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To cite this article: Mirela Veleva-Eftimova & K. Haralampiev (2020): The political initiatives of the Rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU – from empirical facts to expert evaluation, European Politics and Society, DOI: [10.1080/23745118.2020.1850270](https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2020.1850270)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2020.1850270>



Published online: 04 Dec 2020.



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# The political initiatives of the Rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU – from empirical facts to expert evaluation

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## ABSTRACT

This article proposes a novel instrument for expert evaluation of political initiatives of the Rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union. This evaluation will create a possibility for assessment of the leadership performers of the Rotating Presidency as a key mechanism for implementation of the EU integration policies. In pursuance of this goal, the article is structured around the three topics. First, the functions of the rotating presidency and the place of the political initiatives among them. Second, the development of an instrument for registration and mediation of the facts that are rich in content. Third, presenting results from the specific, conditional quality measuring of the performance of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU during the first half of 2018 under the undertaken political initiatives and their total expert evaluation.

## KEYWORDS

Rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU; political initiative; EU policy-making; evaluation; Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU 2018

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The succession of crises which the European Union had to overcome during the previous decade – the financial one, the refugee one, the Russian-Ukrainian one, demonstrated the restricted possibilities for a timely and adequate reaction. The increase of the number of participants in this process – Member States (MS), and the developing variable coalitions among them – in the EU institutions, each of which has its own institutional stakes, restricts the possibilities for accomplishing effective political leadership. Meanwhile, namely such a leadership is an important condition for the positive dynamics of the integration process and respectively for the Union’s adjustment to the accelerating of the globalization trends – a task that underlying the grounds for its creation (Majone, 2014; Tömmel & Verdun, 2017; Van Esch, 2017).<sup>2</sup>

EU leadership studies include different types of leadership actors ranging from individuals to institutions, member states, and the EU itself as a global leadership actor (Müller & Van Esch, 2020). From an institutional point of view, the Union’s main strategic directions are determined in the European Council format, whereas the management of the everyday agenda is entrusted to the European Commission (EC). The Treaty of Lisbon (ToL) introduces additional leadership positions and functions, which have been added to the central political figure of the EC President – the EU President and the High

Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs. To this 'leadership bouquet' there should also be added the Rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU (RPCEU). The Presidency is expected to take a leadership role, act as a broker in policy disputes, and generally guides the integration process forward in its period of office (Shikova, 2012; Tallberg, 2003). For this aim it has capabilities for setting the political agenda, by undertaking its own political initiatives (Batora, 2017; Gruisen et al., 2017; Hage, 2017). Therefore, it could be said that a RPCEU will be as successful as the number of successful political initiative (p. 17) are implemented.

In this context, the present article aims at answering the following research question<sup>3</sup> – Can the RPCEU conduct successfully political initiatives as a means for implementation of its leadership role? Which immediately turns into a question of measuring and evaluating what is achieved by this complex subject in its political initiatives.

Despite the broadly shared understanding that knowing the resultativeness of the RPCEU is an important prerequisite for improving the integration process, however, there is not a reliable instrument which to allow in a transparent and objective way to be made an expert evaluation of each presidency. A main reason for that is the methodological challenge to be measured and evaluated the resultativeness of the work of such a complex political subject as the rotating presidency. The scope and intensity, the phases, 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.).<sup>4</sup>

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. 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 & Bossuyt, 2014).<sup>5</sup> Due to these problems, in many cases, the study of the presidencies, including of their political initiatives, remain at the level of the narrative statement.<sup>6</sup>

Taking into account the above references and goal, the article is structured around three topics. First, the functions of the rotating presidency and the place of the political initiatives as a means for implementation of its leadership role. Second, the development of an instrument for registration and mediation of the facts that are rich in content. Third, presenting the results from the specific, conditional quality measuring of the performance of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU during the first half of 2018 under the political initiatives and their total expert evaluation.

## **2. Functions of the RPCEU and the political initiatives as a factor for the dynamics of the integration process**

Broadly shared in the academic literature dedicated to the EU's Council of the Ministers institutional characteristics is the opinion that its rotating presidency performs four main functions – determining political priorities, administrative coordination, mediation for reaching a consensus, representation before third parties (Elgström, 2003, p. 2;

Shikova, 2012, pp. 78–89). From this point of view, the presidency roles are respectively – a political leader, a coordinator, a broker and an external representative. The role of political leadership presupposes the presidency influence on the political agenda – by undertaking of political initiatives (Aksoy, 2010; Batora, 2017; Batory & Puetter, 2013; Princen, 2013; Thomson, 2008).

Broadly shared in the scientific literature is the opinion that with the Treaty of Lisbon entering into force in December 2009 the impact of the rotating presidency, especially in terms of the political initiatives, is restricted by ‘seizing’ the opportunity for implementing the political leadership and an external representation. These functions are granted to new institutional agents – the President of the European Union and the High Representative of the EU on CFSP for a period of five years (Bocquillon & Dobbels, 2014; Dinan, 2013; Kassim et al., 2017; Kreppel & Oztas, 2017). Despite this widespread opinion there are authors who prove the opposite thesis (Batora, 2017; Brandsma, 2015; Gruisen et al., 2017; Hage, 2017; Karolewski et al., 2015; Wartien, 2013).

Such is the case with the Slovakian 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 MS created the opportunity for increasing the RPCEU political profile. 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>7</sup> The main argument for this statement is the results from the Slovakian Presidency political initiative of meeting in Bratislava on 16th September 2016, which is the first post-Brexit meeting of the leaders of the 27 MS. At this meeting the MS 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 – which 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 MS and the first one to make a step backwards to the political realities before the ToL.

### **3. Developing an instrument for mediating the facts that are rich in content**

For objective measuring of the political initiatives of a RPCEU in difference of narrative explanations, the following steps should be accomplished.

First, to select primary, directly measurable indicators determining the degree of the presidency’s political initiatives performers, as the high degree in terms of the achievable aggregate optimum is to be accepted as a success.

Second, to select primary documentary sources that are accessible and liable to independent examination to create an information set to the selected indicators.

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

Fourth, 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.

Fifth, to develop appropriate formulas for meaningful aggregation of the received numerical values and to develop a summarizing (general) index for the overall resultativeness and degree of success of the RPCEU political initiatives.

The possibility such a complex methodological task to be solved is going to be illustrated with our expert evaluation of the result from the work of the Bulgarian Rotating Presidency in the first half of 2018.

### **3.1. Indicators**

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 also exists a possibility for undertaking also political initiatives that have not been planned in advance. This implementation 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.

A significant indicator for the RPCEU political initiatives implementation is the degree of priority of the selected initiative topic. 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 RPCEU can formulate and introduce its own initiatives, 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.<sup>8</sup> 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, 2017; Alexandrova et al., 2012).

Directly related to the priority indicator is that of the process phase – is there some previous activities on the theme, before the six-month term of a presidency. 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 MS this topic was a priority one. In September 1992 the British government insisted at EEC Council to declare its wish to greet the Visegrad countries as future MS. Although none of the other EU MS 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. 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 – intensity. 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.

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 MS. In parallel, there exist different formats of the Council depending on the discussed topic, in which the ministers in charge sit in session. 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 characteristic premises the availability of three main possibilities under this indicator – the level of the MS 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 MS 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 (Borras & Peters, 2011). From this point of view, the possibilities in terms of the result are – availability or not of an adopted document and different degrees of commitment – with or without deadlines or 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 (Karolewski et al., 2015; Kral et al., 2009; Schout & Vanhoo-nacher, 2006).<sup>9</sup>

They haven't 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 RPCEU 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, 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. Meanwhile, the external crises, as well as the internal context in the Union are mediated by the MS 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 MS 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.

### **3.2. Sources**

Information about the established directly 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 (EU institutions and national institutions of the country holding the Presidency), which enables a comparison by the person, collecting the information, but also a check by an external auditor ([Appendix 1](#)).

### **3.3. Questionnaire**

Based on the above-listed indicators and the established primary documentary sources, a questionnaire was drawn up for recording empirical facts with their corresponding codes, allowing subsequent mathematical processes<sup>10</sup> ([Appendix 1](#)). Apart from this procedure, based on the above conceptual considerations, the research team developed a comprehensive model for entering numerical values for each category of the empirical indicators. This categories of the empirical indicators are in fact degrees in conditional ordinal 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 assessment 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 euro integration policies (Dimitrov et al., 2014; Dimitrov, Hharalampieiev, Georgieva, 2015; Haralampieiev and Dimitrov 2016).<sup>11</sup>

Based on the report of the Bulgarian Rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU from the first half of 2018, 29 political initiatives were identified, to which the questionnaire with the indicators listed above was applied<sup>12</sup> ([Appendix 2](#)).

## **4. Integral index for expert assessment of the efficiency of the political initiatives of the Bulgarian Rotating Presidency**

The creation of an index for assessment of the RPCEU takes place in several steps ([Appendix 3](#)).

First step – on the basis of the created questionnaire, whose indicators and their categories exhaustively characterize the work, in terms of structure, stages and peculiar features, each of the possible categories of the individual indicators is assigned a conditional score, which expresses its relevant grade.

Second step – by means of the thus derived actual scores of each indicator the overall assessment is calculated for the specific initiative. We would like to highlight that we have chosen such indicators for the assessment of the initiatives, which reflect in grades quality parameters of the work, performed by the RPCEU and the respective results.

Third step – the overall assessment of each specific initiative is normalized, i.e. the specific numerical value derived is related to the possible maximum, which can be achieved for the respective work, set at 100, and to the possible minimum, set at 0, and thus the specific value of the initiative index is obtained.

Fourth step – while the main part of the indicators characterize the qualities, structure and grades of the work performed, the remaining indicators additionally characterize the weight of the specific initiative. To determine the weights, indicators have been chosen, which reflect the importance of the initiative. If the work on a given initiative is politically more important and challenging than the work on another, the first one obtains greater weight.

Fifth and last step – the empirically established indices of all dossiers are averaged by weighted average and the specific value of the general index is established, indicating the degree of success when performing one of the main activities of the RPCEU.

#### **4.1. Assessment of work on political initiatives**

The assessment of the work and the result from specific political initiative is calculated as the sum total of the numeric values of three of its specific and different in terms of quality parameters:

- type of initiative;
- degree of intensity of the action performed;
- conditional grades in the quality of the result

The value of the specific type of initiative is established through empirical data, obtained with Question No 1 from [Appendix 1](#). Each of the categories of this question is assigned the following numerical values ([Table 1](#)).<sup>13</sup>

The scores have been allocated depending on the scope of the type of political initiative. The highest score is given to the conference-forum, since it gather participants at the

**Table 1.** Scores of the categories of the type of initiative.

Code	Category	Score
1	Conference-forum	5
2	Diplomatic negotiations	4
3	Political meeting-dialogue	4
4	Expert meeting-dialogue	3
5	Training	1
6	Other	1



**Table 2.** Scores of the categories of the action intensity.

Code	Category	Score
1	One-off (for example, one event)	4
2	Repeated (series of initiatives with follow-up)	3

highest level and in the greatest number. 'Other' gets the lowest score, since this group encompasses political initiatives with the most limited – in terms of number and level – participants and respectively, the degree of complexity related to the implementation of such initiative is significantly lower. The reliability of the data by this indicator – level and participants – is verified by subsequent questions (Questions No 4 and No 6 from [Appendix 1](#)).

The intensity of the specific political action is established through the empirical information, obtained with Question No 5 from [Appendix 1](#). Each category of this question is assigned the following numerical values ([Table 2](#)).

The one-off action is given more scores, due to the assumption that it has been more effective, i.e. the objective has been achieved with less resources.

The result from the performed political initiative is established through empirical information, recorded with Questions No 7, 8, 9.1 and 9.2 from [Appendix 1](#). Due to the complex character of the results, containing different content dimensions of the political initiatives – degrees of specificity and degree of commitment (expressed through a clear financial commitment), a combining scale was developed, depending on the degree of the result achieved ([Table 3](#)).

The adoption of documents with specific commitments is given the highest score. The lowest score goes to the political initiatives which have been finalized without any adoption of documents.

#### 4.2. Normalization of the assessments

The normalization of the assessments is carried out against their lowest and highest theoretical values (equated respectively to 0 and 100). Since the assessment has been formed as a sum, the lowest theoretical value is derived as a sum total of the lowest scores of each addend, while the highest theoretical value is calculated as a sum of the

**Table 3.** Scores of the categories of the result.

Code of question No 7	Code of question No 8	Code of question No 9.1	Code of question No 9.2	Category	Score
2	-	-	-	<i>No documents have been adopted</i>	0,5
1	1	-	-	<i>Documents of purely declarative nature</i>	2
1	2	1	2	<i>Documents, containing specific proposals for action – with deadline and without funding</i>	3
1	2	2	1	<i>Documents, containing specific proposals for action – without deadline and with funding</i>	3,5
1	2	1	1	<i>Documents, containing specific proposals for action – with deadline and with funding</i>	4

highest scores of each addend. The lowest theoretical value is 4.5 and it would be obtained, if a given political initiative comprises a training or other, has been conducted repeatedly and no documents have been adopted. The highest theoretical value is 13 and it would be obtained, if a political initiative is a conference-forum, has been conducted only once and documents have been adopted, containing specific proposals for action – with deadline and with funding.

The results obtained are presented in [Figure 1](#).

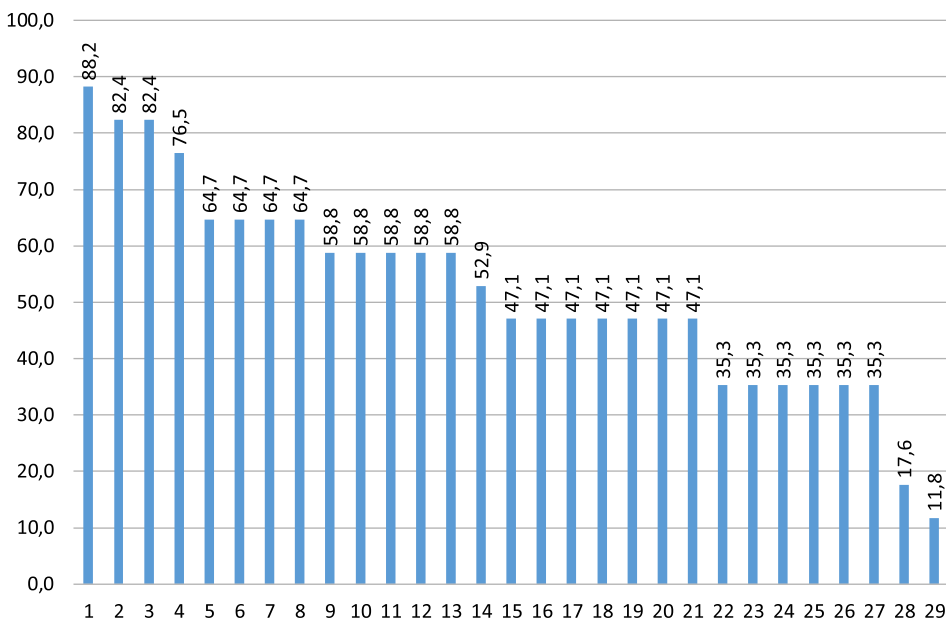
The political initiative with the highest index (88.2) is ‘Air quality’ of Ministry of Environment and Water, which is conference-forum, it is repeated and its result are documents, containing specific proposals for action – with deadline and with funding. The political initiative with the lowest index (11.8) is ‘Enhancing transparency in the activities of the Working Group ‘Code of Conduct’ of Ministry of Finance, which is other type of initiative, it is one-off and no documents have been adopted.

What is important here is the structure of the distribution – nearly 15 per cent of the initiatives have realized over three fourths of the maximum possible potential for achieving a result. Half as lower are the initiatives, which have realized less than one fourth of the potential.

#### 4.3. *Weights of the work on the specific initiatives*

The conditional weight of the specific political initiative is obtained as sum of the numerical values of three indicators:

- the stage of the implementation process of the initiative;
- the scope of the institutional participants;
- priority for the EU.



**Figure 1.** Indices of political initiatives (in descending order).

**Table 4.** Scores of the categories of the process stage.

Code	Category	Score
1	New initiative, launched by the Presidency	4
2	Continuation of work already undertaken/existing process	2

The value of the specific stage of the process is established through the information, obtained with Question No 3 from [Appendix 1](#). Each category of this question is assigned the following numeric values ([Table 4](#)).

As can be seen from the table there are only two possible answers, but there is a wide gap in their conceptual significance, and for this reason there is a step higher than one unit when determining the relative weight. In case of a work already undertaken or an existing political process, the Presidency has prior experience or a formal framework, which facilitate its work. By contrast, when launching of a new initiative it is the Presidency itself, which has to formulate and implement such framework, which enhances the necessary expenses for human, material and symbolic resources, as well as the complexity itself, respectively, the degree of risk, related to the initiative undertaken.

The quantity equivalent of the specific scope of institutional participants is established through the information under Question 4 from [Appendix 1](#). Each category of this question is assigned the following numerical values ([Table 5](#)).

The third category has the highest score, since its scope is the broadest and, respectively, requires the highest volume of work by the Presidency, while work with a scope limited to the Council only receives the lowest score, since this scope is the most limited and largely guaranteed by the functional powers of the Presidency.

As in the case examined above, the degree of priority of the political initiative for the EU is established through empirical information, recorded with questions No 2.1, 2.2 and 6 from [Appendix 1](#) and in the complete logically possible combinatorial analysis of their categories. The following combinatorial formula was created in respect of the magnitude of the priorities:

First, the categories of Questions No 2.1 and 2.2 were combined.

The scale is from one to six to ensure greater diversification, since the difference between Bulgarian priority only and European priority is significant from a content and a political point of view. In addition, the three-component character of the European priority also suggests greater differentiation between, relatively speaking, triple, double and single political priority. The triple European priority has the highest score.

Subsequently the combinatorial scale for Questions No 2.1 and 2.2 from [Table 6](#) was combined with the categories under the scale of Question No 6 regarding the order of participation in the implementation of the specific political initiative and the final

**Table 5.** Scores of the categories of the scope of institutional participants.

Code	Category	Score
1	The Council of the EU alone	3
2	The Council of the EU jointly with other institutions from the EU triangle	4
3	The Council jointly with other institutions outside the EU triangle	5
4	The Council jointly with other non-governmental participants (local or international)	4

**Table 6.** Scores of the categories of the topic priority.

Code of question No 2.1.1	Code of question No 2.1.2	Code of question No 2.1.3	Code of question No 2.2	Category	Score
1	1	0	1	Yes, on the Leaders' Agenda, in the Conclusions and of Priority for the Presidency	6
1	1	0	2	Yes, on the Leaders' Agenda and in the Conclusions of the European Council	4
0	1	0	1	Yes, in the Conclusions of the European Council and of Priority for the Presidency	4
1	0	0	1	Yes, on the Leaders' Agenda and of Priority for the Presidency	4
1	0	0	2	Yes, only on the Leaders' Agenda	2
0	1	0	2	Yes, only in the Conclusions	2
0	0	1	1	Yes, only of priority for the Presidency	2
0	0	1	2	No	1

**Table 7.** Scores of the categories of the priority for the EU according to the standing of participants.

Degree of priority of the topic	Code of question No 6	Category	Score
1	3	Not a priority, experts are involved	1
1	2	Not a priority, but ministers are involved	2
1	1	Not a priority, but leaders of the states are involved	6
2	3	Single priority, experts are involved	2
2	2	Single priority, ministers are involved	4
2	1	Single priority, leaders of the states are involved	8
4	3	Double priority, experts are involved	4
4	2	Double priority, ministers are involved	6
4	1	Double priority, leaders of the states are involved	10
6	3	Triple priority, experts are involved	6
6	2	Triple priority, ministers are involved	8
6	1	Triple priority, leaders of the states are involved	12

combinatory scale was obtained regarding the level of priority of the initiative for the EU (Table 7).

#### 4.4. General index

The general index was calculated as a weighted average of the indices of the individual initiatives. The result obtained about the general assessment of the political initiatives of the Bulgarian RPCEU is 54.3. Since the index is a number in the range from 0 to 100, it can be interpreted on the basis of its similarity to a percentage. Thus, this governmental achievement can be qualified as a good, but nonetheless average performance.

## 5. Conclusion

The result about the general assessment of the political initiatives, undertaken by the Bulgarian Rotating Presidency gives grounds to qualify it as successful in this field of contribution. This result supports the allegation that the RPCEU has the possibility to implement

successful political leadership, which would acquire great significance for ‘normalizing’ the agenda of the Union amid the growing dynamics of the global environment.

At the same time, some questions are left open, which require research activity, targeted at a more complete interpretation of the result and, consequently, a refining of the research instrument. First, from a political point of view, the question remains open as to what exactly is the balance between the satisfied European and national interests of the presiding country or – who will enjoy the success. However, historical distance is required, in order to be able to answer this question – which is not available at the time of obtaining the results from the present research. Second, from a methodological point of view – the selection of political initiatives can probably be more precise, because some of them have been formally established, i.e. their success is largely guaranteed – for example, the parliamentary dimension of the Presidency. Third, in a comparative perspective, although the result obtained is good in itself, this interpretation requires additional verification through applying the same instrument to other presidencies. This is a forthcoming task for the research team.

## Notes

1. The term ‘expertise’ is used with a dual meaning. First, the very construction of the questionnaire, with which we approach the empirical facts from the various sources, as well as the values ascribed to the varieties of the answers to the questions, are a work of a research team, in which participate Dr. Toneva-Metodieva, a member of the Ministry of the Presidency Political Office, and Assoc. Prof. Simeonov, Work Groups Head at the Ministry of Finance. Second, the expertise of the evaluation is guaranteed by the strict following of the methodological standards, providing reliability and representativeness, and also a strict methodological control on the procedures leading to the final quality result from the integral index application.
2. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/white-paper-future-europe\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/white-paper-future-europe_en)
3. The article is based on the results from the research of Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence, European studies department, Sofia University. <http://jeanmonnetexcellence.bg/en/activities/research/>
4. Trying to evaluate objectively the French Presidency in 2000, Schout and Vanhoonacher appropriately claim that: ‘Judging presidencies is easy, evaluating them is not. Evaluations are rare and often superficial’ (Schout & Vanhoonacher, 2006).
5. The two authors who make a review of the available literature on the RPCEU summarize that four main issues are subject of active academic debate – whether the RPCEU can exert influence at all; what are the definitions of ‘influence’ and ‘success’, what is the definition of ‘interest’, a methodological problem of the objective evaluation due to the causal complexity of the RPCEU.
6. See Karolewski et al. (2015); Keulen and Pijpers (2005); Král et al. (2009).
7. 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.
8. For example, a clear Bulgarian political priority is the stimulation of the EU membership of the Western Balkans, which corresponds with European priorities. This priority was formulated as European Perspective and Connectivity of the Western Balkans – <https://eu2018bg.bg/bg/60>
9. For instance, in the evaluation of the Czech Presidency (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 – but it doesn’t become clear how the impact of the above-mentioned external factors has been operationalized (Kral et al., 2009).
10. This questionnaire is our registration form for the quantitative content analysis. For each political initiative, the team searched information and filled in separate registration form.

11. 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/](http://jeanmonnetexcellence.bg/2017/02/14/сравнително-изследване-на-процеса-на/)).
12. The political initiatives – type, participants, timing – are described in the Report of the Bulgarian Rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU (*Отчет на Програмата на Република България за Председателството на Съвета на Европейския съюз*).
13. These scores are in fact degrees in conditional ordinal scale. The introduced numeric values 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.

## Acknowledgements

Great thanks to Professor Georgi Dimitrov for the very helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper and foremost for the inspiration of this research adventure.

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## Appendix 1

### Questionnaire for recording, analysing and integrating the factual information about the performance of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU 2018

Category of political initiatives

#### 1. Type of initiative

- ☐<sub>1</sub> Conference-forum
- ☐<sub>2</sub> Diplomatic negotiations
- ☐<sub>3</sub> Political meeting-dialogue
- ☐<sub>4</sub> Expert meeting-dialogue
- ☐<sub>5</sub> Training
- ☐<sub>6</sub> Other

#### 2. Priority of the topic

##### 2.1. Included in the priorities of the European Council (each correct answer)

- ☐<sub>1</sub> Yes, on the Leaders' Agenda (*check the Leaders' Agenda, accessible online*)
- ☐<sub>2</sub> Yes, in the conclusions of the European Council in the period from the autumn of 2014 to 30 June 2018 (*check the website of the European Council*)
- ☐<sub>3</sub> No

##### 2.2. Priority for the Presidency (included on the programme of the Bulgarian Presidency) – (*examination of the BG2018 Programme*)

- ☐<sub>1</sub> Yes
- ☐<sub>2</sub> No



**3. Stage of the process** – (*BG2018 report and if it contains gaps, examination of the website of the Council*)

- ☐1 New initiative, launched by the Presidency (*examination of the websites of the European Commission, the Council*)
- ☐2 Continuation of work already undertaken/existing process

**4. Institutional participants** (*each correct answer*)

- ☐1 The Council of the EU alone (*check the website of the Presidency and the Council about the nature of the initiative. If necessary, examination of the websites of Bulgarian line institutions*)
- ☐2 The Council jointly with other EU institutions
- ☐3 The Council jointly with other non-EU institutions
- ☐4 The Council jointly with other non-governmental participants (local or international)

**5. Intensity of the action (is it a one-off action or a process?):** (*A careful examination of the BG2018 calendar and the BG2018 website*)

- ☐1 One-off (for example, one event)
- ☐2 Repeated (series of initiatives with follow-up)

**6. Level of participation** (*BG2018 calendar, according to the category of the event and in Internet sources – website of the Council, website of BG2018*), if there are several events in relation to this initiative, the highest level is recorded

- ☐1 Leaders of the states' level
- ☐2 Ministerial level (incl. Deputy Ministers)
- ☐3 Expert level

7. **Is the political initiative accompanied by adoption of documents** (*By this we mean documents, initiated by the Presidency itself, which are not obligatory – different from category 1.2, but they indicate its sense of initiative*) – (BG2018 report and Internet sources of the Council and the Presidency)

- ☐<sub>1</sub> Yes, documents have been adopted
- ☐<sub>2</sub> No documents have been adopted (this is stated, when they are not found in the above sources)

8. **If the first answer is selected to Question No 8, specify the character of the documents** – (BG2018 report and internet sources of the Council and the Presidency)

- ☐<sub>1</sub> Documents of purely declarative nature (only general provisions)
- ☐<sub>2</sub> Documents, containing specific proposals for action

(If both types of documents exist, the second answer is selected – we record the more favourable picture)

9. **If the second answer is selected to Question No 9, specify the content of the documents**

- 9.1. With specific deadlines for implementation (*review of the documents themselves and/or website of the Council/Presidency*)

- ☐<sub>1</sub> With deadlines
- ☐<sub>2</sub> Without deadlines
- ☐<sub>3</sub> Not applicable

(If both types of documents exist, again the second answer is selected – we record the more favourable picture)

- 9.2. With or without secured funding (*examination of the documents themselves and/or the website of the Council/Presidency*)

- ☐<sub>1</sub> With funding
- ☐<sub>2</sub> Without funding
- ☐<sub>3</sub> Not applicable

(If both types of documents exist, again the second answer is selected – we record the more favourable picture)

## Appendix 2

### Register of political initiatives

Institution	Type of initiative	Name of the initiative
1. Ministry of Interior (Mol)	Conference-forum	European perspective and the connection to the Western Balkans
2. Mol	Political meeting-dialogue	Maintaining a constructive dialogue with Turkey
3. Mol	Diplomatic negotiations	Promoting the dialogue between the EC and Poland
4. Mol	Expert meeting – dialogue	The forgotten crises
5. Mol	Expert meeting – dialogue	Disarmament
6. Mol	Diplomatic negotiations	Enhancing the EU-USA strategic partnership
7. Ministry of Energy (ME)	Political meeting-dialogue	Energy security in South-East Europe
8. Ministry of finance (MF)	Conference-forum	The future of the cohesion policy
9. Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (MAFF)	Conference-forum	The future of CAP
10. MF	Other	Enhancing transparency in the activities of the Working Group 'Code of Conduct'
11. Ministry of Regional Development (MRD)	Conference-forum	Integrated macro-regional approach to the Black Sea Region.
12. Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (MRDPW)	Conference-forum	Danube strategy
13. Ministry of Health (MH)	Conference-forum	Healthy diet for children
14. MH	Political meeting-dialogue	Efficacy, availability and affordability of medicines
15. Mol	Conference-forum	Combating anti-Semitism
16. Ministry of Tourism (MT)	Conference-forum	The topic of tourism and economic growth, incl. digital transformation
17. MT	Conference-forum	The topic of cultural heritage and cultural tourism
18. Ministry of Environment and Water (MOEW)	Conference-forum	Air quality
19. ME	Conference-forum	Pure energy
20. Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS)	Other	European youth objectives
21. MYS	Conference-forum	Combating the manipulation of sporting events
22. Ministry of Justice (MJ)	Political meeting-dialogue	European Public Prosecutor's Office
23. Ministry of Labour and Social Policy	Conference-forum	Debate on the future of labour
24. National Assembly	Conference-forum	6 thematic events of Parliamentary nature
25. National Assembly	Conference-forum	INTERPARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE ON THE COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY AND THE COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY
26. National Assembly	Conference-forum	INTERPARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE ON STABILITY, ECONOMIC COORDINATION AND GOVERNANCE IN THE EUROPEAN UNION
27. National Assembly	Conference-forum	MEETING OF THE JOINT GROUP FOR PARLIAMENTARY CONTROL OF EUROPOL
28. National Assembly	Conference-forum	LIX PLENARY SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF COMMUNITY AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEES OF PARLIAMENTS OF THE EU
29. National Assembly	Conference-forum	MEETING OF THE CHAIRPERSONS OF THE ENERGY COMMITTEES OF THE PARLIAMENTS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

### Appendix 3

Structure of the index for the assessment of the performance of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU 2018

Category of political initiatives with given scores

