to moving forward enlargement processes and developing EU external relations. A continuity and agreed character of this goal was shown in the declaration that "the Presidency will cooperate hand in hand with the Member States, the Commission and the candidates in order to take the process forward" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, 2011: 13). Therefore, ambitious declaration of Hungary concerned concluding the accession negotiation with Croatia, making progress in negotiation with Turkey, bringing first results in negotiation with Iceland and being ready to start accession negotiation with Macedonia as soon as the Council reached a decision. The nature of other goals under the fourth objective was rather soft (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, 2011: 14-16). Hungary put significance on the neighborhood policy by declaring commitment to Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and organizing the second Eastern Partnership summit. The European External Action Service took up its duties during the Hungarian Presidency that is why Hungary declared that it would assist in building institutional capacity of EEAS i.a. by harmonizing EU's civil and military crisis-management capabilities with structure of EEAS. Hungary declared also continuing debate on increasing the effectiveness of EU's development policy in order to show a progress in reaching the UN Millennium Development Goals.

POLAND

The background of Poland's EU presidency was also set up by initiatives aimed at the recovery of the EU economy after the crisis of the years 2010-2011. In the half-year program of the presidency of the Council of the EU the Polish government defined three priorities: European Integration as a Source of Growth, Secure Europe, Europe Benefiting from Openness (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, 2011: 5).

The first objective assumed continuing the economic governance enhancement for the coordination of the fiscal policies of the member states but also taking measures which ensure boosting the common market (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, 2011: 6-7). Polish presidency was tasked with starting and advancing as far as it is possible the negotiation over the European Commission's proposal for the new multiannual financial framework for the years 2014-2020. Within the first objective Poland also continued to work on legislative motion implementing 7 out of 12 levers contained in the Single Market Act issued by the European Commission in April 2011. Among the mentioned levers Poland focused i.a. on development of e-commerce and establishing one legal regime (blue button) for the whole EU, finalizing work on a European patent system and providing a platform for rising the awareness about single market opportunities by organizing for the first time Single Market Forum. Therefore, the first priority of Poland's EU presidency can be described as a continuity one, but with visible willingness of achieving firm goals.

The second priority called Secure Europe referred to broad understanding of security, thus it included financial security objectives, energy security, food security and defence (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, 2011: 8-9). In all of these areas the role of the Polish presidency came down to supporting actions already taken by the European Commission (European Semester) or to facilitate discussion over certain issues (reform of Common Agricultural Policy, enhancement of EU structures within Common Security and Defence

Policy and developing the EU-NATO dialogue). Therefore, the abovementioned second objective can be described as continuity aimed at achieving soft results.

By adopting the third objective Poland wanted to show itself as a votary proponent of enlarging the EU seeing in it a possibility to strengthen EU internally and externally by disseminating European values and regulations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, 2011: 10-11). The priority “Europe Benefiting from Openness” was mostly focused on Eastern Partnership. In this case the Polish EU presidency’s activities were planned as multithreaded and firm. The presidency announced that EU will conclude Association Agreements and create deep and comprehensive free trade areas by finalizing or making visible progress in negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova. Making progress in the process of visa liberalization and deepening sectoral cooperation were also important goals for the presidency. Moreover, the Eastern Partnership agenda was planned in such a way to achieve also firm goals, like Eastern Partnership Summit organized in Warsaw, ministerial-level meetings and Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership. Other EU activities in the field were only mentioned to have a support of presidency (Southern Neighborhood programs, setting up new framework for cooperation between EU and Russia and keeping the accession negotiations with other countries like Turkey, Iceland on track). Within the third objective Poland assumed to achieve a firm goal which was to sign the Accession Treaty with Croatia. The character of the third objective of the Polish EU presidency on the one hand is continuity on the other hand it is individual and innovative. Poland dragged out the Eastern Partnership from the EU political agenda, which had lost its impetuous since establishing the initiative in 2008. Moreover, Poland put more effort on evolving the Eastern Partnership than on other topics which made this objective individual and focused on firm results but still it was concurrent to the Southern dimension of European Neighborhood Policy.

LITHUANIA

Lithuania set three objectives for its EU presidency period. The first objective was called “Credible Europe” and it focused on providing a stable financial sector and public finances with simultaneous strengthening the social dimension of the EU (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, 2013: 4-6). The role of this objective was to continue the implementation of guidelines from the report by the President of the European Council “Towards a Genuine Economic and Monetary Union”, the “Blueprint for a deep and genuine Economic and Monetary Union” by the European Commission and following up on the decisions taken by the European Council in June 2013 on further strengthening the Economic and Monetary Union. Thus Lithuania declared to proceed with discussions on establishing Banking Union and to make progress on negotiations on Single Resolution Mechanism. Lithuania focused also on keeping an eye on the implementation of EU Fiscal Compact, smooth application of the Stability and Growth Pact, strengthening budgetary surveillance mechanisms in the Euro area (implementing two-pack). Lithuania took into account the political guidelines of the European Council of 2013 to continue the work in the field of combating tax fraud and tax evasion during its presidency time. Concerning the strengthening social dimension of the EU, Lithuanian Presidency planned to enhance the protection of fundamental rights, raised public awareness (especially among youth) of shared EU values and to highlight the interests of EU citizens. To underline the importance of those issues during the European Year of Citizens, Lithuania planned to host an International Conference on those matters in Vilnius on 12-13 December 2013.

The second objective of Lithuanian EU presidency was called “Growing Europe” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, 2013: 6-9). First of all, Lithuania had to complete the legislative process of the MFF for 2014-2020 and ensure to finalize it by 1 January 2014. The Presidency also had to adopt the first annual EU budget for 2014. Subsequently Lithuania planned for its six-month term at the helm of the Council of the European Union to moderate the discussion on EU digital agenda, strengthening of research and innovation policy. Thus Lithuania sought to ensure that the Horizon 2020 program involving the European Institute of Innovation and Technology and the Euratom program were implemented from early 2014. In November 2013 there was planned an international conference in Vilnius on opportunities for digital technologies and innovation in the EU. Under the “Growing Europe” objective Lithuania focused on pushing forward the debate and continuing the implementation of several measures referring to the single market. Those were i.a. reaching agreement on electronic identification, reaching agreement on Single Market Act I, making progress on Single Market Act II, providing favorable regulations in line Small Business Act. A continuity character had also the presidency initiatives referring to the internal energy market (implementation of third energy package, review 2011 Council conclusion on external dimension of the EU energy policy, discussing the first list of energy projects of common interest). Lithuanian EU presidency focused also on the promotion of social cohesion by implementation of the youth employment package (i.e. Youth Guarantee Initiative and encouragement of apprenticeships) and organized discussions on the better protection of worker rights. An innovative character had the last goal of the Lithuanian EU presidency planned under the “Growing Europe” objective. Lithuania intended to organize a debate over the assessment of the macro-regional strategies published in the mid of 2013. At that time two of those strategies were operating i.e. Baltic Sea Region Strategy and Danube Region Strategy. In November 2013 the presidency planned to organize in Vilnius an 4th Annual Forum on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, where the implementation of the Strategy was discussed with partners, with a particular focus on environmental protection.

The third objective of Lithuanian EU presidency was called “Open Europe” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, 2013: 9-11). It referred to the external relation of the EU. On 28-29 November 2013 in Vilnius presidency planned to host the third Eastern Partnership Summit which expected to mark progress in political association and economic integration with Eastern Partnership countries by finalizing association agreements including the establishment of deep and comprehensive free trade area. Less interest was aimed at Southern neighborhood, where Lithuania only declared its support to the promotion of democracy, human rights and sustainable growth. Thus Eastern Partnership goal can be considered as innovative and individual. During the Lithuanian presidency, EU Council was to set EU Enlargement policy guidelines for 2014 which should push forward negotiations with Turkey and Montenegro, and ensure European perspective for the remaining countries of the Western Balkans. In other issues falling under the “Open Europe” objective Lithuania wanted to continue negotiation of free trade agreements with the United States and Japan and to achieve further progress in discussing the “Smart Borders” package. Lithuanian EU presidency declared also to take steps to prepare for the implementation of the 11th European Development Fund and to contribute to the development of the EU ability to respond to new security challenges in the field of energy, cyber and maritime security, as well as to strengthen practical EU and NATO cooperation and to enhance the efficiency of EU battle groups, EU missions and operations.

SLOVAKIA

The Slovak EU presidency formulated four priorities. The first one named “Economically strong Europe” is an example of pure continuity goal. Slovakia focused on continuing the guidelines established in the Five Presidents’ Report of June 2015 that proposed a three-phase plan on establishing full Economic and Monetary Union. Therefore, the presidency focused on building the EMU's fiscal pillar, examining the possibility of setting up common macroeconomic stabilization tools and pursued discussions on the European deposit insurance scheme (an element of Banking Union). Another aspect of activities undertaken in first priority was to boost public and private investments by i.a. increasing the investment potential of European Fund for Strategic Investments, making progress in establishing Capital Market Union, holding debate on the mid-term review of the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework, evaluating European Structural and Investment Funds (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, 2016: 6-7).

The second objective called “Modern single market” referred only to few issues Slovakia chose to pilot during six months (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, 2016: 8). These were: supporting efforts to create energy union by improving the security of gas supply by tapping the potential of cross-border and regional cooperation; contributing to forming a digital single market and promoting the solutions that contribute to sustainable growth like ratification of Paris Agreement and developing the idea of circular economy all around the EU single market. Therefore, the character of the second priority is generally continuing the processes which were underway. However, the ratification of the Paris Agreement was not only an agreed objective but also expecting a firm result.

The third priority of the Slovak EU presidency focused on managing the aftermath of migration crisis in 2015 (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, 2016: 9-10). Thus it is justified to look at this priority as *ad hoc* or imposed on Slovakia due to developing the legal proposal of the European Commission from May and July 2016 referring to the reform of the Common European Asylum System. A comprehensive agenda of the presidency in given priority speaks for this remark. The Slovak EU presidency focused on maintaining the undisturbed Schengen area with simultaneous protection of the external borders. The latter were to be strengthened by deploying European Border Guard, implementing modern information technologies into border management and cooperation with third countries. In its presidency programme Slovakia announced: “The Slovak Presidency feels a strong responsibility for further developments in this debate, and wishes it to move forward in those areas where there is agreement among the Member States” (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, 2016: 10). As a consequence, a character of third priority is to be described as continuing aimed at soft results.

The fourth priority of the Slovak EU presidency was called “Globally engaged Europe”. It assumed continuing development in the area of common foreign and security policy which were pointed out in the EU Global Strategy of Foreign and Security Policy accepted just before the Slovak presidency in June 2016. Slovakia focused on strengthening transatlantic ties, bilateral free trade agreements with third countries, implementation of the Agenda 2030 concerning the development cooperation, starting the debate on future relations with Africa, Caribbean and Pacific countries and supporting stabilization initiatives in two dimensions of the European neighborhood policy. Even in enlargement policy, Slovak presidency declared only, without any concrete expected results, that it would achieve progress in accession process with candidate countries. Therefore, the fourth priority seemed to be also continuing aimed at soft results.

BULGARIA

The first objective of the Bulgarian presidency is called “The Future of Europe and the Young People – Economic Growth and Social Cohesion” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, 2018: 7-10). The general background for activities under this goal will set a proposal for post 2020 multiannual financial framework. First of all, Bulgarian Presidency will launch the debate between EU institutions and member states about the mentioned proposal. The Bulgarian presidency will also open a debate on the future of cohesion policy and continue the debate on common agricultural policy. Therefore, it justifies to call it an innovative goal. Bulgaria however chooses to move on with two specific issues referring to first of the mentioned policies - to optimize the model of shared management and effective implementation of the principle of proportionality and also to work on the harmonization of the rules of the Union’s funds and instruments to find balance between grants and financial instruments, as well as between traditional priorities and new challenges. This in turn allows to call this objective individual because eventually it is hard to say on what issues member states would like to reach consensus. Bulgaria is also continuing the agenda set by the Five Presidents’ Report and the Commission’s White Paper aimed at deepening the EMU. Thus presidency is working on the legislative proposal for the creation of a European Deposit Guarantee Scheme and on measures for building the Capital Markets Union. Bulgaria put young people in a central place in the debate on the Future of Europe. That is why it is aimed to provide the continuation of the work on the European Commission package on “Modernizing Education – Youth Initiative”, New Skills Agenda for Europe and support the European Solidarity Corps and the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships. Bulgaria will also evaluate the mid-term of the Erasmus+ program facilitating the political discussion on its future, in the context of the proposal of the European Commission on the new MFF.

The second objective called “European Perspective and Connectivity of the Western Balkans” seems to be very specific and that is why it can be called individual, innovative and is aimed at firm results according to project assessment perspective (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, 2018: 10). The presidency program states that “The Bulgarian Presidency’s ambition is to be a Balkan Presidency” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, 2018). Bulgaria will follow the guidelines from the European Commission’s “Strategy of the Commission for a successful EU accession of Serbia and Montenegro as frontrunner candidates in the Western Balkans” announced in February 2018. The most important event during the presidency will be an informal Summit of the Heads of State and Government devoted to the Western Balkans – on 17 May 2018 in Sofia.

The third objective of the Bulgarian Presidency is called “Security and Stability in a Strong and United Europe” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, 2018: 11-13). It is a continuity objective with soft result expected and aimed firstly at achieving progress on the reform of the Common European Asylum System based on the principles of responsibility and solidarity. Secondly this objective assumes to work for the institutionalization and the launch of the work of the European Public Prosecutor’s Office. Thirdly, Bulgaria will organize discussions on the preparation of the new EU e-Justice Strategy 2019-2023, as well as on e-evidence. Fourthly, Bulgaria will work on the adoption of a revised text of the Regulation in the Jurisdiction, Recognition and Enforcement of Judgments in Matrimonial Matters in the area of parental responsibility and international child abduction (“Brussels IIa”). Under the third objective presidency will strive to achieve a stable Energy Union with a view to end the isolation of some of the Member States from the European gas and electricity grids. Bulgaria has declared to work on full implementation of all the initiatives ensuing from the EU Global Strategy,

deepening EU-NATO cooperation, as well as enhancing security in the Western Balkans. Bulgaria will also work to enhance the visibility of the Danube and the Black Sea regions by increasing their connectivity on the basis of the potential of the two regions. The last issue can be called innovative as macroregional strategies rarely develop during the EU presidencies for example from Western Europe member states.

The fourth objective of Bulgarian EU presidency is called “Digital Economy and Skills needed for the Future” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, 2018: 13-16). This objective is a continuity one and is based on soft results. Bulgaria is planning to accelerate the process of completing digital single market. Bulgaria will create the conditions for making audio-visual production and copyright protection elements of economic growth. The Presidency will also work to promote entrepreneurship based on digital technology and innovation. This connects with another initiative of continuing the work on the legislative proposals of the Services Package that simplify the regulatory framework to support business within the digital single market. Bulgaria wants to focus also on social fairness within the digital market. That is why it will promote social economy, with emphasis on social innovation; equal opportunities and gender equality; fostering full social inclusion for people with disabilities; protecting the workers’ rights.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The Lisbon treaty has changed the systemic role of the EU presidency. Its competences have been diminished by the creation of new institutional entities within the system of EU. As a consequence of these changes coordination, planning and representative functions were limited, as well as the instruments subscribed to them, which favored the presidency to play a role of the national interests’ representative. In consequence political science needs to seek new models which are going to describe the post-Lisbon EU presidency in a more adequate manner. The project assessment perspective presented in the above article is based on the ontology characteristic for project management theory. The prerequisites for this approach have been the structural changes of the EU presidency which have shifted from strong political actor toward technical manager of the Council of the European Union agenda. The project assessment perspective has also one more advantage over other methods of EU presidency evaluation. It covers not only the *ex-post* phase, where the output of the presidency assesses, but also the *ex-ante* phase, which focuses on assessing the input i.e. objectives and a program of the member state holding the presidency.

Defining the nature of the objectives of the Hungarian, Polish, Lithuanian, Slovak and Bulgarian EU presidencies according to the project assessment perspective, the author has been able to partially verify the hypothesis stated in the article. The domination of the continuity objectives and softer objectives than the firm ones (see table 1) allow to confirm that post-Lisbon EU presidency is gradually overwhelmed by the role of technocratic manager. And only a few individual and innovative objectives show that most of the member states donot want to put at risk the presidency agenda proposing new subjects or those which are cohesive with their national interest. Thus we can observe that the political aspect of presidency is slowly pushed out. An interesting case in this matter is Bulgaria. Member state which national preparations for the EU presidency were put on a high political level, has placed in its six-month program more innovative and individual objectives than the other four analyzed countries.

Table 1. Objectives' character of the Hungarian, Polish, Lithuanian, Slovak and Bulgarian EU presidencies in the years 2011-2018.

NAME OF THE OBJECTIVE	CHARACTER OF THE OBJECTIVE
HUNGARY	
Growth, jobs and social inclusion	Continuity with firm results but in some parts individual and innovative
Stronger Europe – building on the foundations and protecting the future	Continuity with soft results but in some parts innovative and agreed
A Union close to its citizens	Continuity with mixed soft and firm results
Enlarging responsibly and engaging globally	Continuity with mixed soft and firm results
POLAND	
European Integration as a Source of Growth	Continuity with firm results
Secure Europe	Continuity with soft results
Europe Benefiting from Openness	Continuity with firm results but in some parts individual, innovative.
LITHUANIA	
Credible Europe	Continuity with soft results
Growing Europe	Continuity with mixed soft and firm results – one innovative and agreed
Open Europe	Continuity with mixed soft and firm results - one innovative and individual
SLOVAKIA	
Economically strong Europe	Continuity with soft results
Modern single market	Continuity with soft results (one firm)
Sustainable migration and asylum policies	Continuing with soft results
Globally engaged Europe	Continuing with soft results
BULGARIA	
The Future of Europe and the Young People – Economic Growth and Social Cohesion	Continuity with soft results – one individual and innovative
European Perspective and Connectivity of the Western Balkans	Innovative and individual with firm results
Security and Stability in a Strong and United Europe	Continuity with soft results – one innovative
Digital Economy and Skills needed for the Future	Continuity with soft results

Source: own elaboration

In order to fully accomplish the project assessment of the EU presidency of the five chosen member states it is advisable to evaluate also the output side of each presidency. And concentrating only on the individual and innovative objectives will additionally help to verify on the stated hypothesis.

Hungary chose to endorse the EU Framework on National Roma Integration Strategies which was an innovative and individual objective as stated in chapter 5. The presidency

was successful to introduce this new issue into the EU agenda. As a first step Hungarian MEP Livia Járóka prepared a report and it was discussed then by four committees of the European Parliament. The European Commission issued an official proposal for EU Framework on National Roma Integration Strategies in April 2011. During the rest of the Hungarian presidency several Council formations discussed the Commission's proposal, which was then forwarded to the European Council.

Another innovative objective of the Hungarian presidency stipulated the implementation of the Danube Regional Strategy. The objective was described as "achieved for the most part" (Balázs, 2011: 5). During the Hungarian Presidency national coordinators of the Danube Region Strategy had been appointed and agreement was reached on several concrete projects (Molnárová, 2011: 12; Vida, 2011). Hungary also advocated for the principle of "three yes" instead of "three no" proposed by the European Commission. Thanks to that debate about Danube Regional Strategy was revolving around better alignment of existing funds and regional instruments (Molnárová, 2011: 13).

The Polish EU presidency wanted to give an impetus for Eastern Partnership which made its individual and innovative objective. Poland implemented this objective following its own plan (Węc, 2013: 16-18). During the second Eastern Partnership summit held on 29-30 September 2011 in Warsaw the delegation of EU-27 and five Eastern Partnership states (Belarus boycotted the meeting) reviewed the first two years of project implementation and signed Joint Declaration which consisted of i.a. declaration of lifting the visa requirements and increasing the allocation of funds for the Eastern Partnership projects. Additionally, the presidency has led to the establishment of two new bodies within the Eastern Partnership framework: the Eastern Partnership Business Forum and the Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership. Poland also closed negotiations on the signing of the Association Agreement with Ukraine and launching agreement negotiations with Georgia and Moldova (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, 2012: 135).

Lithuanian EU presidency focused on two goals which could be described as individual and innovative. Both were almost fully implemented and the only obstacle was independent from the Lithuanian presidency. First – an innovative goal – raised the environmental protection aspects, i.e. the implementation of the Baltic Sea Region Strategy. In 11-12 November 2012 in Vilnius 4th Annual Forum on the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region was organized. No final declaration or conclusion was adopted at the meeting, however. The second objective – innovative and individual – referred to organizing the third Eastern Partnership summit. During this event the EU presidency planned to sign an association agreement between Ukraine and the EU; to complete negotiations on association agreements and deep and comprehensive free trade agreements with Georgia, Moldova and Armenia; to advance negotiations with Azerbaijan; make progress in liberalizing the visa regime with Eastern Partnership countries. Due to the renouncement of the association agreement by the Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich civil demonstrations broke out in Ukraine. In result during the summit the presidency was able to initial association agreements and deep and comprehensive free trade agreements with Moldova and Georgia, to note the implementation of the visa facilitation plan in the case of Moldova and to sign visa facilitation with Azerbaijan (Vilpišauskas, 2014: 105-107).

The evaluation of the output of the presidency above shows that all objectives characterized as innovative or individual have been accomplished. On the one hand this proves that the member states holding the EU presidency still have ambitions to leave an imprint on the EU during their six-months at the helm. Even in the post-Lisbon presidency

model which diminishes the political potential of the EU presidency. On the other hand, full accomplishment of the innovative and individual objectives could not be possible without post-Lisbon presidency transformation into technocratic manager of the Council of the European Union agenda. Member states obliged to cope with continuing issues from the current working plan of the EU are able to carefully choose other objectives which are convergent with their preferences and are safe enough to mark them as a success of the given presidency.

All of the analyzed member states during their six-month presidencies had to deal with anti-crisis agenda referred to the systemic reform of the Economic and Monetary Union. The Slovak presidency showed that political crisis-management initiatives are becoming more frequent than everybody expected. The Bratislava declaration adopted by 27 heads of states or governments on 16 September 2016 was a necessary response for the migration crisis aftershocks and the outcome of the Brexit referendum. These new conditions for the EU presidencies seem to be already noticed by the member states. At the end of June 2017 during the meeting in Brussels Bulgaria's Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, Estonian Prime Minister Jüri Ratas and Austrian Prime Minister Christian Kern declared together that each of the trio-countries "*will stick to the priorities but will remain flexible in order to be able to respond adequately to unforeseen situations*"⁹. This declaration shows an important characteristic of the current presidencies, namely flexibility in adaptation to the unexpected events or crisis that could hit the EU in the close future.

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