

**ESF Exploratory Workshop on the Presidentialization of Politics in Democratic
Societies, Sussex 12-14 April, 2002.**

Scientific Report

Paul Webb (University of Sussex) & Thomas Poguntke (University of Keele)

The workshop centred around the question whether there is evidence for the suggestion that the politics of democratic societies is moving towards a ‘presidentialized’ mode of operation. In other words, the working hypothesis of this meeting was that the actual political process of modern democracies is increasingly coming to resemble the inherent logic of fully developed presidential systems. In most cases, this will not be the result of changes in the formal institutional structure of a given polity. Instead, changes in the way the political process operates will be caused by a combination of long-term structural changes in modern societies and contingent factors which may fluctuate over time. While the latter include factors such as the personalities of those in top political offices at a given time, the overall political agenda, and the majority situation in parliament, structural factors are relatively uniform across modern nations and include:

- the growth of the state
- the erosion of stable political alignments
- the mediatization of politics
- the internationalization of politics.

In a nutshell, we argue that the decline of stable political alignments has increased the proportion of citizens whose voting decisions are not constrained by long-standing party loyalties. At the same time, the mediatization of politics has increased the capacity of political leaders to by-pass their party machines and appeal directly to voters, who are less loyal to a given party creed than in previous phases of democratic politics. The prevalence of political leadership has been amplified further by the vastly expanded steering capacities of state machineries which have reduced the scope of effective parliamentary control. Finally, the internationalization of modern politics has led to an ‘executive bias’ which has additionally strengthened the role of political top elites vis-à-vis their parliamentary groups and/or their parties. As a result, we expect two interrelated processes to occur in modern democracies,

each of which contributes to a political process increasingly shaped by the inherent logic of presidentialism:

(a) increasing leadership power and autonomy within party and the political executive of the state respectively, and

(b) increasingly leadership-centred electoral processes.

We refer to these aspects of the phenomenon respectively as *political* and *electoral* presidentialization. All workshop participants were invited to apply this theoretical framework to their country or countries of study. This served two interrelated objectives. First, the workshop was able to systematically review and discuss empirical evidence on 12 democratic nations. Second, the consistency and coherence of the theoretical framework could be discussed in the light of these findings.

Consequently, the workshop began with a general conceptual debate, which raised several important points that were then followed up in the subsequent discussions about country studies. While the country studies revealed substantial cross-national variation as regards pace and actual ‘Gestalt’ of processes of presidentialization, the workshop members were impressed by the consistency of overall trends. Particularly interesting was the discussion semi-presidential countries (France, Finland, Portugal) which seem to follow a pattern of first moving formally towards fully parliamentary systems before ‘presidentializing’ in the sense set out above. It was also noted that presidentialization has somewhat different effects in consensual and majoritarian political systems. While leaders coming to power in majoritarian systems can immediately exercise their enhanced, presidentialized powers, leaders in consensual democracies initially need to ‘earn’ their autonomy from party political forces. Once this has been achieved, however, they may become even more detached and autonomous from their political parties than their counterparts in majoritarian systems.

Overall, although it is too early to report definitive conclusions, the following key points emerged from the workshop:

Major results:

- there are strong indications for processes of presidentialization in most modern democracies
- presidentialization occurs on two dimensions, the political and electoral dimension
- these dimensions are clearly interrelated, although the pace of changes may differ, and the causes of change may differ from one dimension to the other
- the impact of structural factors on the pace and exact nature of processes of presidentialization needs to be studied systematically
- while the papers which were discussed at the workshop represent an important step towards such a systematic study, they largely rely on secondary analysis
- participants therefore agreed that it is desirable to design a comparative project which would generate primary data on the causes and extent of presidentialization in democratic nations.

Appendix 1: Final Programme

ESF Exploratory Workshop on the Presidentialization of Politics in Democratic Societies

**Swanborough Manor, Kingston Village, near Lewes,
University of Sussex, 12-14 April 2002**

Friday 12 April 2002

morning: travel & arrival

14.00: Gather in lobby of White Hart Hotel

14.15-14.45: Welcome/Coffee at Swanborough Manor

14.45-15.15: Introduction: the analytical framework (Thomas Poguntke & Paul Webb)

15.15-16.15: Prime Ministerial Presidentialization in the UK? (Paul Webb)

Break

16.30-17.30: The Presidentialization of Politics in Democratic Societies:
The Case of the French Fifth Republic (Ben Clift)

Evening: Dinner, White Hart Hotel, Lewes

Saturday 13 April 2002

9.30-10.30: Presidentialization, Italian Style (Mauro Calise)

Break

11.30-12.30: A Presidentializing Party State? The Federal Republic of Germany
(Thomas Poguntke)

Lunch

14.00-15.00: The Low Countries: From 'Minister-President' to President-Minister?
(Stefaan Fiers & Andre Krouwel)

15.00-16.00: The Presidentialisation of Portuguese Democratic Politics?
(Marina Costa Lobo)

Break

16.30-17.30: Sweden: Is the Presidential Tortoise Catching the Parliamentary Hare?
(Nick Aylott)

Evening: Dinner, White Hart Hotel, Lewes

Sunday 14 April 2002

09.30-10.30: Presidentialization in Denmark? (Tim Knudsen & Karina Pedersen)

Break

11.30-12.30: Finland: Let the Force Be with the Leader - But Who Is the Leader?
(Heikki Paloheimo)

Lunch

14.00-15.00: Canada: A Case of Hyper-Presidentialism?
(Herman Bakvis & Steve Wolinetz)

15.00-16.00: The Failure of Presidentialized Parliamentarism: Constitutional versus
Structural Presidentialization in Israel's Parliamentary Democracy
(Reuven Hazan)

Break

16.30-17.00: Concluding discussion (incorporating planning of next stage of work)

Evening: Dinner, White Hart Hotel, Lewes

Sunday 14 April, evening/Monday 15 April 2002 - DEPARTURE

Appendix 2: Final List of Participants

Dr Nick Aylott

School of Politics, International
Relations and the Environment (SPIRE)
Keele University
Keele, Staffs, St5 5BG
UK
phone 0044-1782-584315
fax 0044-1782-583592
email N.Aylott@keele.ac.uk

Currently on a visiting fellowship at Department of Political Science, Umea Univseristy:
Statsvetenskapliga institutionen,
Umeå Universitet,
S-901 87, Umeå,
Sweden.
Tel: 090-786 50 00
Fax: 090-786 66 81
email: nicholas.aylott@pol.umu.se

Prof. Herman Bakvis,

Department of Political Science,
Arts and Administration Buidling, 3rd Floor,
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3H 4H6,
Canada .
h.bakvis@dal.ca

Prof Mauro Calise

Dipartimento di Sociologia,
Universita di Napoli,
Largo san Marcellino 10,
80138 Napoli,
Italy.
calise@unina.it

Dr. Ben Clift

Department of Government
Brunel University
Uxbridge
Middlesex UB8 3PH
UK
ben.clift@brunel.ac.uk

Dr. Marina Costa Lobo

Instituto de Ciências Sociais
da Universidade de Lisboa
Rua Miguel Lupi, 18, r/c
1200 Lisboa,

Portugal
tel: ++351-213903141
fax: ++351-213920615
email: marina.costalobo@ics.ul.pt

Dr. Stefaan Fiers
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven,
Departement Politieke Wetenschappen,
E. Van Evenstraat 2b,
B-3000 Leuven,
Belgium.
Stefaan.Fiers@soc.kuleuven.ac.be

Prof. Reuven Hazan
Department of Political Science,
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem,
91905 Jerusalem,
Israel.
mshazan@mscc.huji.ac.il

Prof. Tim Knudsen
Institute of Political Science,
University of Copenhagen,
Rosenborggade 15,
DK-1130 Copenhagen,
Denmark
TK@ifs.ku.dk

Dr Andre Krouwel
Department of Political Science and Public Administration,
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam,
De Boelelaan 1081c,
1081 HV Amsterdam,
Netherlands.
APM.Krouwel@scw.vu.nl

Prof Heikki Paloheimo
Heikki Paloheimo,
Department of Political Science
University of Turku
20014 Turku
FINLAND
hepalohe@utu.fi

Karina Pedersen
University of Copenhagen
Institute of Political Science
University of Copenhagen
Rosenborggade 15
DK-1130 København K.
Tel.: +45 35 32 34 16

Fax: +45 35 32 33 99
kp@ifs.ku.dk

Prof. Thomas Poguntke
School of Politics, International
Relations and the Environment (SPIRE)
Keele University
Keele, Staffs, ST5 5BG, UK
phone 0044-1782-583591
fax 0044-1782-583592
email t.poguntke@keele.ac.uk

Prof. Paul Webb
School of Social Sciences
University of Sussex
Falmer
Brighton BN1 9SN, UK
Tel: 01273 877796
Fax: 01273 673563
p.webb@sussex.ac.uk

Prof Steve Wolinetz
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's,
Newfoundland A1B 3X9,
Canada
office telephone (709) 737 7413 or 737 8179 (message)
fax (709) 737 4000
home (709) 753 6417
swolin@plato.ucs.mun.ca

Appendix 3: Statistical Information on Participants

a) Country of institutional affiliation

Belgium	1
Canada	2
Denmark	2
Finland	1
Israel	1
Italy	1
Netherlands	1
Portugal	1
Sweden	1 (a UK national)
UK	3 (including 1 German national)

b) Gender

Male	12
Female	2