

Riedel, R., 2014, *Rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union after Entry into Force of the Treaty of Lisbon. The Analysis of Presidency's Roles in the Transitional Period*, University of Opole Press, Opole, pp. 240.

For political scientists the phenomenon of the presidency of the Council of the European Union has been the research topic for many years. Most works published in this sphere are normative in their character and tend to evaluate politically the actual presidencies directly after they have ended. Against this background the book of Prof. Rafał Riedel is one of the best results of a new approach (at least in Polish literature) based on a combination of theoretical assumptions and his own empirical studies. The arguments of the book make an important contribution to both analyzing the Council as the main EU decision-making institution and theorizing European integration as a process with far-reaching institutional consequences.

In the author's view, the Council presidency as an institutional feature of the EU decision-making system underwent a very interesting historical evolution, from purely administrative functions through the gradual enhancing of its political significance, up to the re-construction of roles featured again with the diffusion and limitation of its political leadership. This latest tendency is related to the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon. In order to deepen the understanding of the rotating presidency four elements must have been analyzed: (a) the presence or absence of a political role for the presidency; (b) the dialogue between academic research and its practical applications; (c) the impact of Lisbon reform on the exercise of the presidency; (d) the identification, mapping and discussion of the presidency's role as re-defined in Lisbon.

The main research category of the book is the "role" referred to in the institution; that is, "the behavior expected in a specific institutional system and the set of rights and obligations connected with institutional position." The Author identifies three predominant roles of the presidency: the mediator, the administrator and the leader. The conceptualization of the "role" – to some extent paralleled with the "function" defined here in terms of "teleological quality of the

system or its element” – is based on expectations and perceptions of practitioners and theorists.

The first chapter of the book contains the presentation of the research topic. After having discussed the objectives, research questions and hypotheses the author motivates the selection of cases to be analyzed, describes the structure of his work and reviews the literature. The central research question is rooted in Lisbon EU reform: have the new treaty provisions really changed the presidency’s activity and – if they have – what are the basic elements of this change? The detailed questions concern: (a) legal reforms of the presidency; (b) their positioning on the evolutionary path of EU development; (c) legal and political connections between the rotating presidency and the standing President of the European Council; (d) legal expectations of the new presidency’s role; (e) changes in the composition of roles compared with pre-Lisbon era; (f) structures of roles in respect to the changing variables (at the level of the Council or political sector); (g) the mapping of expectations in respect of the specified categories of member states (old/new or big/small countries); (h) the practice of initial four post-Lisbon presidencies.

The main research hypothesis refers to the modification of methods of exercising the presidency after 2009. According to the author’s proposition the practice resulting from the legal power of the new treaty has both an institutional and a normative dimension. Further hypotheses are focused on: (a) the impact of legal reforms on the expectations and roles of the presidency; (b) the “proportionality” of legal and non-legal changes; (c) the perception of the new treaty as a “critical juncture” on the evolutionary path; (d) the correlations between the permanent European Council presidency and the (predominantly) rotating EU Council presidency; (e) changing the behavior that is expected from member states in comparison with former legal provisions; (f) distinctions in the structure of roles and its dependence on decision-making level and issues at stake; (g) the mapping of systemic expectations in respect of states’ characteristics.

The second chapter contains a detailed discussion of the methodological and theoretical contexts of the research. The author refers to the main schools and paradigms that can be used in the analysis of the presidency. With special focus on sociological neo-institutionalism he presents a really erudite overview of neofunctionalism,

intergovernmentalism, rational-choice neoinstitutionalism, constructivism, two-level game theory, a multi-level governance model and the “governance approach” judged here as the most popular vision among theorists. A very special place in this chapter is designed to Jonas Tallberg’s theory of formal leadership. The aim of this conception is to examine the tendency of sovereign member states to deepen the legalization and institutionalization of the presidency. Three leading explanations include the desire to avoid obstacles to be found in the EU decision-making system connected with the agenda, negotiation and representation. The rational expectation that member states calculate the benefits and losses from their national perspective need to be supplemented by the view that such a calculation does not necessarily lead to negotiators’ defending the egoistic interests of their respective states. In many cases the commitment to “calculated neutrality” can be strategically more profitable than defending selfish preferences.

The third chapter is dedicated to a legal and political scientific perspective on the Council presidency. The institutional solutions of the Treaty of Lisbon, the functioning of the Council system, the evolution of the presidency and its formal roles are elaborated in some detail. The current set of presidency’s roles includes no less than ten elements: (a) an administrative manager; (b) the chair of meetings; (c) the point of contact; (d) a broker; (e) an agenda manager; (f) an initiator; (g) an interinstitutional representative; (h) a representative to other third parties; (i) a leader; (j) defender of national interests. The many tables, diagrams and schemes make the book clearly readable for both academics and advanced practitioners. The fourth chapter encompasses empirical analyses of the progress of four post-Lisbon presidencies exercised by Spain, Belgium, Hungary and Poland. The explanation of this transitional stage is supplemented by the discussion of initial steps connected with the new treaty’s entry into force in December 2009 during the Swedish presidency.

In the author’s view the primary objective of the Lisbon presidency reform was the consolidation of the leadership in the Council and the rationalization of the Council’s functionality in relations with other EU institutions. As an effect of interinstitutional and international compromises, the current form of the presidency is called a “hybrid” phenomenon: a standing and rotating supranational component of an