

**THE ROTATING PRESIDENCY  
OF THE COUNCIL  
OF THE EUROPEAN UNION –  
FROM EMPIRICAL FACTS  
TOWARDS EXPERT EVALUATION**

## INTRODUCTORY WORDS

*Success is a science;  
if you have the conditions,  
you get the result.*

*Oscar Wilde*

There is no such thing as unsuccessful rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union – this rather humorous maxim, which is widely popular among academic and political experts on European affairs, has the potential to discourage any attempt at evaluating the Presidency. Meanwhile, it is precisely this barrier of political correctness that underlines how important it is to evaluate the Presidency objectively, as it is one of the mechanisms for implementation of European integration policies. There is an unambiguous answer to the question why it is possible that every Presidency is successful – it is due to the lack of reliable evaluation methodology.

This publication is an attempt to solve this task – to provide an objective evaluation of a rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union

- as a complex, multi-dimensional and dynamic object of research,
- with limited and often inconsistent academic tradition in this regard,
- and with all related logistic, bureaucratic and ethical problems, stemming from the work of a recent political object of research;

The results of this intellectual challenge are structured in four chapters. In chapter 1 Prof. Ingrid Shikova introduces the reader to the concept of the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU – its functions, institutional mechanisms and historical dynamics.

In chapter 2 Prof. Shikova, Assoc. Prof. Mirela Veleva-Eftimova and Dr. Linka Toneva-Metodieva present a short overview of the academic tradition in the field of studying of the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU – achievements and problems in the attempts for an objective evaluation.

In chapter 3 Prof. Ingrid Shikova, Assoc. Prof. Mirela Veleva-Eftimova, Assoc. Prof. Kaloyan Haralampiev and Dr. Linka Ton-

eva-Metodieva propose concrete steps towards the elaboration of an instrument for expert evaluation of the Presidency – elaboration of registers, questionnaires, selection of information sources.

In chapter 4 Assoc. Prof. Haralampiev, Prof. Shikova and Assoc. Prof. Veleva-Eftimova present the result of the practical application of the created instrument for expert evaluation of the Presidency – quantitative and qualitative analysis of the empirical data, index for evaluation of the Presidency.

The research endeavor for evaluating the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU 2018, which the team initiated approximately two years ago, was to a large extent a jump into the unknown. It would not have achieved the current outcome without the collaboration and unreserved support by the other members of the team of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence at the Department of European Studies – Prof. G. Dimitrov, Assoc. Prof. K. Simeonov, Dr. Borislav Mavrov and the dedicated work of the volunteer student team.

*Ingrid Shikova  
Mirela Veleva-Eftimova  
Kaloyan Haralampiev  
Linka Toneva-Metodieva*

## I. INTRODUCTION. ON THE IMPORTANCE OF AN EXPERT EVALUATION OF THE ROTATING PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EU<sup>1</sup>

### 1. The nature and the development of the rotating presidency of the EU Council

The rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union (RPEUC) has been in place since the beginning of the establishment of the European Communities, but has undergone various reforms to reach its present form after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon. As Ole Elgström, one of the researchers of the rotating presidencies, points out, “the functions of the presidency have evolved steadily since the birth of the EU, and the tasks it performs evolve gradually through the creation of informal practices that, over the years, become more institutionalised”.<sup>2</sup>

The rotating leadership of the Council takes into account in practice the fact that the European Union is made up of sovereign Member States. The presidency creates the preconditions for the implementation of the principle of equal treatment of the states, in order to prevent the long-term domination of one center or one country in the integration processes. Despite discussions on the abolition of the rotating presidency during the preparation of the Lisbon Treaty, it has remained largely under pressure from smaller Member States, who have called for it to be regarded as a historic achievement of European integration, contributing to the successful cooperation within

---

<sup>1</sup> This monograph is based on the results of a research, accomplished during the third year of the activity of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence at the Department of European Studies at Sofia University „Kliment Ohridski“ (2016–2019) and with significant financial support from R&D fund of the Faculty of Philosophy at Sofia University „Kliment Ohridski“ under contract №80-10-143 / 2019.

The research team owes great gratitude to Prof. Georgi Dimitrov, who actively cooperated throughout all phases of the work, including through critical comments on the content of this monograph.

<sup>2</sup> Elgström, Ole (2003a) “The Honest Broker”? The Council Presidency as a Mediator, in European Union Council Presidencies: A Comparative Analysis, Ole Elgström (ed.), 38–54. London: Routledge.

the European Union. From this point of view, it can be argued that the rotating presidency, albeit in a modified form after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, is an important tool for preventing concentration of influence only in the large Member States of the Union.

The rotating presidency allows the presiding country to put its mark on the integration life of the European Union, enables it to enhance its role and influence as a member of the European Union, and if it succeeds in doing so, it can draw long-lasting results from the presidency: building authority, positions and influence on the decision-making process and the implementation of the integration policies.

The Council's rotating presidency mechanism was established within the first European Community – the European Coal and Steel Community – in 1951. The role of the Presidency has been steadily increasing since the early 70s of the XX century. The rotating presidency has evolved as a result of the “empty chair crisis”, the institutionalisation of the European Council, the enlargement of the European Economic Community (EEC), the extension of the legislative powers of the European Parliament, the extension and deepening of EEC's own policies. In parallel with the factors that favor the increase of powers, the presidency is influenced by those limiting it – dependence on the other EU institutions, short term, inherited agenda, so that Member States are forced to refrain from directly prioritising their national interests. (Shikova, 2012)

The role and functions of the EU Council rotating presidency were limited by the changes and new posts in the European Union's institutional system introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon – the institutionalisation of the European Council and the introduction of its permanent presidency, the establishment of the European External Action Service and the acquisition of new functions by the EU High Representative for External Relations and Security Policy, a significant increase of the powers of the European Parliament. (Dinan, 2013; Wartien, 2013; Bocquillon and Dobbels, 2014; Kassim et al., 2017; Kreppel and Oztas, 2017)

The four main functions of the rotating presidency, established mostly by practice than by European law, are: setting political priorities and drawing up a program, administration and coordination, me-

diation of consensus building, and representation. It means that the presidency must combine the functions of political leader, administrator, mediator and representative. These functions give sense to the original idea of establishing the institution of the rotating presidency, as well as of the Council in general – to be the crossroad between the interests of the community and those of each member state (initially six).<sup>3</sup> In other words, the six-month rotating presidency should ensure that all decision-makers find a balance between pursuing specific national interests and the Community / Union goals that are on the agenda.

**Setting political priorities and preparing a program** is one of the main functions of the presidency. The presidency program reflects the leadership and the country's view of the political priorities to focus on over the six-month period and. The introduction of the Trio Presidency format, the presence of a permanent President of the European Council, as well as the role of the European Commission as an important player in defining the agenda of the European Union significantly limit the freedom of the presidency to set political priorities that meet its own views and to some extent its interests. Despite the limitations of the presidency's function of defining political priorities, the rotating presidency still has the capacity to influence the agenda of the integration process and to put emphasis on issues that are important to the presiding country.

It will not be overstated if it is claimed that **administration and coordination** are one of the most essential and labor-intensive functions during each rotating presidency. There is no coincidence that the way in which this function is implemented has a significant impact on the evaluation of the performance of the rotating presidency. The increasing number of Member States and the extension of European Union policies have made this feature particularly important for

<sup>3</sup> “It (the Council – trad.) is at the crossroads between two types of sovereignty – national and supranational. Therefore, it must simultaneously watch over the interests of the community and the individual countries, as well as agree on an even distribution of shares between the two parts.” Speech by K. Adenauer, Federal Chancellor of Germany and first Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the European Coal and Steel Community before the first meeting of the Council, 8 September 1952 (Une Europe Inédite, 2001) (Невижданата Европа, 2003: 111)

the smooth decision-making process. Coordination and administration are also important for the process of decision making within the Commission-Council-Parliament institutional triangle. Part of this function is related to the need of the rotating presidency to remain in constant liaison and to work with the Commission and Parliament to ensure the smooth running of the legislative process.

The presidency's **mediation/brokerage function** is particularly important for reaching mutually acceptable solutions and especially for moving the legislation forward. Achieving compromises, offering solutions that will satisfy all parties, are highly appreciated in the implementation of the rotating presidency. Here, the presidency plays the role of the "honest broker", who must do its best in the effort and skills to overcome the contradictions and to achieve a reconciliation of the interests of the Member States. The degree of neutrality of the presidency is also reflected in this function. In its role of mediator, the rotating presidency acts in several directions. First, the presidency works with all Member States to reach agreement and to take decisions, especially on contentious and sensitive issues, receiving support, where necessary, mainly from the Legal Services of the General Secretariat and the European Commission. Second, the presidency works actively with the institutions of the European Union, which are part of the legislative process – the European Commission and the European Parliament – and represents the Council in resolving any controversy. Third, in certain circumstances, the presidency may be an intermediary between the European Union and third countries (although the Treaty of Lisbon limits the role of the rotating presidency in this area).

**Representation** as a function of the rotating presidency has different dimensions – on the one hand, it is about the role of the rotating presidency as a representative of the Council in international negotiations and, on the other, about the relations of the Council with the other European institutions. In practice, the rotating presidency represents and expresses the Council's opinion in the trilogues carried out in the institutional triangle – European Commission-Council-Parliament.

The combination of the four functions of the rotating presidency differs from one Presidency to another. In practice, the country

holding the rotating presidency gives preference to the way it is held. For example, some countries prefer the so-called "a brokerage presidency", in which the main task is to reach compromises and thus results in the adoption of legislative acts. Other countries prefer to be leaders first and make efforts to steer the integration process in their desired direction. The leadership presidency implies a clear vision of a political priority that the country would like to put to the fore and eventually implement. The leadership approach of a rotating presidency is important in complex situations where different solutions are possible. In these cases, the presidency, in close cooperation with the European Commission and the General Secretariat of the Council, can play a leading role in approximating the differing preferences of governments, having the advantages of possessing comparative information and a privileged negotiating position. When leadership is exercised so that the parties can truly agree, the rotating presidency gains the opportunity to bring the end result as close as possible to its own view on the subject.

The Lisbon Treaty has greatly facilitated the selection of a priority role. Restricting the political dimension of the rotating presidency, it puts the emphasis on the provision of appropriate conditions for the adoption of legislation. It is precisely the sphere of legislative endeavor that becomes crucial for the presidency, since in practice the most important political decisions are taken by the European Council. From this point of view, it seems that the role of "a pragmatic broker" is the most promising one for a successful rotating presidency<sup>4</sup> (Van Hecke and Bursens, 2013).

## 2. Performance of the Council's rotating presidencies – challenges and solutions

One of the main reasons for the pressure to carry out reforms in the rotating presidency mechanism is attributed to the different quality of the individual presidencies. Some countries are very effective in

---

<sup>4</sup> For example, the Belgian rotating presidency after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon deliberately refrains from taking political initiatives beyond the concrete work on legislative files on the basis that this strategic approach would make it more effective (Van Hecke and Bursens, 2013).

managing European affairs over the six-month period, while others are not only ineffective but even damaging to the European integration process. Discussing the text of the Lisbon Treaty, doubts arose as to whether the newly acceded Member States during the period 2004-2007 would be able to fulfill the duties and functions of the rotating presidency and to acquire the necessary administrative training and skills to hold an efficient presidency. Political disputes over the preservation / removal of the rotating presidency and the ability of individual Member States to put it into practice have imposed the need to answer the question of the performance of the rotating presidency and its contribution to the European integration process.

Which rotating presidency is successful? Who actually determines if a presidency is successful? What are the factors that influence the achievements of the rotating presidency? Is it possible to create a "model of a good rotating presidency"? If we are looking for answers to these questions, we will hardly find them in the documents of the institutions or in the speeches of European leaders. Officially, all presidencies are "successful", probably due to diplomacy, political and institutional correctness.

The Lisbon Treaty changed the nature of the rotating presidency, changed its leadership role, increased the need for a balanced mix between its core functions. However, the Treaty of Lisbon did not clearly and explicitly define the role of the rotating presidency, which makes it possible to evaluate differently the (un)achieved results. There are many cases where the lack of progress on a particular issue is not the fault of the presidency, but is due to the degree of divergence of opinion between Member States. At the same time, the rotating presidency also has a number of instruments that, with goodwill and organization, are capable of influencing the convergence of the positions of its partners. Every Member State strives for a highly appreciated results of the rotating presidency, and therefore endeavors to prepare and implement it. In practice, however, the presidencies are not equally efficient.

Evaluating the performance of the EU Council rotating presidency 's activity is politically important. On the one hand, European Union countries invest a lot of efforts and resources in the preparation and implementation of the rotating presidency and they deserve

fair assessments, not just reports or highly politicised texts and opinions, influenced mainly by the political affiliation of their authors. On the other hand, evaluating the performance of the rotating presidencies is an important prerequisite for improving the management of the integration process. However, the ambiguous standards and procedures for analysing the rotating presidencies limit the ability to make expert, supranational and non-partisan assessments of each presidency in a transparent and objective manner. Therefore, diametrically opposed and politicised assessments can be found. They have the potential to damage the image of a Member State as well as the authority of the institutions and, thus, impede the implementation of the integration process at a time of growing instability of the global environment.

## II. CURRENT STATE OF THE ACADEMIC DEBATE

### 1. Evaluating the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union – a research problem

The key role of the RPCEU premises the attention of the scholarly community on it, so in this research field there is a more than thirty-year academic tradition<sup>5</sup> (Vandecasteele and Bossuyt, 2014). Despite the broadly shared understanding that knowing the resultativeness of the RPCEU is an important prerequisite for improving the integration process, however, by now there is not a reliable enough instrument which to allow in a transparent and objective way to be made an expert – supranational and non-party – evaluation of each presidency. In the literature, there are known sufficiently many evaluations, which are either biased, or, at least, ungrounded. A main reason for such a practice is the methodological challenge for it to be measured and, respectively, to be evaluated the resultativeness of the work of such a complex political subject as the rotating presidency. The scope and intensity, the phases, but also the temporal dynamics of its activities are not a constant, but depend on many circumstances, which at that are not always under the control of the RPCEU country (for example, unevenness of the law-making process cycle in the EU; established states of affairs of the work process on the legislative and non-legislative initiatives from the previous presidency; international political situation; unforeseen events, etc).

There is a high level of variety and fluidity in the mechanisms of negotiation; uncertainty due to the lack of stable forms of leadership even despite Lisbon innovations; the decision-making system has variable geometry with multiple normative procedures (Mény, Muller and Quermonne, 1996, Mazey and Richardson, 1996, Ruzza, 2004, McCormick, 2008: 247, Hix 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Vandecasteele, Bruno, Fabienne Bossuyt. „Assessing EU Council Presidencies: (Conditions for) success and influence.“, *Comparative European Politics* 12.2 (2014): 233–247.

Parallel with the methodological problem in the RPCEU research, there is also a conceptual one. There are different definitions of the “influence” and “success” of the presidency, to which there can also be added the traditional for the European integration studies theoretical argument between rationalists and constructivists on the motives for the RPCEU behaviour. Moreover, due to the lack of a public quality standard of the result for the presidencies work, the existing studies do not use systematically a sustainable combination of factors determining the RPCEU performance, which also doesn’t allow the application of a comparative perspective for evaluating the various presidencies (Vandecasteele and Bossuyt, 2014)<sup>6</sup>.

The methodological and conceptual difficulties are combined with difficulties in accessing empirical data. Access to information about the decision-making and negotiation in the Council and its preparatory bodies is still limited, especially compared to the other two key institutions in the policy process at EU level – the Commission and the Parliament (Bunyan 2014). Additionally, with the growth in EU competence and membership, the volume of decision-making which takes place on a daily basis within the Council (and all EU institutions and bodies for that matter) has increased substantially. Moreover, there is no standardized practice of reporting of the Presidencies, as the Presidency is not an institution bound by requirements for accountability, but rather a function occupied only for a limited period. This means that it is in the prerogatives of the country, holding the Presidency, to determine the format of its report for the Presidency period – whether to publish a detailed document or a shorter summary, whether to focus on all areas of work, or on a selected list of priority topics, whether to disseminate it in an electronic or printed format, including the choice of language versions. The combination of increasing volume and limited access to documentation, in parallel with the various methods of reporting, makes it very

<sup>6</sup> The two authors who make a review and evaluation of the available literature on the RPCEU summarize that four main issues are subject of active academic debate, beyond the theoretical constructivist-rationalist dispute, encompassing all fields of the European studies – whether the RPCEU can exert influence at all; what is the definition of “interest” and “success”, the definition of “interest”, a methodological problem of the objective evaluation due to the causal complexity; the “influence” is contrasted with the “success”.

difficult to track each process, involved actors, concerned stakeholders, influences, bargaining strategies, outcomes and impact, and is a tremendous challenges for any research team.

Due to these problems, in a lot of cases, the study of the presidencies, including of their political initiatives, remain at the level of the narrative statement, which recounts what the presidency has accomplished, leaving the reader to make conclusions by themselves about the level of its success.<sup>7</sup> In the rare cases when after all an attempt is made for an objective evaluation of a presidency, the most important thing remains unclear – how exactly one moves on from facts to evaluation. Put in other words, the way of applying the methodological set of instruments remains “hidden”, due to which reason the results from the research also seem unconvincing, as they cannot be completely understood and verified.<sup>8</sup>

An example of this case is the Slovak Rotating Presidency in the second half of 2016 (Bilcik 2017). Great Britain’s decision to leave the EU and the following political cleavage among the Member States created the opportunity for increasing the RPCEU profile,

---

<sup>7</sup> Trying to evaluate objectively the French Presidency in 2000, Schout and Vanhoonacher very appropriately claim that: “Judging presidencies is easy, evaluating them is not. Evaluations are rare and often superficial”. Meanwhile, they leave the reader to make a conclusion by themselves whether France has performed successfully or not, and at methodological level there is displacement from performance evaluation to determining the behavior as dependent on variable external and internal conditions in a different correlation. Put in other words, the presidency behaviour in its four variations is not the result of its activity (Schout, and Vanhoonacher, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> See Karolewski, Mehlhausen and Sus (2015); Rudiger and Wurzel (2000); Keulen and Pijpers (2005); Král, Bartovic and Rihácková (2009). For example, a publication dedicated to the evaluation of the Dutch Presidency in 2004 looks like a debriefing or a report with a narrative character. The statement is based on interviews with participants from which are outlined basic trends on the specifics of the RP decision-making process, the main topics and participants, but without clarifying what the method is, through which the selection and extrapolation is done. The political initiatives are part of the presidency’s role as a EU leader and even are “a main duty” of each presiding country. In this part the statement is concentrated on the conditions for the accomplishment of a successful political leadership as, for example, the existence of a tandem between the Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister, and not only on the performance itself or the RP ambitions. In conclusion, evaluation has been made without clarifying how exactly it has been calculated (Keulen and Pijpers 2005).

which it seized. More particularly, Slovakia managed to bring at least three aspects of the presidency’s work back to the state before the Treaty of Lisbon. One of these aspects is the influence on the EU strategic agenda.<sup>9</sup> The main argument for this statement is the results from the meeting in Bratislava on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2016, which is the first post-Brexit meeting of the leaders of the 27 Member States. At this meeting, initiated by the Slovakian Presidency, the Member States leaders adopted a common declaration from Bratislava and a roadmap outlining the strategic goals of the Union after Great Britain’s withdrawal. Also, a consensus was reached on the forthcoming summit meeting in Marrakesh. With these results the meeting has contributed considerably for the normalization of the EU agenda after the initial shock from the United Kingdom’s decision to leave. According to the author, the Slovakian Presidency is going to be remembered as the last one of 28 EU Member States and the first one to make a step backwards to the political realities before the Treaty of Lisbon with traditional informal meetings in the national capitals.

Despite referring to many facts from “behind the scene”, this positive conclusion in relation to the possibility for a rotating presidency to accomplish successful political initiatives is not convincing. The method of using primary sources (interviews) has not been clarified. The factors for successful implementation also have not been identified, in comparison to which it should be measured and, respectively, it does not become clear how has been accomplished the moving from facts to evaluations.<sup>10</sup>

The case with the evaluation of the Polish Rotating Presidency in 2011 is similar. According to the authors of the study, this presi-

---

<sup>9</sup> The other two aspects are – returning the presidency to the capital of the presiding country and ascribing a more significant European role to the Prime Minister of the presiding country.

<sup>10</sup> Similar is the case with the abovementioned study of the French Presidency in 2000. Unlike the other three RPCEU functions, for which there have been formulated between 7 and 9 indicators, for the political initiatives they are only three and at that with problematic operationalizing – “short perspective for national acquisitions” and “influence on the political agenda” (Schout and Vanhoonacher, 2006).

dency is successful in terms of the implementation of its functional dimension, part of which is also the implementation of political initiatives (Karolewski, Mehlhausen and Sus, 2015). The performance in this functional dimension is evaluated on the basis of the achieved common positions, representation before the EP, representation before third parties and media performance. This evaluation framework, however, is applied narratively, as there is a brief factual report on each of the listed indicators without a correlation between them to be made, or without becoming clear what the logic of their selection is and how from the individual facts one passes to the summarizing evaluations.

## **2. Research Tasks Stemming from the Above Challenges**

In order to overcome these conceptual and analytical imperfections so that prerequisites can be created for objective measuring of the political initiatives of a rotating presidency, the following research objectives should be accomplished:

First, creation of a conceptual model of the rotating presidency through outlining of its main content – activities, implemented by the Presidency, in their diversity, and the consecutive registering of those activities on the basis of typological similarities, determined by the functional characteristics of the RPCEU.

Second, a content-related selection of the primary, immediately measurable indicators determining the degree of the presidency's political initiatives realization, as the high degree in terms of the achievable aggregate optimum is to be accepted as a success.

Third, to select primary documentary sources that are accessible and liable to independent examination to create an information array in relation to the selected indicators.

Fourth, to formulate a questionnaire to operationalize the conceptual indicators to meaningful indicators and codes for registering the possible answers.

Fifth, to give numerical values to each of the registered possible answers to the respective indicators, through which to be expressed the links and proportions between the degrees, phases and forms of

the political initiatives implementation, their specific results and the political contexts for this work.

Sixth, to allocate a numerical value to each of the registered possible responses on the corresponding indicators, in order to demonstrate the correlations and proportions between levels, phases and forms of realization of the various types of activities of the rotating presidency, their specific outcomes and the political contexts of this activity.

Seventh, to develop appropriate formulas for meaningful aggregation of the received numerical values and to develop a summarizing (compound) index for the overall resultativeness and degree of success of the presidency's political initiatives.

Our expert evaluation of the result from the work of the Bulgarian Rotating Presidency in the first half of 2018 will demonstrate that such a complex methodological task can indeed be accomplished.

### III. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH TASKS – DATA COLLECTION

#### 1. Creating the conceptual model

In order to proceed with the elaboration of a research framework for an evidence-based assessment of the Presidency, one needs to answer the question what it is exactly that one needs to measure. The Presidency of the Council of the EU has multi-dimensional role. It is responsible for the planning and chairing meetings in the Council and its preparatory bodies (with the exception of the Foreign Affairs Council). This is an administrative and coordination effort of an enormous scale, considering the complex structure of the Council, having over 150 working groups and committees, and given the number of policy areas covered by EU competency. The Presidency also represents the Council in its relationship vis-à-vis the other EU institutions and bodies, and more specifically the Commission and the Parliament. It is closely engaged in the EU negotiation process, by mediating and brokering compromises between the EU Member States and between EU institutions.

An evidence-based empirical evaluation of the outcomes of the Council Presidency requires an understanding of the different types of negotiation activities that a Presidency typically engages in and what their deliverables are, what influences them and how. The framework proposed here, offers a distinction whereby those different types of activity of the Presidency can be classified in three main groups as the primary variable for evaluation.

Firstly, as responsible for chairing Council meetings and participating in trilogues with the Parliament and the Commission, the Presidency's key deliverable in the 6-month term is the outcome achieved in the legislative process. The primary function of the Council is the adoption of legislative acts, therefore a key indicator for assessing the performance of the Presidency is the *number of legislative dossier discussed* and the *stage of advancement* achieved. It is not surprising that the primary tracking tool after each Presidency, elaborated by the General Secretariat of the Council and distributed

to delegations, is the list of files concluded by the outgoing Presidency under the ordinary legislative procedure. Hence, this is one of the main responsibilities of the Presidency. It is well-known that qualified majority voting in the Council is one of its characteristics as an institution of the integration, but it also presupposes taking decisions in spite of opposition of the countries left in minority. Whatever the model the Presidency decides to adopt in the decision-making process, the country at the helm needs to balance this option by using the capacities of the preparatory bodies as well as its own skills in the art of compromises, in order to lead to compromise decisions without countries left in dissent.

Secondly, the Council is also engaged in negotiations under various non-legislative processes such as concluding international agreements, adopting the EU budget, elaborating strategic policy documents (conclusions, recommendations, strategies, action plans, etc.).

Thirdly, the Presidency has the opportunity to put forward or continue initiatives of political and strategic nature, based on its individual preferences and the conditions on the EU political arena.

This area of activity is what shapes the image of a Presidency and what it is often remembered for.

Each of these three distinct types of activity of the Presidency has specific characteristics, distinct requirements on the part of the chair, and ultimately, concrete outcomes. Therefore, an important stage of the empirical work is identifying a full list of: a) all legislative dossiers discussed in the Council and its preparatory bodies in the 6-month period (according to recent-years statistics of the GSC, typically would range between 100 and 200 legislative files under any Presidency); b) all non-legislative deliverables worked upon; c) all initiatives of political and strategic nature, initiated or carried forward (ex. diplomatic processes, strategic debates, expert and public discussions).

To this end, three registers were elaborated for the current research initiative, covering the various types of activity of the Presidency: 212 legislative dossiers (Appendix 1); 112 non-legislative deliverables (Appendix 2) and 29 political initiatives (Appendix 3).

## 2. Defining the indicators

A main source of identification of the primary and the immediately measurable indicators for objective evaluation of what is achieved at the political initiatives implementation is the analysis of: the institutional nature of the RPCEU, the formal and informal rules in the EU decision-making process, the historical experience from previous presidencies, as well as of the accounting documents of the Bulgarian Rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU from the beginning of 2016 and of the trio – Estonia, Bulgaria and Austria.

### 2.1. Legislative Dossiers

When discussing the Presidency of the Council of the EU, one of the key words that comes to mind is “priority”. Indeed, a Presidency is usually remembered for its **priorities**. Therefore, one important indicator for the achievements of a Presidency should be whether more results have been achieved on high-priority issues as compared to less prioritized files. Three main dimensions of this indicator can be observed – a) whether the dossier/issue has been prioritized by the three main institutions and included in the Joint Declaration on the Legislative Priorities for the period in question); b) whether it has been prioritized by the European Council which sets guidelines for the activities of the Council of the EU, and c) whether it has been prioritized by the Presidency in its Programme. Greater weight in the overall score should be given to those files, advanced or concluded by the Presidency, that have been included in the Joint Declaration, followed by issues, prioritized by the European Council.

For each identified dossier/topic, one needs to establish the achieved result – whether the work on the dossier has been initiated, concluded or is in process of advancement. Registering the information on this indicator is of central importance for the overall assessment of a Presidency. On the other hand, this is not a one-sided, one-faceted dimension, thus – it is difficult to identify and requires verification and refinement through a series of follow-up indicators. From this perspective, the indicators outlined below, may be preliminarily divided into **indicators for general assessment and more specific indicators**.

The effect of the work of the Presidency is directly related to the actual negotiation strategies of the participating actors – whether they support or oppose the approach of the Presidency. Here, a number of distinctions could be made – whether **cooperation** or **opposition** comes from within the Council (one or group of Member States), or from outside the Council. In terms of institutional actors, opposition from the Commission, the Parliament or from other EU bodies may mean different things for the Presidency and its desired outcomes. The main partners, but also main opponents of the Presidency, are the Member States in the Council, which is the forum where the Presidency implements its normative functions. The effect of the potential opposition by one or a group of countries is to a large extent dependent on the type of legislative procedure, but in any case increases the requirements and costs of the Presidency in terms of managing the negotiations on legislative dossiers even in their initial stage. There are multiple examples in the history of the EU, when a Member State could block the negotiations on legislative norms, which she deems not corresponding to its national interests (Veleva, 2018).

Circumstances outside the EU – **unfavourable context** – also play an important part on the outcomes of a Presidency. For example, a migratory crisis in Europe can trigger the perception of time pressure and potentially lead to compromise on important dossiers in the field of border management and asylum policies. In contrast, political tensions or crisis in a region can hinder the advancement of ongoing negotiations on an international agreement or trade agreement with the EU. Therefore, the existence of unfavourable circumstances should be investigated with regard to each dossier in the Council when measuring Presidency performance.

An additional indicator can also be used to identify whether the Presidency follows a strictly institutional approach on the work on the dossier or employs a more comprehensive strategy towards the dossier. Through this indicator one can measure whether the Presidency focuses solely on the more limited institutional aspects of the decision-making process, or adopts a broader strategy for seeking compromises and a common decision with all Member States, as well as their societies. Such a strategy may include organizing the-

matic discussions in an expert format, public events, etc. The indicator allows for a distinction to be made between specific thematic events and discussions on the dossier in question, or broader debates on the thematic area of the dossier. For example, in the context of the work on the energy efficiency directive, the Presidency may broaden its approach by organizing expert discussions, conferences and public events, being either focused on the more specific topic of the expected impact of the adoption of the directive, or on the broader thematic area of the Energy Union.

The Presidency role is not the role of a single player, as the Council is only one part of the institutional framework of the EU, and of the "institutional triangle" in particular. Its activities are therefore highly dependent on the particular **normative procedure** and the institutional actors involved. Therefore, an assessment of the achieved result in any given legislative or non-legislative dossier or initiative, needs to take into consideration the actors involved and the degree of their participation and influence on the outcome. A negotiation setting with multiple actors involved, outside the Council, will arguably require more resources and capacity on the part of the Presidency to manage, and should therefore be attributed greater weight in the overall assessment of its outcomes. Thus, deliverables achieved under the ordinary legislative procedure would require more effort and ultimately deserve more acclaim than those under the specialized procedure, and particularly as compared to procedure where Council acts alone or only consultation with the Parliament is required.

The key parameters for performance evaluation, described so far, allow for a broad assessment of the work of the Presidency and its outcomes, and for taking note of the factors which facilitate or hinder its activities. Nevertheless, as we noted earlier, EU negotiations are multifaceted, complex and characterized by continuity. Thus, a comprehensive evaluation of Presidency performance needs a research framework which allows for identification of the **concrete steps achieved** in this continuous process. In other words, evidence-based objective research should be able to identify the exact distance between point A and point B in the legislative process, "travelled" by the Presidency in question.

In the case of legislative dossier, a detailed set of indicators can be outlined for measuring the specific outcomes achieved by the Presidency during the process of deliberation on legislative proposals. These indicators allow for identification of the procedure under which each file is being adopted. They can also measure the achieved outcomes in the Council stage in terms of **procedural steps concluded at working group**, COREPER and ministerial level. This is a non-traditional research approach, which ensures that not only the final outcome is measured, as is usually the case when reviewing Presidency reports, but the steps taken to achieve this outcome by the specific Presidency. This framework allows to go a big step further from the common practice of evaluating Presidencies simply by the number of political agreements reached with the European Parliament and number of Council general approaches (mandates for negotiations) obtained. With its diversity of sub-stages, this indicator mirrors the usual modalities and procedures in the work of the Council and its preparatory bodies. The Council-stage variables of the indicator can be applied both to ordinary and for specialized legislative procedure files, which result either in a Council *general approach* (mandate) in the first case, or in a *compromise* and *decision to move the file forward* (towards *adoption* or *consultation/approval* by the Parliament) in the latter case.

Thus, on the level of Council working groups we may outline whether the Presidency in question has implemented the initial presentation of the dossier in the working group (presentation and Q&A by the Commission, presentation of the impact assessment); whether general discussions have taken place (without going into concrete parts or articles of the proposal); whether the Presidency has structured the debate in the working group on specific parameters of the dossier; whether it has initiated the article-by-article review (on parts of the text or the whole text). Once the work on the dossier advances further, the Presidency may negotiate technical and/or political issues (i.e. issues of more expert nature or issues, requiring decision-making on politically legitimate level); it may have elaborated a revised text of parts of the dossier, or proposed a full compromise text of the Presidency. We are able to follow-up on whether a compromise text has been prepared, whether it has been

adopted or not, as well as whether there has been one or multiple ones.

On a political level, we may track whether there has been a political discussion in COREPER or in the Council – minister level, and whether there has been one or multiple discussions. With regard to the outcome of the work of the Presidency on the dossier, we are able to measure whether there has been a progress report adopted, a partial general approach reached, or a full general approach<sup>11</sup>.

Tracking the number of **political agreements reached between Council and Parliament** is the “golden standard” for evaluating Presidency ability as a negotiator – golden, because it is also the main indicator in the reporting documents of the GSC, as well as the Presidencies’ reports. However, there is still no research on the performance of Presidencies based on a detailed assessment of the Presidency strategies and resources used in the trilogue stage. Nevertheless, a set of indicators can be detailed in order to measure how the Presidency is managing the **trilogue phase** in terms of both intensity (number of inter-institutional negotiations held at both political and technical level) and outcomes (number of agreements reached, preliminary and final, number of legislative acts signed by the co-legislators).

Even when a political agreement has not been reached between the co-legislators, the work of the Presidency may be assessed based on the number of trilateral meetings held – at political, and at technical level. Interim progress may also be measured – whether technical or political issues have been negotiated. The phase of the political agreement reached is also important – it is often considered being *preliminary* (all political and technical level issues solved in working group, but not yet approved by COREPER); *final* (adopted by

<sup>11</sup> The Council may sometimes adopt a political agreement pending first reading position of the Parliament, also known as a ‘general approach’. A general approach agreed in the Council can help to speed up the legislative procedure and even facilitate an agreement between the two institutions, as it gives the Parliament an indication of the Council’s position prior to their first reading opinion. The Council’s final position, however, cannot be adopted until the Parliament has delivered its own first reading opinion. The partial general approach, similarly, is a Council agreement not on the full text, but on some parts/chapters of it.

COREPER); *adopted* by the Council (but with remaining details for the legal linguistic experts); or *signed* legislation by the three institutions (final outcome).

The above described stages of the Council work can also be assessed with view to the special legislative procedure. As regards the next phase of the work with the European Parliament, there instead of the trilogues, one needs to assess whether there has been consultation/approval by the EP or not.

Notwithstanding the importance of normative procedures in the EU setting, the role of the Presidency is as much a role of coordinator and administrator, as it is also the role of a consensus-builder, mediator and facilitator of compromise. To achieve this, the Presidency needs to employ subtle diplomatic skills and problem-solving approaches, which go beyond the purely procedural mechanics of decision-making. And these are arguably the most important criteria against which a successful Presidency should be measured. A set of indicators can be outlined for assessment of the problem-solving orientation of the Presidency and mediation skills vis-à-vis the Member States and the other institutions, in particular the European Parliament: tactics used to facilitate compromise, working materials proposed, communication channels maintained, etc.

For example, potentially for each legislative dossier, we may be able to assess whether the Presidency has initiated and maintained close contacts with the rapporteur(s) in the EP on the dossier; whether it has initiated and maintained contacts with the political families of the rapporteur and the Commissioner; whether it guarantees high political level of representation in the trilogues (deputy-ministers, ministers); whether it proposes innovative solutions in difficult bargaining situations.

## 2.2. Non-legislative initiatives

The legislative process is an integral part of the responsibilities of the Council Presidency and could be considered their central part. Nevertheless, the Presidency is also responsible for managing the negotiations within the Council on a large number of files in various policy areas, which may not be strictly legislative, but are crucial

for the European policy process. These files include non-legislative documents adopted by the Council, including Recommendations and Conclusions, policy documents such as strategies, road maps, action plans, reports, or the conclusion of international agreements. Examples of non-legislative files of significant importance include the budget, the discharge reports, EU positions for international organization summits, conventions, etc. The Council may work on over 100 such files during any given Presidency and therefore those outputs should also be evaluated when assessing the performance of a Presidency.

With minor adjustments, the indicators for the legislative dossiers, presented above, can also be used to evaluate non-legislative initiatives (deliverables). One needs to consider the differences in procedure and particularly, the different level of engagement of the European Parliament. In terms of outcomes, the key variable here will not be whether general approach at Council stage or political agreement after trilogues has been reached, but rather – whether the deliverable (ex. Council Conclusions, Recommendation, Presidency Conclusions, Report, Strategy, Roadmap, Action Plan, International Agreement) has been adopted or not.

### *2.3. Political Initiatives*

A fundamental factor for measuring the performance of a presidency is the practical implementation of an otherwise only planned in advance political initiative, especially as there is also a possibility for undertaking also (contextual) political initiatives that have not been planned in advance. This implementation or “the materialization” can be registered by reporting the **type/form** of the political initiative that has taken place – for example, conference, diplomatic negotiations, political meeting. As a different content can be imparted to the term “political initiative” depending on the aims it is used for, in this research the term includes all the activities of the rotating presidency which stay outside the work on the legislative dossiers and the adopting of due documents of the Council. Namely because they do not fall into the functions that are compulsorily innate for the rotating presidency after adopting the Treaty of Lisbon, and there

are also presidencies that have deliberately marginalized them, their registration is important for the overall evaluation.

A significant indicator for the RPCEU political initiatives implementation is the degree of **priority** of the selected initiative topic. As it has been noted, according to a number of researchers, the presidency has the opportunity to influence on setting the Union’s agenda, as it chooses the degree of priority of the topics in it. The presiding country has the opportunity to formulate and introduce its own initiatives and respectively political preferences, as well as not to include for discussion some specific issues which are not to its interest, but can also emphasize on European priorities that correspond to the national interests (O’Brennan, 2006: 62–68). From this point of view, there can be identified two main variations of priority depending on their source – national priorities and common European priorities. As far as there is a thematic distribution in terms of the topics in the Union’s agenda between the EC and the Council, so that the latter is focused mainly on strategic political priorities which remain stable in the middle-term perspective, the RPCEU has the opportunity for a relative flexibility when determining its own priorities (Alexandrova et al., 2012; Alexandrova, 2017).

Directly related to the priority indicator is that of the process **phase**, in which the presidency takes over. Like with the legislative initiatives, with the political ones as well the decision-making process can last much longer than the six-month term of a presidency (Toneva-Metodieva, 2020). For example, the rotating presidencies of Great Britain in the second half of 1992 and of Denmark in the first half of 1993 gave an impetus to the debate on the Eastern Enlargement of the EU. For both Member States this topic was a priority one. In September 1992 the British government insisted at EEC Council to declare its wish to greet the Vishegrad countries as future Member States when they are ready to undertake the rights, obligations and the privileges of this membership. Although none of the other EU Member States supported this formula, the continuity with the next presidency created prerequisites for adopting the first pre-accession strategy during the German Presidency in the second half of 1994 in Essen. Moreover, as has been noted, the RPCEU has the possibility to include own new initiatives. In this situation, the varieties of the

phases are mainly two – starting a new initiative and continuing the already started work on a European priority/existing process.

An important indicator for the nature of the implemented political initiative is the number of **the institutional participants**, which the presidency involves in it. The original formal RPCEU functions – an intermediary and coordinator in the Council, a representative of the Council before the other institutions of the EU and outside EU, a political leader of the Union – premise the existence of four main opportunities for this indicator – participation only of the Union, participation of the other Union institutions as well, participation of institutions outside the EU, participation of non-governmental organizations. The more complex the composition of the participants, the more significant in rank is the RPCEU achievement under the implementation of the respective initiative.

Together with the number of the participants, a significant indicator for the degree of implementation of a political initiative is also the number of the actions undertaken in relation to it, or the **intensity** of the action. The function of the administrative coordinator allows to a great extent the RPCEU to influence the events schedule so that a political initiative can be implemented through a single action, but also through undertaking following actions in different formats. For example, the Danish Presidency from the second half of 2002 undertook a succession of actions – diplomatic meetings within the Council, a series of diplomatic meetings with representatives of the candidate countries and with representatives of the Member States, so that an agreement could be reached on the financial package of the Eastern Enlargement by the end of its term.

The variety of formats in which the Council sits in sessions also determines the different **level of the participants** in a political initiative, which is also an indicator for its nature. The Council can sit in session in the format European Council as a forum of the state and governmental leaders of the Member States. In parallel, there exist different formats of the Council depending on the discussed topic, in which the ministers in charge sit in session – of agriculture, of economy, of transport. With the separate Council formats there also sit in session expert groups, which can be permanent, but they can be as well temporarily established on a topical issue. This institutional char-

acteristic premises the availability of three main possibilities under this indicator – the level of the Member States leaders, that of the ministers from these countries and, respectively, the lowest expert level.

Many of the important documents in the history of the European integration have the names of the cities in the presiding Member States at that moment – The Essen Pre-Accession Strategy (1994), The Göteborg Road Map for Enlargement (2001), The Bratislava Declaration (2016). They are a result of the presidencies' political initiatives and witness for achieving a great degree of consensus, even if there is a great variety of positions on the debated issues, so that their existence is an indicator for the RPCEU performance. Unlike the presidency participation in the legislative work of the Union, the direct result of which is closing a legislative dossier or achieving a common position, the immediate result from the political initiatives is the documents adopted at the organized forums, as well as the degree of commitment ensuing from them. A document can have a symbolic and non-binding nature for the countries that have signed it, but it can also bring forth following actions and respectively commitments, as is the Lisbon Strategy from 2000 (Borrás and Peters 2011). From this point of view, the possibilities in terms of the result are – availability or not of an adopted document and different agrees of commitment – with or without deadlines, with or without financial provision. The existence of concreteness, and moreover – of a financial commitment, is evidence for the great significance of the respective political initiative.

The proposed set of indicators includes such that are directly related to the RPCEU work during its six-month term and that it has the ability to control. Often in the RPCEU studies are included other indicators as well, which to a great extent are “inherited” or contextual – public opinion about the EU, previous experience of presiding, authority of the presiding country, administrative capacity, GDP and size of the presiding country, internal context, external crises (Schout and Vanhoonacher, 2006; Karolewski, Mehlhausen and Sus, 2015; Král, Bartovic and Rihácková, 2009).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> For instance, in the evaluation of the Czech Presidency in 2009 the authors emphasize on the external factors that have impact on it – the change of the EC, the elections to the EP and the influence of the French President Sarkozy – but it doesn't

They have not been used in this meaningful reference framework for the presidency evaluation, as on the one hand, chronologically they are not within the term, and on the other hand, the RRCEU has a very limited ability to control effectively. Despite the formal and practical argument for this exclusion, there is also a methodological problem. Although most of the listed indicators could get a concrete numerical expression, its operationalization, the interpretation of its operationalization, i.e. the interpretation of its impact on the evaluation, is very problematic. For instance, there are not enough convincing historical arguments that the size or the wealth of a Member State by all means has influence on the quality of its performance. Sweden and Finland have had successful presidencies, and France and Greece, at least, not to the same extent. Meanwhile, the external crises, as well as the internal context in the Union are mediated by the Member States governments, which are also the main participants in the decision-making process in the Union. Put in other words, these factors by themselves are not a reliable indicator, unless they are operationalized through the Member States behaviour. From this point of view, the proposed framework includes only indicators, which can be valued unambiguously at a later stage from the development of the RPCEU evaluation.

### 3. Establishing the Information Sources

Information about the established immediately measurable indicators of the nature of RPCEU's performance in terms of political initiatives can be found in a number of primary documentary sources. These documents vary, depending on the medium (paper, electronic) and the publishing institution (official EU institutions and national institutions of the country holding the Council Presidency), which enables a comparison by the person, collecting the information, but also a check by an external auditor. These possibilities for verification ensure a high degree of reliability and reduce to a minimum the subjective judgements.

---

become clear what exactly the evaluation is, how it has been formed and, respectively, how the impact of the abovementioned external factors has been operationalized. What is clear is that evaluating is difficult and the Czech RP has faced internal and external crises (Král, Bartovic and Rihácková, 2009).

An exhaustive list of all possible types of legislative dossiers and non-legislative documents, as well as political initiatives on which the presidency has worked, are usually presented as an annex to the narrative report of the Presidency (although there are variations in the Presidencies' approaches to publicity). In case of research interest, this list may also be obtained by request from the General Secretariat of the Council.

Information about the European priorities can be found in two complementary and accessible online sources – the Leaders' Agenda and the Conclusions of the European Council from the beginning of the term of office of the EU's leading institutions to the moment of launching the presidency. Both types of documents contain the EU's key strategic priorities in line with the primary function of the European Council (heads of state and government) to determine the main political priorities of the Union.<sup>13</sup>

The national priorities of the Presidency can be found in the working programme of the respective RPCEU, which is prepared by each Presidency prior to the beginning of its term of office and can be found in both electronic and paper version.

The stage of the process – continuation or beginning of each legislative dossier, non-legislative document or political initiative – can be identified when analyzing the report of the Presidency, as well as on the official website of the Council of the EU, and the Commission. It should be underlined, however, that a more detailed level of specifics on the phase in which a given dossier has been transferred from one Presidency to the next, may only be obtained in practice through an interview/surveying on the basis of a detailed questionnaire with the representatives of the working groups of the Council and/or in COREPER, or in the national bodies, responsible for each thematic area, especially when the objective periodization of *all dossiers* is necessary for an evidence-based expert assessment.

Information about the number and type of institutional participants can be found on the official website of the Presidency. It also reveals the nature of the political initiative – solving diplomatic issues, discussing topics related to EU policies – and respectively, who the relevant institutional participants are.

---

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/tallinn-leaders-agenda/>

The indicators regarding the attitudes and positions of the other institutional participants on the dossier, as well as on the type of context existing (favourable or unfavourable) may be analysed on the basis of online sources, including media publications in the leading international media. Experience shows, however, that they provide a clear picture of attitudes and context of the negotiations only on the most important dossiers on the European agenda. An exhaustive assessment on all dossiers on which a Presidency has worked, requires that those sources are complemented by the results of interview/surveying of the expert/political participants in the process.

The indicators, related to the question whether the Presidency follows a strictly institutional approach, or uses a broader array of instruments and approaches in its work on the dossier/document, may be assessed effectively based on a review of document sources such as the Presidency calendar of events, or a detailed review of online sources – Presidency website, websites of other key EU institutions, the media. The same selection of sources may also be used for compiling information about the intensity of the work on a given political initiative, as well as the level of participants (expert level, political level, head of state and government level).

The information about the specifics of the result of a political initiative – documents and their typology – may be found in the official websites of the Presidency, the Presidency report, in media publications about organized events, as well as review of the individual documents.

It should be noted that information can hardly be compiled only through document review about the indicators, related to the level of initiative of the Presidency in reaching agreement – whether regarding contacts with the Member States, or the EP and the other key institutions in the legislative process. The systematic analysis requires use of interviews/surveying of the participants in the process (at expert or political level). The optimal approach would entail use of a standardized questionnaire for the national experts and political representatives, along with in-depth interviews with representatives of the EP, EC and GSC on a number of topics/dossier in view of verifying the collected data through sources that are independent from one another.

In conclusion, the evaluation of the work of the Presidency on the legislative dossiers, non-legislative deliverables and political initiatives requires the use of both the main, easily accessible document sources, and the interview/surveying which allows for nuancing the picture and reaching a substantially high level of validity of the evaluation.

#### 4. Elaboration of Questionnaires

The above described directly measurable indicators and the specified primary data sources served as a basis for elaboration and testing of questionnaires for systematic accumulation of information massive, allowing for consecutive mathematical analysis – for the legislative dossiers (Appendix 4), non-legislative deliverables (Appendix 6) and political initiatives (Appendix 7). It was deemed appropriated that the legislative dossier questionnaire is prepared in two versions – one for the document sources of information and one for the expert interviews with Bulgarian participants in the work of the Presidency (expert questionnaires) (Appendix 5). Despite increasing the volume of work, this approach increased the reliability of the information we were able to obtain as it allowed for accumulating hard-to-access information such as existence of opposition by Member States and/or by administrative representatives from Bulgarian or European institutions), and on the other hand – it also allowed for verification of the accumulated empirical data.

Apart from this procedure, based on the above conceptual considerations, the research team developed a comprehensive model for entering numerical values for each variation of the empirical indicators, so that they are already elements of nominal scales as they might seem at first sight. The variations of the empirical indicators are in fact degrees in conditional ranking scales and in this specific case it is of utmost importance that the introduced numeric values also reflect the logical connections between the respective degrees, forms and stages, but also the proportions in which the empirical indicators themselves correspond to each other in terms of content. Only in this way do empirical facts become numerical values, which can be subjected to mathematical processing through a conceptually

aggregating formula, so that the main prerequisite is created for an objective evaluation of RPCEU's political initiatives. This method of work is based on previous experience with developing and implementing innovative tools for quantity assessments of the European integration policies (Dimitrov, Haralampiev, Stoychev 2014; Димитров, Харалампиев, Георгиева 2015; Haralampiev, Dimitrov, 2016)<sup>14</sup>.

## 5. Data Registration

To guarantee a sufficiently broad information database, a logistic system was established for assuring administrative support in the implementation of the research, including engaging the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria (at highest governmental level – secured support letter by the Deputy Prime Minister Tomislav Donchev), the European Affairs Council at the Council of Ministers, the sectorial ministries and agencies, engaged in the activities of the Presidency. An institutional registry was compiled of all participating governmental administrative entities, from whom information would be requested, and the received information – systematized.

Several variations of a comprehensive model for integrating the diversified empirical data were created, alongside with instruments for registration of the information. The model in which the numerical values were in most direct compatibility, content-wise, with the work of the RPCEU, was ultimately selected for utilization.

A team of specialized research collaborators was selected, to participate in the process of data collection, typologization and computer-based processing for the purposes of the mathematical analysis. The members of the team were trained in a number of practical sessions. The team comprised eleven students from the Departments of European Studies and Sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy of Sofia University<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Including methodology for work assessment of the European Commission under the annual reports for the progress of Bulgaria in the process of preparation for EU membership within the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence ([jeanmonnetexcellence.bg/2017/02/14/сравнително-изследване-на-процеса-на/](https://jeanmonnetexcellence.bg/2017/02/14/сравнително-изследване-на-процеса-на/))

<sup>15</sup> Alexandria Angelova, Antonia Velikova, Aglaya Lenkova, Viktoria Ilieva,

The team elaborated and applied a sample model for data collection for the units in the full set of dossiers and initiatives, and the ones to be subjected to the study were selected, in order to minimize the influence of potentially “inaccessible units”. Ultimately, the final sample of interviews with representatives of the national working groups on EU policies represented 77% of the full data set, which guarantees representativeness of the research results, including in the part based solely on the information from expert interviews.

In order to guarantee quality control in the process of empirical information coding, a tri-step mechanism was elaborated and applied, including: a) auditing of the coding for each 10<sup>th</sup> dossier and if errors are found – consecutive review of all codes of the collaborator; b) mathematical-statistical analysis for coherence levels of the coding among the team members; c) logical analysis of the entire data set, whereby cases of duplications of dossiers were found, missing data, as well as erroneously filled in data. The final processing and analysis of the information database was performed on the clean set.

## 6. Additional (external) instrument

### *6.1. The significance of conducting interviews with external experts for the presidency evaluation*

The interviews with experts that are institutionally based in Brussels – whether at the EC, EP or the Council (we are going to provisionally indicate them with the IEB abbreviation) give the opportunity for obtaining information about the RPCEU evaluation from a point of view that relatively lacks national involvement. The integral index, through which there has been made the expert<sup>16</sup> evaluation of

Dimana Petkova, Dessislava Dinkova, Iva Yotsova, Ralena Gerasimova, Sandrina Georgieva, Simeon Stoyanov, coordinated by Denitsa Tzankova. The introductory lecture in the training cycle was presented by Dr. Linka Toneva-Metodieva and is available on the website of the Jean Monnet Center of Excellence website as a video file (<https://jeanmonnetexcellence.bg>)

<sup>16</sup> It is important to be noted that the term “expertise” is used with a dual meaning within the whole research. First, a great part of the information on which the integral index is constructed has been obtained through standardized interviews with

the Bulgarian Presidency, except on extracting data from published official EU and Presidency documents, has as a main information resource the content of the answers from the standardized interviews of a representative sample of Bulgarian participants in the Presidency work. That is why the IEB show an alternative expert point of view on the presenting of the presidency in a specific sectoral policy, as well as in a comparative perspective in relation to the experience from the work with previous presidencies in the respective sphere of competence.

The national neutrality is a considerable advantage of the IEB, which makes the results of their conducting an important addition to the evaluation made on the RPCEU. At the same time, namely because of these characteristics the IEB results remain only and particularly an additional instrument to the index developed on the basis of an integral approach towards the RPCEU content, reflected when developing and applying the index. The basic assumption in the development of this index is the understanding of an exclusive complexity and multidimensionality of the RPCEU – multifacetedness (interaction in relation to a set of different sectoral policies), multilaterality (a large number of participants in the interaction, who at that work at different levels), different phases of interaction, variable interaction dynamics. Holding all these variables in a single framework requires a high level of comparability between the different work instruments, which at that have to provide the optimal quantity of reliable information. The external point of view is hard to be compared with these work instruments due to its exclusiveness and namely because of this remains an external additional.

We again emphasize that from a methodological point of view the IEB is a traditionally used instrument for measuring the performance of a rotating presidency, because it allows the application of

---

the Bulgarian participants in the work groups on the respective legislative, non-legislative and political initiatives (dossiers). In these groups, the Bulgarian participants have worked namely in their capacity as experts on the respective sectoral policies. Second, the expertise of the evaluation is guaranteed also by the very strict following of the methodological standards, providing reliability and representativeness, and also a strict methodological control on the procedures leading to the final quantitative result from the integral index application.

a comparative perspective in relation to other presidencies. Meanwhile, the results obtained from IEB cannot achieve the high syntheticity of meaning of a specific numeral result, as is with the other facts about the RPCEU included in the index, but they remain at the level of content analysis and narrative presenting of their specificities. This gives the opportunity for comparing the obtained results in terms of different assessment scales.

The combination of the advantage of the external point of view and the methodological IEB characteristics create sufficient prerequisites for using the results from this instrument as a means for control and verification of the integral index result. In this way, the IEB contribute to enhancing the scientific credibility both of the evaluation itself and of the instrument of its creation.

#### *6.2. Developing a questionnaire and selecting the respondents*

Through the IEB, the authors team aims at revealing whether there is a prevailing “averaged assessment” or there has occurred a considerably differentiated picture in terms of content, which hypothetically could express even sharply polarized, contradictory assessments in the external expert evaluation of the Rotating Presidency. This additional information from the external experts could enhance the content density of the assessment obtained from the integral index. Subject of research were the assessments of the external experts on the Bulgarian Presidency, who under the undertaken institutional position to a higher extent could be carriers of valid statements. Of interest are not the individual opinions, but the points of intersection between them, so that there could be revealed the content and the structure of the prevailing opinion on the Rotating Presidency performance. This aggregate opinion consists of two main components<sup>17</sup>:

- evaluation of the RPCEU performance in a specific sectoral policy, supported by a concrete illustrative example, as a control question overcoming the respondent’s possible proneness to “politically correct” speaking or other pre-assumed tendency;

---

<sup>17</sup> The respondents were also given the opportunity, at their own desire, to highlight some meaningful emphasis of their impressions from the work of the Bulgarian RPCEU.

– evaluation of the RPCEU in a comparative perspective, again with the support of an illustrative example.

Namely in relation to these meaningful emphases have been constructed the main questions to the respondents, formulated in a way that supports the establishment of an environment of trust and commitment between the interviewer and the respondent/expert (Appendix 8).

The selection of respondents has been made on the basis of the obtained results about the RPCEU performance in the individual legislative dossiers by the integral index set of instruments. There have been selected an equal number of dossiers, i.e. fields of sectoral policies from three main categories of efficiency – such with a high value of the result, with a medium value and with a low value. Put in other words, the point of reference in the selection has not been the rank or the specific institutional position of the respondent, but the policy field in which such should be searched. The table with the names of the legislative dossiers compiled on this basis has been used as a list for establishing the respondents (Appendix 9).

With a view to providing the maximum diversity of points of view, there has been recommended a broad scope of possible institutional positions of potential respondents: EP – rapporteur for the dossier, a shadow rapporteur from another party family, different from that of the ruling party in Bulgaria; EC – responsible director or a GD director in the respective policy field of the selected dossier; GSC – directors or deputy directors in the portfolio directorate, in accordance with the policy areas.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Within this list over 200 potential respondents have been found and at least an initial contact has been established with them. Due to a number of various reasons, the majority of the contacted experts refused to give an interview. Twenty interviews were planned, and ultimately only 17 interviews were accomplished that cover the three types of categories of the result from the work on the dossiers. As there has been expected, the largest number of the responding officials is from the EP, which is an institution often preferred for research – namely because of the relative transparency of its work. The counterpoint is the number of the officials working in the Council formats who have responded to the invitation, which confirms the conclusions which are often made about the limited transparency and accessibility of/to the work of this institution.

## IV. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH TASKS – QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

### 1. Mathematical Data Processing – Quantitative Analysis

#### 1.1. Methodology

The integral index for evaluation of the RPCEU, in line with the structure of the main activities, implemented by the Bulgarian Presidency team, aggregates three dimensions within itself, corresponding to the three main types of activities, implemented as part of the responsibilities of a Presidency in the political and legislative process of EU integration:

- Work on legislative dossiers;
- Work on non-legislative deliverables;
- Work on political initiatives.

Each of the dimensions, based on the specific contents of the implemented work, aggregates multiple indicators. On the basis of this significantly detailed empirical foundation of facts, characterizing the work process and its outcomes, we constructed an integral index, following several consecutive steps:

Step One – operationalization of the constructed conceptual model through a questionnaire in which all indicators and their empirical variations comprehensively characterize the main work, implemented by the Bulgarian Presidency<sup>19</sup>, in terms of structure, stages and specifics. In line with the overall structural logic of the work, accomplished by the Presidency, a numerical value (score) is attributed to each of the categories of the individual indicators, which expresses its corresponding level of achievement, i.e. relative weight in terms of the quality of the final outcome.

---

<sup>19</sup> The inherent activities for the preparation of each Presidency such as trainings, logistics, volunteers, public communications will not be a subject of our research interest, due to their secondary, complementary nature in terms of Presidency outcomes.