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TYPES OF HEAD OF STATE IN EUROPEAN POLITICS

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This chapter provides an overview of European Heads of State. It provides basic information about the way in which Heads of State are selected, how long they remain in office, and how powerful they are. There are three general themes. First, whereas monarchs have no substantive role in the political process, there is great variation among the set of European presidents. Second, variation in presidential power is a better predictor of the different ways in which European presidents operate than how they are selected. Thirdly, variation in presidential power is itself the result of a mix of constitutional powers, party politics and behavioural norms. These themes are based on an analysis of 36 European countries, the 28 members of the European Union, plus five non-EU countries in the Balkans — Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia — and three non-EU countries in Western Europe — Iceland, Norway and Switzerland.

Selecting the Head of State

We can make a basic definitional distinction between monarchies and republics. In a European context, a monarchy is headed by a king or queen, or in the case of Luxembourg by a Grand Duke. In a monarchy, the Head of State is selected through some process of hereditary succession, or birthright. For example, until 2013 the rule of male primogeniture still applied in the UK. This meant that if the reigning monarch had both a son and a daughter and the daughter was older than the son, the son was still the first in line to the throne. However, like most other European monarchies, the UK has now abandoned this rule. Here, as elsewhere, the monarch's eldest child is first in the line of succession. In Europe, all monarchies can now be classed as parliamentary monarchies, implying that the monarch has few powers and the prime minister is dominant within the executive (see below). This classification helps to distinguish European

monarchies from absolute monarchies that can still be found elsewhere, notably in some Gulf States. There, the monarch is still a powerful figure.

In European republics, the Head of State is a president. Presidents can be chosen either indirectly by representatives of those elected by the people, or by the people directly. When the president is elected indirectly, then we can call the regime a parliamentary republic. Indirectly elected presidents are selected by an electoral college, but there is great variation in the type of electoral college used. For example, in Hungary the president is elected by members of the sole house of parliament, the National Assembly. By contrast, the German president is elected by a specially convened Federal Convention, which comprises the members of the lower house of parliament, the Bundestag, and an equal number of members elected by the sub-national parliaments of the Länder. For its part, Estonia mixes these two methods. Members of parliament meet to elect the president in the first instance. However, if no candidate is elected after three ballots, then a special electoral college is convened, comprising members of parliament and one representative from each local authority in the country. For their part, directly elected presidents have been selected in two ways. The standard format is simply a popular vote as in France. However, from 1925-1988 inclusive Finland had a different system, whereby there was a popular vote for members of an electoral college, which in turn elected the president. This system resembled the situation in the US. Some people wish to make a distinction between a French-style directly elected president and a Finnish-style popularly elected president. Now, though, with the change in the Finnish system, all European directly elected presidents are chosen by a direct popular vote.

While there is a basic definitional distinction between European monarchies and republics, it is standard to differentiate between different types of systems by adding a second classification rule that captures whether or not the government is collectively responsible to the legislature. In all parliamentary monarchies, this is the case. For example, in Britain Prime Minister James Callaghan's government lost a confidence vote in the House of Commons in March 1979, triggering the general election that brought Margaret Thatcher to power. In all European parliamentary republics, with the exception of Switzerland, the government is also collectively responsible to the legislature. So,

in the Czech Republic Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek's government lost a vote of no confidence in the Chamber of Deputies in March 2009 and resigned. Switzerland aside, we class both parliamentary monarchies and republics simply as parliamentary regimes. We class the Swiss case as an assembly-independent regime. When we apply this second classification rule to countries with a directly elected president, we can distinguish between semi-presidential regimes where there is a prime minister and where the government is collectively responsible to the legislature and presidential regimes where there is no prime minister and where the government is not responsible to the legislature. So, in Romania Prime Minister Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu's government was defeated in a vote of no confidence in April 2012. This is consistent with classifying Romania as semi-presidential. In Europe, there are many countries with a semi-presidential constitution (Elgie ed. 1999). However, while across the world there are many presidential regimes, notably in the US and Latin America, in Europe there is only one such country, Cyprus. (See Table 17.1). In Cyprus, the president is both head of state and head of government. So, there is no prime minister.

Over time, there has been a shift from monarchies to republics and, within republics, from parliamentary republics to semi-presidential regimes (Elgie, 2012). We can explain this shift normatively. We are now living in an era of representative liberal democracy. A key element of such a system is the notion that the people can hold accountable those who make decisions on their behalf. Monarchs cannot be held accountable. Therefore, when newly independent or democratizing countries have to make a choice about which constitutional structure they wish to adopt, there is now usually little support for the creation of or return to a monarchy. For example, in Iceland a republican constitution was overwhelmingly approved in May 1944. In Italy a referendum in June 1946 rejected the return of the monarchy albeit narrowly. In Greece, the restoration of the monarchy was rejected in a referendum in 1974. In the same year Malta, which had been independent since 1964 with the British monarch as Head of State, passed a law declaring itself a republic. Only Spain reverted to a monarchy at the point of democratization in 1975. The 'republicanisation' of European political life can be seen perhaps best in Bulgaria (Vassilev 2010). Here, the

monarchy was abolished in 1946 with the advent of a people's democracy. However, the heir to the Bulgarian throne, Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, returned to Bulgaria in 1996 and formed a political party, the National Movement for Stability and Progress, which won the 2001 parliamentary election. As Simeon Borisov Sakskoburggotski he served as Prime Minister from 2001-2005. This example demonstrates that the republican system is now firmly entrenched in Europe.

A similar logic explains why there has been a shift from parliamentary republics to semi-presidential regimes. Direct election is a very clear expression of popular will. Therefore, even if the indirect election of the president is fundamentally consistent with the principles of representative liberal democracy, direct election is normatively attractive. This helps to explain why most of the countries of the former communist block in Europe chose a directly elected president. It also helps to explain why parliamentary republics have subsequently switched to semi-presidentialism. This shift occurred in Slovakia in 1999 and the Czech Republic in 2013. However, we need to add a further element to explain the popularity of semi-presidentialism. While the US is a very stable presidential democracy where power is shared at the federal level between the President, the Congress and the Supreme Court, presidentialism in other countries has often been associated with very powerful, sometime authoritarian presidents. For this reason, pure presidentialism is often viewed as an unattractive or risky choice for newly independent or democratizing countries. Therefore, even though most former communist countries in Europe chose a directly elected president, none chose a pure presidential regime. The combined effect of these factors has made semi-presidentialism a very common regime type in contemporary Europe, though when parliamentary monarchies and republics are combined there are still as many parliamentary regimes in Europe as semi-presidential systems.

A puzzle, though, remains. If monarchies are no longer normatively attractive, why do they continue to exist? In part, the answer is historical. During the Second World War, West European monarchs were often associated with opposition to German expansionism or occupation. Therefore, when democracy returned to Western Europe in the post-war period there was little appetite to

abolish the monarchy. In Belgium, where the king's attitude to occupation was more questionable, a referendum was held in which a majority still voted to restore Leopold III to the throne. The answer is also partly political. In Western Europe monarchs no longer play any substantive role in the political process. Therefore, they do not challenge the essential normative principle of representative liberal democracy. The people rule indirectly through elections to the legislature and the responsibility of the prime minister and government to the legislature. If monarchs systematically tried to influence the political process, then we could safely predict that there would be a concerted move to abolish them. What all this suggests is that even if existing monarchies may endure, new ones are unlikely to be created. The result is that if the EU were ever to create the position of Head of State, we can be sure that the system would not be a monarchy.

Table 17.1 Type of political regimes in Europe about here

Presidential elections

Most European countries are republics. All republics hold presidential elections. We have seen that some countries elect their president indirectly, whereas others elect them directly. How do European presidential elections operate?

There is considerable variation in the rules for electing presidents indirectly. We have already seen that some indirectly elected presidents are selected solely by members of the legislature, some by a specially convened electoral college, and some by a mix of both. However, there is further variation in the precise mechanisms by which electoral colleges choose a president. All parliamentary republics require at least an absolute majority of votes in the first instance for the president to be elected and most require a super-majority, but thereafter some countries have a system that allows a candidate to be chosen relatively quickly whereas others have a system that can lead to a very protracted election. In Germany, there is a maximum of three rounds of voting. At the first two rounds a candidate needs to win an absolute majority of votes in the Convention. At the third round, a simple plurality is required. Therefore, the process of election is completed relatively quickly. In Italy, though, a two-thirds

majority is required at the first two ballots and an absolute majority thereafter. What is more, there is no limit to the number of ballots. So, in Italy in 1971 it took 15 days and 23 ballots before a president was chosen. In Estonia, when parliament fails to elect a president, the convening of the broader electoral college means that the whole process can take a considerable time. For example, the first round of the 2001 Estonian presidential election took place on 27 August, but President Arnold Rüütel was only elected on 21 September. In Greece there is a strong incentive for parliamentarians to reach agreement, but there is no guarantee they will do so. Here, the president is elected solely by deputies. At the first two ballots a two-thirds majority is required, whereas at the third ballot a three-fifths majority is necessary. If no candidate reaches this figure at the third ballot, then the legislature is dissolved and the process begins again except at the third ballot under the new parliament a simple plurality is required, thus guaranteeing a successful election. As a general rule, parties collectively and deputies individually do not wish to see the legislature dissolved for fear of losing support. Partly for that reason, three presidential elections in Greece have been decided at the third ballot, thus avoiding a dissolution. In 1990, though, a newly elected parliament was so split that a new election suited the various parties. When the presidential election went to the third ballot, the three-fifths majority was not found and new parliamentary elections were held. Only after the legislative election was a president successfully chosen. The whole process began on 19 February and ended on 4 May. Table 17.2 provides information about the number of ballots required to elect the president in Europe's parliamentary republics.

Table 17.2 The number of ballots required to elect the president in parliamentary republics about here

We can see, therefore, that there is great variation in the rules for electing presidents indirectly and that the process of election can be very protracted, but how competitive are elections? Table 17.3 shows that with the striking exception of the Italian case the first ballot of indirect presidential elections tends to be contested by a relatively small number of candidates, though it should be noted that in some countries new candidates are allowed to enter the contest at a later ballot to try to generate the necessary majority. Table 17.3 also shows that

uncontested elections are not uncommon. For example, in Greece where partisanship is very pronounced and where the 1990 presidential election took nearly three months, four presidential elections have nonetheless been uncontested since 1975. Usually, uncontested elections occur when an incumbent president wishes to stand for re-election as in Latvia in 2003. That said, in Hungary the 2012 presidential election was contested by only one candidate because none of the opposition parties had sufficient seats in parliament to nominate a candidate on their own and because they preferred not to run a joint candidate when the government's candidate was almost certain to be elected at the first ballot. Thus, an uncontested first ballot does not necessarily signify the presence of a consensus president. Overall, we can see that indirect presidential elections vary greatly in their competitiveness. Some are divisive and protracted, but a surprising number are uncontested. We can explain this difference by reference to party politics. Political parties dominate indirect presidential elections. If the party system is highly competitive and parties see little incentive to compromise, then the presidential election can be very divisive. However, if parties feel that they have little to gain from such a competition, then they will engineer a compromise candidate or allow an incumbent president to be re-elected without a contest. As we shall see, indirectly elected presidents usually have few powers, so the stakes are often not very high. This can encourage compromise candidates and/or discourage opposition parties from standing candidates and forcing a contest they might lose.

Table 17.3 The number of candidates at the first ballot of presidential elections in parliamentary republics about here

Turning to direct elections, the rules for electing the president are much more uniform. With the exception of Ireland, which uses a one-round system of preferential voting, all European countries use a two-round runoff system to elect the president. In this system, a number of candidates stand at the first round, but, assuming no candidate wins an absolute majority of the votes cast, only the leading two candidates are allowed to stand at the second round. In most countries the rules for nominating candidates are also relatively similar. Usually, candidates can stand for election if they receive a certain number of signatures from citizens. The number of signatures required varies roughly as a

function of the population of the country. That said, in France and Ireland there is no provision for citizen involvement. Instead, elected representatives dominate the process. Where signatures are the basis of the nomination process, the threshold is usually such that extremely determined well-known individuals and representatives of small parties can stand, whereas utterly frivolous candidates are effectively excluded. The rules in France have the same effect. In Ireland, established political parties have dominated the candidate selection process at least until recently. Overall, Table 17.4 shows that the average number of candidates in countries with direct elections is greater than the equivalent number for countries with indirect elections where parliamentary parties dominate the nomination process. Partly for that reason, Table 17.4 shows that in contrast to parliamentary republics uncontested elections are very rare in countries with direct elections, though they are common in both Iceland and Ireland where, as we shall see, the president is a figurehead institution with scarcely any political powers. That said, in countries with direct presidential elections political parties are usually the main vehicles by which signatures are collected. So, elections are still contested predominantly by party candidates. More than that, there is a big difference between standing for election and standing with a chance of winning or even doing well at the election. So, typically, the battle to win through to the second round is almost always confined to a handful of well-known party figures. Lesser-known 'citizen' candidates or candidates from very small parties often trail far behind, rarely able to make a dent in the public consciousness. Accordingly, Table 17.4 provides the figures for the effective number of presidential candidates at the first ballot of European direct presidential elections. These figures give a sense of how competitive direct elections are on average. They show that the effective number of first-round presidential candidates in countries with direct elections is higher than the average number of candidates at the first ballot of countries with indirect elections. This reflects the more open nomination process. Even so, the figures also show that in direct elections the real competition for the presidency is usually restricted to a relatively small number of candidates.

Table 17.4 Direct presidential elections in Europe about here

The main difference, though, between the effect of indirect and direct presidential elections concerns the nature of election campaigns. In countries with indirect elections, the election of the president is usually a major political event. However, by and large the contest takes place within a relatively restricted time period and mainly within the parliamentary arena. Candidates do not prepare a manifesto. There are no televised debates between them. There may not even be the opportunity for candidates to speak in parliament in support of their candidacy. Instead, the election is an elite party-centred affair. It may require party leaders to meet to try to agree a common candidate, but most of the politicking goes on behind closed doors. By contrast, direct presidential election campaigns look very different. All but the most minor candidates prepare some sort of manifesto, outlining their vision for the country. With the exception of Iceland, all countries now hold televised debates between all or at least some of the presidential candidates. Even prior to the official period of campaigning, which is usually around a month before the election date, candidates may hold mass rallies and public meetings for their supporters. They are likely to tour around the country. There is also political advertising or official election broadcasts on television. Indeed, the total cost of campaigning can be very large indeed. In addition, in some countries, such as France, the major parties now hold US-style primary elections to choose their presidential candidate. This means that formal campaigning begins up to a year before the election date itself. More than that, in countries such as France maneuvering for the presidency takes place years in advance. Here, the presidential election is the centrepiece of the electoral process. The political system is defined by the presidential election. Therefore, would-be candidates are making decisions with the presidential election in mind years ahead of any official campaigning. Overall, there are great differences between countries with directly and indirectly elected presidents in relation to election campaigns.

We have seen that direct elections are somewhat more competitive than indirect elections and that campaigning varies greatly as a function of the particular mode of election. However, does it make a difference to the type of person who is elected? There is some evidence that parliamentary republics are more likely to elect non-partisan presidents, or at least presidents who were not

holding elected political office at the time of their election. For example, in Latvia two of the four presidents since the collapse of communism have been drawn from outside parliament. Here, in 1999 five ballots failed to generate the required majority to elect the president. At the sixth ballot a figure from outside parliament was nominated and a majority was found. Similarly, in the second presidential election in Kosovo in 2011 a non-partisan candidate was found to ensure that a protracted or divisive selection process did not damage the political process. If we include ambassadors, judges and central bankers, there is an equivalent example in every parliamentary republic, even if most presidents have held representative political office prior to being elected as head of state. Indeed, in Italy and Greece the vast majority of presidents have been long-standing party figures. With directly elected presidents, the power of the office makes a difference. In countries with directly elected but weak presidents, the situation is not very different from countries with indirectly elected presidents. For example, in countries such as Austria, Finland and Slovenia there have been presidents from outside representative party politics, even if most presidents have been explicitly partisan. In Iceland and Ireland, where the presidency is very weak, non-partisan presidents have been more common still. However, in countries where the president is more than a figurehead, such as Cyprus, France and Romania, then party heritage is a necessary component for election. In these countries, the stakes are high and political parties are keen to hold the presidency. So, the power of the president is a better predictor of the type of person who serves as president in European republics than the mode of election.

The duration in office of Heads of State

The amount of time that Heads of State remain in office varies greatly between monarchies and republics. In monarchies, the king or queen cannot be voted out of office by the legislature, there are no elections at which public can choose to replace them, and there are no term limits. This means that monarchs can serve indefinitely. In the UK Queen Elizabeth II has reigned since 1952. Monarchs in Denmark and Norway have reigned from the early 1970s. That said, there is a tendency among European monarchs to abdicate at a certain point. For example,

Queen Juliana of the Netherlands reigned from 1948 until her abdication in 1980. She died in 2004. Her daughter, Queen Beatrix, reigned from 1980 until 2013 when she in turn abdicated at the age of 75. Thus, even though European monarchs serve for a much longer period than presidents, they often limit their reign. What is more, the decision to step down is usually entirely personal. Given monarchs no longer play any meaningful role in the political process, there is rarely any public or political pressure for them to abdicate. The exception is Leopold III of Belgium. As noted earlier, a referendum in March 1950 supported the restoration of Leopold III to the throne. However, when he returned to Belgium from exile in Switzerland in July 1950, strikes broke out in opposition. Almost immediately, Leopold III declared that he would abdicate in favour of his son, who became Baudoin of Belgium reigning from 1951 until his death in 1993.

Turning to republics, the standard European president serves for a five-year term and can be re-elected only once. In fact, this rule applies to 19 of Europe's 27 parliamentary republics, semi-presidential and presidential regimes. There is some variation. The presidents of Ireland and Italy serve for a seven-year term and the presidents of Austria and Finland for six years. By contrast, the presidents of Iceland and Latvia serve for only four years. Also, the presidents of Cyprus, Iceland, Italy and Malta are not term limited and can, in theory, be re-elected indefinitely. Even so, no Maltese president has served for more than one term and in 2013 Giorgio Napolitano was the first Italian president ever to be re-elected for a second term. In some countries, the combination of long presidential terms and/or the absence of term limits means that certain presidents have served for a considerable period of time. In Ireland four presidents have each served for 14 consecutive years. In France, President François Mitterrand served for the same length of time prior to the reduction in the president's term from seven to five years in 2000. In Iceland both President Ásgeir Ásgeirsson and President Vigdís Finnbogadóttir served for 16 consecutive years. What is more, the current incumbent, President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, was re-elected for a fifth term in 2012, having already served for 16 years. However, the record still lies with President Urho Kekkonen in Finland. He was in office from 1956-1982 prior to the introduction of the two-term limit there. Finally in this regard, it is worth noting that presidents tend not to return to the office after having stepped

down. Only three former presidents have been re-elected after a period away from the presidency. They are Konstantinos Karamanlis in Greece, Valdas Adamkus in Lithuania, and Ion Iliescu in Romania. So, while former presidents often continue in political life either domestically or in international organisations, they rarely return to the top post.

In contrast to monarchs, presidents can be held accountable for their actions. There are plenty of cases of incumbent presidents failing to be re-elected. If we confine ourselves solely to directly elected presidents, in Poland President Wałęsa was elected in 1990 but defeated in 1995. In Cyprus, two incumbent presidents have stood for re-election only to be defeated. The same is true in France and Romania. In Slovakia Rudolf Schuster won the country's first-ever direct presidential election in 1999, winning 47.4 per cent of the vote at the first ballot. However, when he stood for re-election in 2004 he won only 7.4 per cent of the vote, coming a distant fourth. In Bulgaria, President Zhelev won the 1992 election, but failed to win his party's nomination for the 1996 election and did not stand. By contrast, in Iceland, Ireland and Portugal, where there is a long history of presidential elections, no incumbent has failed to be re-elected. These countries have weak directly elected presidents, particularly Iceland and Ireland, again suggesting that where the president is a figurehead the office is less likely to be contested. That said, in Slovenia, where the president is also very weak, President Türk failed to be re-elected in 2012.

In addition to these and similar cases, a small number of European presidents have had to leave office early. Two presidents have resigned under pressure from a scandal in which they were implicated. In 2010 President Christian Wulff of Germany resigned amidst allegations of financial wrongdoing (Kubiak 2012). In 2012 President Pál Schmitt of Hungary resigned when he was accused of plagiarising his PhD thesis. Two presidents have resigned when the exercise of their role has been challenged. In Germany, President Horst Köhler resigned in May 2010 when he was criticized for comments he made in relation to alleged links between Germany's military missions overseas and the country's trading relations. There was no obligation for him to resign, but he decided to do so when he received little support from the political class generally. A similar situation occurred in Ireland in 1976 (Gallagher 1977). Here, President Cearbhall

Ó Dálaigh was criticised by the Defence Minister for submitting a bill to the Supreme Court for a ruling on its constitutionality. The minister offered to resign for having criticised the President, but the Taoiseach (prime minister) refused to accept the minister's resignation. Feeling isolated, President Ó Dálaigh stepped down. The president was perfectly entitled to send the bill to the Supreme Court and he did not have to leave office. However, he felt that he had not been supported by the political class and preferred to resign.

Even though presidents serve for a fixed term, all constitutions have a clause that allows them to be impeached and dismissed from office. The conditions vary, but usually they require some claim that the president has acted unconstitutionally. To date, only one European president has been impeached, though impeachment has been avoided only narrowly on two further occasions. In 2004 President Rolandas Paksas of Lithuania was impeached (Clark and Verseckaitė 2005). He was accused of having contacts with Yuri Borisov, a Russian businessman who allegedly had links with organised crime. A special parliamentary commission ruled that the accusation was accurate. The Constitutional Court then found President Paksas guilty of violating the constitution and breaking his oath. In parliament, deputies voted on the charges and the two-thirds majority necessary for impeachment was passed by just one vote. This is the only case when a president has been obliged to step down prematurely. However, in Romania there have been two impeachment attempts (Gherghina and Miscoiu 2013). Both concerned President Traian Băsescu. In 2007 a hostile majority in parliament voted to suspend President Băsescu from office for supposedly violating the constitution. In this case, the Romanian constitution requires that a referendum be held to impeach the president. In May of that year, nearly 75 per cent of those voting in the referendum voted against impeaching the president and he remained in power (Tanaescu 2008). A similar situation occurred in 2012. Again, President Băsescu faced a majority opposed to him in parliament and once again he was suspended. This time, nearly 90 per cent of those voting in the referendum voted to impeach the president. However, less than 50 per cent of registered electors turned out to vote. Therefore, the result of the referendum was invalid and President Băsescu again remained in power. In Latin America, there is some evidence that impeachment has increasingly been

used as a way of ousting unpopular presidents (Marsteintredet and Berntzen 2008). In Europe, this situation has not occurred, but the Romanian example shows that it is possible. If it were to occur, then it would most likely do so only in countries where the president is a relatively powerful political actor. This is because the presidential stakes are higher in these countries, leading parties to calculate that in some circumstances the risk of undermining the institution of the presidency by an act of presidential *lèse-majesté* may be outweighed by the benefits to be gained from winning the presidency at the subsequent election. Here, then, is another example where the power of the office helps to explain variation in political practice across the set of European Heads of State.

The power of Heads of State

On a number of occasions we have seen that the power of Heads of State helps to explain various differences in the way in which European political systems operate. So, what powers do they have? (Table 17.5 provides a basic ranking of presidents in terms of their powers).

Table 17.5 The power of European presidents about here.

The first distinction we need to draw is between monarchies and republics. As noted above, in monarchies the Head of State no longer has any real influence over the political process. In these countries, the head of government (the prime minister) is the main political figure within the government. All the same, we need to distinguish between the formal constitution and actual constitutional practice. Formally, monarchs often exercise great power in some areas. For example, with the exception of Sweden (Roobol 2011: 284), the approval of the monarch in still needed for a bill to become law. In theory, this means that monarchs have veto power. By convention, though, this power is never used. That said, in Belgium in March 1990 King Baudoin informed Prime Minister Wilfried Martens that his conscience would not allow him to sign a bill that partially legalised abortion (Prakke 2006: 141-143). However, the King also acknowledged that it was unacceptable for him to veto a bill passed by the legislature. To resolve the problem, the Council of Ministers voted to declare the King unable to rule, meaning that it had the power to sign the bill into law,

which it duly did, and then convened parliament the next day to declare Baudoin once again able to rule. Generally, the one area where we might still see the residual influence of the monarch is in the process of government formation. Again with the exception of Sweden, in European monarchies the king or queen formally nominates the prime minister-designate who then proceeds to form a government. Usually, the monarch's choice is determined in advance by the result of the legislative election or by post-election negotiations between political parties. However, it is not unimaginable that in particular circumstances there may be no obvious prime ministerial candidate and the monarch's decision could be influential (Saalfeld 2003: 648). For example, in 2010 the Dutch general election returned a parliament without a clear-cut majority. Queen Beatrix was advised to nominate representatives (or *informateurs*) from two parties each of whom would engage in negotiations to form a new government. However, she decided to nominate only one, seemingly signaling her preference for a particular type of coalition. In the end, new *informateurs* had to be appointed as the process of government formation proved particularly difficult. However, the Queen's choice could have been decisive. Indeed, in 1994, when a similar situation occurred, Queen Beatrix also went against advice and appointed an *informateur* who ended up becoming Prime Minister (De Winter: 126). So, the formal powers of the monarch may be slightly more than completely residual in this regard. That said, such examples are very rare and do not threaten the democratic norms on which the regime is founded. Instead, the monarch's role is now purely social and cultural, acting as a figurehead around which citizens can unite in times of national disaster, for example. Thus, the point stands that if monarchs were to intervene substantively and unilaterally in the political process, then there would quickly be a backlash.

We can see, therefore, that in parliamentary monarchies kings and queens play no substantive role in the political process. Instead, in these countries prime ministers are the main political actors within the executive. In parliamentary republics the prime minister is also the main political actor. However, even the weakest indirectly elected presidents have the potential to exercise more influence than any monarch. For example, in Germany where the president has very few powers at all and where, as we saw, one president resigned because he

was criticized for merely commenting on the political process, the Federal President still has the implicit power to refuse to countersign bills passed by the legislature. This power is used very sparingly. Indeed, it has been invoked only ten times since 1949. However, when we compare even this very restricted use of the president's veto power to the constitutional consternation caused by King Baudoin of Belgium's moral dilemma in 1990, we can see that indirectly elected presidents play a fundamentally different role in the political process from monarchs. They may be weak, but they can legitimately exercise whatever power they may have. What is more, Tavits (2008) has shown that even the weakest indirectly elected presidents can be quite consequential political actors. One area where they sometimes intervene is in their capacity as the 'guardian of the constitution'. This power often expresses itself when presidents veto bills passed by the legislature, or at least when they send bills back to the legislature for further consideration. For example, in Latvia President Valdis Zatlers returned 14 bills to the legislature from 2007-2011. President Václav Klaus of the Czech Republic was particularly active in this regard, returning no fewer than 63 bills to parliament from April 2003 to November 2012. More than that, presidential power can sometimes be more significant still. For example, in Hungary President Árpád Göncz was persistently in conflict with the government in the years immediately following the collapse of communism (O'Neil 1993). In Italy, Pasquino (2012: 848) has shown that prior to 1993 Italian presidents exercised little more than "moral persuasion". Since this time, though, they have become more significant political actors. For example, in April 1993 President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro found himself "totally unconstrained" (ibid. 849) in his choice of prime minister and government ministers. Italian presidents have also become more involved in the general process of legislation since this time. President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi had a habit of "active and decisive intervention in the course of parliamentary proceedings" that "essentially transformed him into an authoritative and influential co-legislator" (Grimaldi 2011: 116). The Italian case is particularly instructive because it demonstrates that variation in presidential power is largely determined by variation in party politics. Here, the collapse of the party system in the early 1990s provided the president with a "huge window of opportunity" (Pasquino 2012: 847) to exercise political influence. In general,

therefore, we can say that even if the prime minister is the main actor within the executive in parliamentary republics, we should not discount the role of indirectly elected presidents.

In semi-presidential and presidential countries the situation is more varied. As Tavits (2008) has amply demonstrated, the direct election of the president does not mean that the president will necessarily be a powerful political actor. As Table 17.5 shows, some of the very weakest presidents are directly elected. In these countries, the prime minister is, once again, the dominant political actor within the executive. The weakness of certain directly elected presidents is partly due to the small number of constitutional powers that are invested in the office. Presidents in the Balkans are now notable in this regard. In the period following independence in 1990 Croatia adopted a constitution with a very strong president. However in 2001 almost all of the president's powers were taken away, bringing Croatia into line with other countries in the region. For example, even though they are directly elected, the presidents of Slovenia and Croatia do not even have the power to request parliament to consider a bill for a second time. The president of Slovenia in particular plays little more than a ceremonial role, though with some powers to influence the process of government formation. That said, the president of Slovenia retains the right to speak out on matters of political concern and presidents have locked horns with the government over controversial issues (Krašovec and Lajh 2008: 213). However, as in parliamentary systems, ultimately the government decides.

In part, the weakness of some directly elected presidents is also due to the historical conditions in which certain presidencies were established (Duverger 1980). For instance, in Iceland the president has many constitutional powers. However, rather like a monarchy, by convention these powers are not used. The president is an almost entirely figurehead institution. In Ireland, the president has many fewer powers but only one, the power to send a bill to the Supreme Court for a judgment on its constitutionality, has been used with any regularity and even then, as we saw, on one occasion the use of this power provoked a crisis that led to the resignation of the incumbent president. In both countries the creation of a presidency was a symbolic political act, replacing the position of a monarch or a monarch's appointed representative in the constitutional system.

The aim was not create an executive presidency and the first incumbents understood that their role was almost exclusively ceremonial. This tradition has lasted. Even so, rather like the situation with indirectly elected presidents, there are times when even very weak directly elected presidents can exercise some influence. In Iceland the president's refusal to sign a bill passed by parliament automatically triggers a referendum to decide whether or not the bill should become law. This power was not used for 50 years until in 1994 President Grímsson invoked the power for the first time. On that occasion, the government withdrew the bill before a referendum could held. However, President Grímsson has since vetoed legislation on two further subsequent occasions and both times in the ensuing referendum the people have supported the president and voted to reject the bill passed by parliament. Overall, though, we can consider the power of indirectly elected presidents and very weak directly elected presidents in essentially the same way.

In some countries, though, directly elected presidents are more powerful political actors. This is most notably the case in Cyprus where, it has been asserted (Ker-Lindsay 2006: 33), the president "exerts more influence over [the] state" than the equivalent leader in any country in the European Union. The situation in Cyprus is unusual and not merely in a European context. Article 46 of the 1960 Constitution states that "executive power is ensured by the President and the Vice-President of the Republic". Indeed, according to the Constitution, the Vice-President is an important political figure with effective veto power over most key issues. Article 1 of the 1960 further states that the President shall be elected by the Greek Cypriot community and that the Vice-President shall be elected by the Turkish Cypriot community. Therefore, the 1960 Constitution established a form of ethnic power-sharing. However, in 1963 conflict broke out between the two communities on the island and the Turkish community's involvement in the political system ended. As a result, even though the Constitution continues to refer to the Vice-President, the position has remained unoccupied ever since. In practice, this means that sole executive authority has resided in the presidency. More generally, the president's position is increased by the popular perception that the president is the *ethnarch*, or national leader, of the Greek Cypriot people (ibid: 28). This position "further intensifies and

reinforces the sense that speaking out against the president is not just disrespectful, it is an act against the community at large" (ibid: 29).

In France, there is no shortage of people willing to criticize the president, but there is still no doubt that under normal circumstances the president is the main actor in the political process (Elgie 2013). Here, the president has some not insignificant constitutional powers, especially in foreign affairs, but Article 20 states that the "government shall determine and conduct the policy of the nation", while Article 21 states that the prime minister "shall direct the actions of the government". So, constitutionally the prime minister would seem to be the key figure within the executive. However, party politics renders the situation very different. In the legislature there is a usually a "presidential majority", meaning a majority that is loyal to the president rather than the prime minister. This means that the president can appoint a loyal prime minister who has the support of the legislature and who will direct the actions of the government on the president's behalf. What is more, in France more than in any other European country with the exception of Greece the presidential election is the key moment in the political process. For example, presidential elections determine the policy agenda. So, not only can the president appoint a loyal prime minister, the president can be assured that the prime minister will implement the president's policies. Thus, party politics rather than constitutional powers ensure that the French president is usually a more political actor within the system than the prime minister.

In Romania, the situation is similar. However, Romanian presidents have tended to exercise power despite rather than because of political parties, which are typically ill-disciplined and which fail to guarantee a stable parliamentary majority (Gallagher and Andrievici 2008). That said, like the situation in countries with indirectly elected presidents, in France and Romania presidential power can vary considerably. Here, the main factor is whether or not the president enjoys a supportive parliamentary majority or whether there is a majority actively opposed to the president. In the latter case, the majority will appoint a prime minister and cabinet who are also opposed to the president and will pass legislation prepared by the government. In these circumstances, the president no longer has any political allies in the executive. This is known as

'cohabitation'. On these occasions, the president can only react to the government's decisions, losing almost all influence over policy. In France since 1958, there have been three periods of cohabitation – 1986-88, 1993-1995, and 1997-2002. In Romania since 1991, there have been two periods – 2007-2008, and 2012-2013. During these periods, relations within the executive between the president, on the one hand, and the prime minister and cabinet, on the other, can be very fraught. It is no coincidence that both attempts to impeach President Băsescu occurred during periods of cohabitation.

In France and Romania, periods of cohabitation weaken the presidency. Elsewhere, though, cohabitation can strengthen the president. In this regard, Portugal, Bulgaria, and Poland are good examples. Outside cohabitation, the prime minister is usually the party leader and the president is a lesser party figure. This means that the prime minister leads the parliamentary majority and is dominant within the executive, whereas the president is a secondary figure exercising little effective power. However, when there is cohabitation the prime minister still leads the parliamentary majority but the president now provides the main party political opposition to the prime minister within the executive. This brings the president to prominence. For example, in 2004 President Sampaio of Portugal engineered the dissolution of the legislature during a period of cohabitation, allowing new elections to be held that returned his party to government (Amorim Neto and Costa Lobo 2009). In Bulgaria presidential vetoes increase under cohabitation as the president tries to stymie the opposition government. In Poland the 1997 Constitution reduced the president's powers. Ordinarily, the president is now a secondary political figure. However, during cohabitation the president is still a nuisance figure for the government. For example, as in Bulgaria, the use of presidential vetoes increases under cohabitation (ibid: 382). Thus, we see that a combination of constitutional powers and presidential politics helps to explain why cohabitation has different consequences in different countries.

In general, therefore, there is great variation in the powers of European heads of states. To all intents and purposes, monarchs are always powerless. By contrast, indirectly presidents usually have a certain degree of influence and on some occasions may have rather more latitude. Even so, they operate within a

system in which, like parliamentary monarchies, the prime minister is the dominant actor within the executive. The same can be said about countries with very weak directly elected presidents. Here again, prime ministers are dominant within the executive, though presidents can exercise influence under certain conditions. However, in a handful of countries the president is generally the dominant political actor. In Cyprus this is always the case, not least because there is no prime minister in the system. In France and Romania the president is usually the dominant actor, but under cohabitation power shifts to the prime minister. This variation in the power of European heads of states is caused by differences in constitutional powers, the presence or absence of behavioural norms, and, most importantly, and shifting patterns of party politics both in the country generally and in the legislature specifically.

Conclusion: European heads of state

On 13-14 December 2012 27 heads of state and government attended the biannual meeting of the European Council in Brussels. This meeting is a good indicator of where power lies in EU member state executives. At this meeting, there were 23 heads of government, four presidents and no monarchs. The presidents who attended were from Cyprus, France, Lithuania and Romania. In the past, the presidents of Finland and Poland have also regularly attended equivalent meetings, but they are now represented by their country's prime minister. We have also seen that Croatia, the newest member of the EU, is represented at European Council meetings by its prime minister. If we try to imagine who would represent the non-EU countries covered in this survey, then Switzerland would be represented by its president, not least because there is no prime minister, but all the other countries would almost certainly be represented by their prime minister. Indeed, if Switzerland was represented by its president, it would not be a sign that the country had a powerful president. The Swiss president is elected by parliament, has very few powers, and serves for only one year with the post rotating between the seven members of the country's cabinet.

These figures are instructive. They indicate that monarchs and indirectly elected presidents are not expected to play a significant role in the policy-making

process. In fact, as we have seen, monarchs are not expected to play any role whatsoever. These figures also indicate that directly elected presidents are not necessarily the centre of political attention in European executives. In only a handful of countries is this the case. Indeed, in Lithuania the head of state attends meetings of the European Council because the constitution specifically states that the president "shall represent the state" (Art. 77) rather than because the presidency is in charge of policy making at home. In that regard, the Lithuanian prime minister is much more important. What is more, if there is a trend, then it is towards less powerful directly elected presidents. In 1982 Portugal significantly reduced the power of its president. In Poland and Croatia, equivalent changes were made in 1997 and 2001 respectively. In Finland the powers of the president have been reduced by so much since 2000 that the Finnish president is now merely an Irish-style figurehead. In Slovakia and the Czech Republic direct presidential elections were introduced in 1999 and 2013 respectively, yet the power of these presidents was not increased accordingly. Thus, two additional weak but directly elected presidents were added to the European list. These changes merely underline the point that the mode of election is not a good predictor of presidential power in Europe.

This is not to say that indirectly elected presidents and weak directly elected presidents do not matter. As we have seen, all presidents have more opportunity to influence the political process than any monarch. More than that, if the party political conditions are right, then both indirectly elected presidents and weak directly elected presidents have the opportunity to exercise a more substantive influence. Their role might be one of behind-the-scenes "moral persuasion", or as the "guardian of the constitution" exercising veto power, as a more constructive partner in decision-making with the government, or sometimes as a troublemaker, making life difficult for the government and the parliamentary majority. For example, in 2013 the Czech Republic switched from indirect to direct presidential elections, thus becoming semi-presidential. The Czech president is a largely figurehead institution. However, when the Czech government collapsed in July 2013 the first directly elected president, Miloš Zeman, was able to appoint his preferred candidate as interim prime minister and then generate a parliamentary dissolution when the government failed to be

ratified by parliament. The Czech president is very weak, but by pushing his powers to the limit President Zeman was able to manufacture the outcome that he was looking for. Thus, the role of indirectly elected presidents and weak directly elected presidents should not be discounted. However, in only a handful of European countries is the Head of State a truly powerful political actor. The presidents of Cyprus, France and to a lesser extent Romania stand out in this regard. These countries have executive presidents, meaning that the president is the main figure within the governmental system. Even here, though, party politics can shift decision-making power to the prime minister. When this happened in Romania in 2012 there was a fierce political row between the president and the new prime minister as to who should represent Romania at the December European Council meeting.

Overall, we can say that presidential power is on the wane in Europe. This does not mean that directly elected presidents are out of fashion. Quite the contrary, the norms of representative liberal democracy point in that direction. However, we are unlikely to see a shift to executive presidencies in Europe any time soon. The development of the EU itself is consistent with this general point. Although the EU is a *sui generis* organisation, the position of the President of the European Commission more closely resembles that of an active indirectly elected president than a true executive presidency. Indeed, if there was ever to be a President of the European Union, then it is not inconceivable that such a position would be directly elected by the citizens of Europe. If this were the case, though, we can be fairly sure that the office would be more of a figurehead institution, acting as the guardian of the Treaties, than a real policy-making actor. In this event, such a president would behave in a way that would be familiar to the vast majority of European citizens.

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Table 17.1 Types of political regimes in Europe

Parliamentary		Assembly-independent	Semi-presidential	Presidential
Monarchies	**Republics**			
Belgium Denmark Luxembourg Netherlands Norway Spain Sweden UK	Albania Estonia Germany Greece Hungary Italy Kosovo Latvia Malta	Switzerland	Austria Bulgaria Croatia Czech Rep Finland France Iceland Ireland Lithuania Macedonia Montenegro Poland Portugal Romania Serbia Slovakia Slovenia	Cyprus

Table 17.2 The number of ballots required to elect the president in parliamentary republics

Country	Year of first election	No. of elections	Average no. of ballots	Highest no. of ballots	Lowest no. of ballots
Albania	2002	3	3	4	1
Estonia	1992	5	3.4	5	1
Germany	1949	15	1.9	4	1
Greece	1975	8	2.3	5	1
Hungary	1990	3	1.7	3	1
Italy	1948	11	9.5	23	1
Kosovo	2011	2	2	3	1
Latvia	1993	6	2.3	6	1

Note: No information is available for Malta. The figures for Hungary are from 2005 inclusive.

Table 17.3 The number of candidates at the first ballot of presidential elections in parliamentary republics

Country	Average no. of candidates	Highest no. of candidates	Lowest no. of candidates	No. of elections with only one candidate at the first ballot
Albania	1.3	2	1	2
Estonia	2.8	4	1	1
Germany	3.3	8	1	1
Greece	2	6	1	4
Hungary	1.7	2	1	1
Italy	11.5	18	5	0
Kosovo	1.5	1	1	1
Latvia	2.2	4	1	2

Notes: No information is available for Malta. The figures for Hungary are from 2005 inclusive onwards. The figures for Italy exclude so-called 'voti dispersi'.

Table 17.4 Direct presidential elections in Europe

Country	Year of first election in dataset	No. of elections	Average no. of candidates at the first round	Average effective no. of candidates at the first round	No. of elections with only one candidate
Austria	1951	12	3.1	2.1	0
Bulgaria	1992	5	13	3.1	0
Croatia	2000	3	11.3	4.2	0
Cyprus	1968	10	5.3	2.3	2
Czech Rep	2013	1	9	5.7	0
Finland	1950	11	7.2	3.7	0
France	1969	8	10.6	5.0	0
Iceland	1945	18	1.9	1.5	10
Ireland	1938	13	2.3	1.9	6
Lithuania	1993	5	7.6	3.4	0
Macedonia	1994	4	4.5	3.5	0
Montenegro	2008	1	4	2.9	0
Poland	1995	4	11.8	3.4	0
Portugal	1976	8	4.6	2.4	0
Romania	1996	4	13	3.9	0
Serbia	2008	2	10.5	4.8	0
Slovakia	1999	3	9.7	3.3	0
Slovenia	1992	5	7	3.0	0

Table 17.5 The power of European presidents

Country	Method of election	Score (0-1)
Cyprus	Direct	0.75
France	Direct	0.44
Romania	Direct	0.39
Croatia	Direct	0.33
Iceland	Direct	0.33
Portugal	Direct	0.33
Lithuania	Direct	0.32
Poland	Direct	0.29
Albania	Indirect	0.27
Hungary	Indirect	0.27
Estonia	Indirect	0.25
Italy	Indirect	0.25
Macedonia	Direct	0.19
Ireland	Direct	0.18
Czech Republic	Direct	0.17
Finland	Direct	0.17
Malta	Indirect	0.17
Slovakia	Direct	0.15
Bulgaria	Direct	0.14
Austria	Direct	0.13
Latvia	Indirect	0.13
Serbia	Direct	0.10
Slovenia	Direct	0.10
Montenegro	Direct	0.08
Germany	Indirect	0.06
Greece	Indirect	0.06

The scores are calculated as the mean of the standardized scores of three measures of presidential power, e.g. Shugart and Carey (1992), Siaroff (2007), and Tavits (2008). The scores are a mix of constitutional presidential powers and presidential powers in practice.