

commanders operating on the ground. It is difficult to summarize the complexity of this single chapter, but in essence, responsibility shares a mysterious relationship with historical character of a nation and its people, where size might be expected to matter does not at all, and troop restrictions could hardly be seen as restrictive, especially when comparing Australia and New Zealand's troop performs with that of other NATO countries.

The risks involved for countries, their soldiers, their publics, and their politics are central components of this book. The core of politics at home and their impacts on warfighting in distance places and in the context of multilateralism is the essence of this intensively researched and brilliantly articulated study. One should not see this as a military examination, or a history of a military campaign. In fact, one cannot escape the interdisciplinary character of a study that attempts to touch on so many different aspects of a war that affects, in turn, so many different levels of societies. This is perhaps one of the most admirable traits of this book. Its intricate empirical side matches its theoretical dimension. Employing both qualitative and quantitative methods of research, there is a very noticeable eclecticism through the chapters. The book, through its investigation of the NATO alliance and its members and non-member partners, pays further attention to the dynamism of a politico-military organization that has repeatedly been said to have outlived its usefulness and becomes disconnected in terms of its original conception, with the evolving nature of geopolitics in contemporary times. There is no clear indication of bias in any of the chapters nor have the authors fallen short of providing equitable focus to the many countries involved in the Afghanistan war. Auerswald and Saideman's book has established a useful vantage point for further studies of the two-way effects of the war and its participants on several analytical levels, and is an important resource for members of military institutions in addition to scholars, and people in politics.

Hloušek, Vít (ed.) *Presidents above parties? Presidents in Central and Eastern Europe, Their Formal Competencies and Informal Power* (Brno: Muni Press, 2013).

Philipp Köker
University College London

The presidencies of Central and Eastern Europe and their incumbents have attracted the attention of a number of political scientists since the region's transition to democracy over twenty years ago. Although over time Prime Ministers and their governments have established themselves as the dominant executive actors, presidents still play an important role in the functioning of these political systems and possess the power to exert significant influence over political decision-making. The volume *Presidents above parties? Presidents in Central and Eastern Europe, Their Formal Competencies and Informal Power* takes the recent change of the

mode of presidential election in the Czech Republic as an occasion and starting point to explore the activities of the presidents of Central and Eastern Europe – defined as the ten countries that joined the EU in 2004/2007. In particular, it focusses on instances in which presidents attempted to overstep their constitutionally defined powers or managed to influence political decisions informally. Hereby, the contributors also aim to shed light on the role played by presidents' personal characteristics and ambitions, and argue that they are key to explaining attempts to “accrue more power” (p. 25) and “strengthen the role of the president” (p. 291).

The book is organised as a collection of ten case studies framed by an introduction and a concluding chapter that set the topic into a comparative perspective and sum up individual findings. The individual chapters, written by country experts, each give an overview of the historical predecessors of the current presidential institutions and their incumbents to date and discuss the way in which presidents have tried to influence political decisions formally and informally, and attempted to extend their powers. The broad historical overviews given in each chapter, often going back to the creation of the first presidencies after WW I and discussing the practice of presidential politics in the inter-war years, provide a very useful contribution to the existing literature. In particular, they illustrate the connotations associated with the institution of the presidency by the drafters of the new constitutions after 1989 well as by the first office-holders during the early years of democratisation. After comparable volumes had previously almost exclusively focussed on popularly elected presidents, the case studies in this book also explicitly include chapters on indirectly elected presidents, thus allowing for comparisons across regime types. Particularly the presidencies of Latvia and Estonia have not yet been featured in this form in other English language publications. Even though Elgie and Moestrup's *Semi-presidentialism in Central and Eastern Europe*⁶⁹ was only published six years ago, the book thus presents a welcome expansion of the literature and also provides updates on the developments of presidencies covered in previous publications.⁷⁰ Furthermore, all chapters include at least some data on how often presidents used their formal powers (vetoes, legislative initiatives, judicial review requests etc.) to date and use this information to assess the influence of different factors on presidential activity. Although this data is not always presented in a form that would make it suitable for cross-country comparisons (e.g. by reporting the number of vetoes also as a percentage of all legislation passed), it still presents an improvement over previous publications on Central and East European presidents where such numbers have only rarely been included systematically.

⁶⁹ Robert Elgie and Sophia Moestrup, eds. *Semi-presidentialism in Central and Eastern Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

⁷⁰ In fact, the chapters on Lithuania and Slovenia are at least partly based on those in *Semi-presidentialism in Central and Eastern Europe* written by the same authors.

Irrespective of these unquestionably valuable contributions and overall usefulness of this volume, there are also a number of weaknesses, both with regard to overall form and in terms of content. First and perhaps least important, the individual country chapters differ with regards to overall length and internal structure. While all chapters address the main points mentioned above (historical overview, incumbents, attempts to influence political decisions and extend presidential power), the emphasis placed on each varies between chapters and the chosen focus is not always justified by its relative significance for the eventual conclusions. Hereby, it should be noted that the chapter on Bulgaria does generally not address the topic of informal presidential power. Rather, it consists of an analysis of presidential veto use and presidents' public approval between 2002 and 2012 which – albeit insightful – does not fit in with the rest of the volume. Another point of critique is the fact that apart from the chapter on Hungary, all other chapters lack an overview table of governments (and/or Prime Ministers) and their respective tenure, making it difficult for readers less acquainted with a particular political system to follow the discussion. The odd number of spelling errors and awkward grammatical constructions (likely resulting from too literal translations from the authors' native languages) do not generally inhibit the understanding of arguments but unnecessarily slow down the flow of reading. Unfortunately, there are also about half a dozen sources referenced in the text which do not appear in the bibliography.

The greatest limitation of the volume at hand concerns how it addresses the issue of presidential personality. The editor is clear to point out in the introduction that the aim of the book is not to provide a “comprehensive explanation of the role played by a strong political personality” (p. 27) and that it therefore refrains from adopting a unified theoretical approach, focussing on the explanation of individual cases rather than “stimulating a shift [...] towards a more general explanation” (p. 27). However, the lack of such a general framework means that the author(s) of each chapter follow a different understanding of what ‘personality’ means and how its influence on presidential action can be demonstrated (in fact, a similar divergence exists with regard to the term ‘informal’). Only few authors refer to concepts from the established literature on political psychology or political leadership and evidence of presidents' individual character traits/ their importance often remains anecdotal or extremely vague (sometimes even bordering the tautological, e.g. the description of Hungarian president László Sólyom as a “more active personality” than pre-predecessor Árpád Göncz; p. 90). Thus, the conclusion that – in addition to conflicts caused by cohabitation between president and government – “attempts to strengthen the role of the president are also dependent upon his/her personality and charisma” (p. 291) should be seen as a hypothesis in need of further systematic investigation, rather than as a definite conclusion.

In sum, the book at hand presents a useful resource for students and scholars interested in presidential politics in Central and Eastern Europe as well as a welcome update to and expansion of the existing literature. It provides a wealth of examples in which presidents have overstepped their constitutionally defined role, many of which have not yet been described in the English language literature. Despite the weaknesses mentioned above, the volume still lays the basis for a potentially fruitful avenue for future research on the role of factors related to presidents as individuals, situated at the intersection of comparative politics and political psychology.