

Governments and Bureaucracies

Post-Communist Politics PMCb1109,
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The executive branch of power

- historically the oldest branch of power
- following the breakdown of communism, the executive power was the most experimented with in the region
- before 1989, only Czechoslovakia and Romania had a presidential office
- POL – a collective head of state (the State Council)
- after 1989: strong powers of the presidents especially in the post-Soviet space

Presidential regimes and democracy

- presidential regimes less likely than parliamentarism to sustain democratic government (Linz, Stepan, Mainwaring) because
- 1. Presidential elections become “zero-sum games”, they exclude minorities
- 2. Produce competing claims of political legitimacy
- 3. Presidential democracies foster personalism of the executive
- 4. An outsider demagogue can capture the system and ignore the existing division of powers

Types of political systems

- **parliamentary** (a system of dependency between the executive and legislative branches of powers)
- **presidential** (a system of mutual independence of the executive and legislative branches)
- **semipresidential** (directly elected president and a prime minister accountable to the parliament)

Duverger: semipresidential systems

- President is directly elected by voters
- Not accountable to parliament
- Prime Minister is the head of government accountable to parliament
- Prime Minister and President share some executive powers
- president has “quite considerable powers”
- system is open to “cohabitation”

Two types of semipresidentialism

1/3

- **A premier-presidential subtype**
- the prime minister and cabinet are formally accountable *only* to the assembly, *not* to the president
- president appoints the prime minister who heads the governments
- only the parliament can remove the PM/government from office

Two types of semipresidentialism

2/3

- a **president-parliamentary subtype**
- the prime minister and cabinet are *dually* accountable to the president and the assembly majority
- president appoints and recalls the PM and government ministers
- the PM and ministers are accountable to both the president and the parliament

Two types of semipresidentialism

3/3

- **president-parliamentary** systems tend to be less democratic than premier-presidential ones
- the key variable is a dependent and uncertain position of the PM and the cabinet between president and the parliament
- if president does not have support of a parliamentary majority, conflicts abound

Executive systems in an early phase of post-communism

- 8 pure parliamentary systems (ALB, BOS, YUG, LAT, CZE, EST, HUN, SVK)
- 6 pure presidential systems (AZE, BLR, GEO, TAJ, TURK, UZB)
- other countries were semipresidential
- a few countries switched from one system to another
- semipresidentialism is a prevailing form of government in the CEE region

Regional variation of executive systems in CEE

- Central Europe and the Baltics
- the Balkans
- Caucasus and Central Asia
- the rest of the former Soviet Union

Central Europe and the Baltics

- no pure presidentialism, no presidential-parliamentary systems
- premier-presidential systems: BUL, LIT, POL, ROM, SVK 1999-, CZE 2012-
- parliamentarism: LAT, pre-1999 SVK, pre-2012 CZE, EST, HUN



The Balkans

- no pure presidentialism
- pres-parl: CRO 1990-2000,
- premier-presidential : CRO 2000-, MAC, SRB 2007-2008, YUG 2000-2003, SLO
- parliamentarism: ALB, BOS 1995-, MONT 2007-YUG -2000, SRB-MONT (2003-2007)



Caucasus and Central Asia

- pure presidential: AZE, GEO 1995-2004, UZB, TUR, TAJ,
- president-parliamentary: ARM 1991-2005, GEO 2004-, KAZ
- premier-presidential: ARM 2005-2015, MONG 1992-
- pure parliamentary: ARM 2015-,



The rest of the former Soviet Union

- pure presidentialism: BLR 1994-1996
- presidential-parliamentary: BLR 1996, RUS 1993-, UKR 1996-2004, 2010-2014
- Premier-Presidential ones: MOLDOVA 1994-2000, 2016- UKR 2004-, 2014-
- pure parliamentarism: MOLDOVA 2000-2016



Semipresidencialism and democracy in CEE

- premier-presidential systems no worse than pure parliamentarism in democratic performance
- president-parliamentary systems far worse in democratic performance than parliamentarism AND premier-presidential systems
- presidential systems linked to worst levels of democracy (they have often never been democratic in the first place)

How do president-parliamentary system undermine democracy?

- 1. Presidents often misuse decree powers in order to monopolize executive authority
- 2. Presidents consciously undermine the creation of stable parties and stable party systems
- constitutionally strong presidents AND weak parties sustain/reproduce authoritarian government

Creating the Presidency: Poland

- an outcome of the roundtable negotiations
- elected for 6 years, the right to dissolve the parliament and veto the legislature
- later (in 1990) reduced to 5-year term
- the Little Constitution of 1992 – presidential prerogatives
- the new constitution of 1997 – further reduction of presidential powers and the strengthening of the PM (a constructive vote of no confidence)

Creating the Presidency: Hungary

- the roundtable negotiations failed to agree on presidency – a referendum in 11/1989
- the Communists – a strong president elected before the parliamentary elections
- the opposition – a weak president elected by a democratically newly elected parliament
- weak presidency, the Constitutional Court further reduced its powers in a few landmark rulings

The presidency: other countries

- Romania and Serbia/Yugoslavia: examples of how the political context and the personal factors may influence the functioning of intra-executive relations
- Slovenia – weak & directly elected president
- Lithuania – semipresidential system as a compromise, as both presidentialism and parliamentary governments existed in the pre-1940 history of the country
- a formally strong role of the directly elected president but the system works as a de facto parliamentarism (the only impeached president in Europe)

Russia

- extremely strong role of the president had pacified the PM and the government even without a parliamentary majority backing the president
- some conflicts (Yeltsin vs. Primakov, Stepashin & Putin vs. Medvedev)
- Putin in presidency = a consolidation of the parliamentary support of the president, his PMs as administrators (Zubkov, Mishustin)

Russia & Ukraine

- **RUS:** tandem Putin-Medvedev, the level of conflicts depended on who held the presidency, constitutional changes in 2020
- **Ukraine:** extreme intra-executive conflicts, manipulation of the constitutional norms
- constitutional amendments tailored to put the office holders into an advantageous position
- President Kuchma – preferred strong presidency while in office

Ukraine

- 2004 – constitutional amendments to weaken the presidency (in anticipation of Yushchenko's victory)
- President Yushchenko – could not/did not prevent further weakening of presidency
President Yanukovich (2010) – after taking control of the presidency, he objected the reduction of presidential powers that he himself had advocated before

Ukraine

- the Constitutional Court ruled in 2010 that the 2004 weakening of the presidency was unconstitutional (i.e. the return to the 1996 Kuchma's strong presidency)
- 2014: the parliament passed a constitutional amendment reinstalling the 2004 reforms (a weaker presidency)
- Zelenskyy: strengthening the powers of presidency due to the state of war

Models of parliamentarism

- parliamentary systems do not function in a uniform manner:
- often a de facto fusion of parliament and government, because of:
- the compatibility of the parliamentary and ministerial posts (ministers also hold parliamentary seats)
- PM is usually an MP
- a strong and disciplined political parties

Prime Ministers in CEE

- a comparatively weak position – given their short tenure
- a link between party system instability and low durability of the PMs
- major exceptions: Drnovšek (1992-2002), Orbán (1998-2002, 2010-), Klaus, Dzurinda (1998-2006), Fico (2006-2010, 2012-2018, 2023-), Tusk (2007-2014, 2023-)
- However: PMs have a strong leader effect in elections – they shape voters' electoral choices