Presidentialisation of Serbian political parties - causes, consequences and possible solutions
This study is one of the outcomes of three year scientific project on relationship between electoral system and internal party relations – Balkan Comparative Electoral Study. In the last phase of this project, our focus shifted on the role of party presidents because previous research showed that trend of presidentialisation and personalization of politics have significant impact on politics in Serbia. This impact is higher because of non-institutionalized party system, lack of democratic tradition and established checks and balances mechanisms. In such political context, presidentialisation of politics can be even more damaging and can lead to erosion of already low democratic standards. That is why we supplement our analysis with set of recommendations that can reverse those negative trends.

1. The presidentialisation and personalisation of political parties – leadership-dominated parties

Contemporary leaders in the societies with developed communication and universal suffrage are usually leaders of political parties. Political parties are often identified with the name of the party leader. Respect for the leaders often survives their death and turns into a cult. In addition to perseverance, the masses are attracted by the leader’s knowledge, catatonic depth of convictions and force of ideas, self-confidence, concentration, altruism and especially power and glory.
Furthermore, the personality of the leader affects the party’s choice of tactics and activities. In almost all parties, leaders aim to accumulate as many incumbency position and authorities in making key political and personnel decisions. Hence, leadership-dominated are those political parties in which the role of the party leader is overemphasized in the intra-party communication and the process of decision-making.

The election, or more precisely, the nomination, of the individuals loyal to the party leader to the key positions is not a mere caprice, but one of the main mechanisms of establishing and preserving a leadership position, i.e. preventing political competition from reaching the key positions. Accumulation of incumbencies is often justified by the needs of party efficiency and successful communication with political partners, or by political discretion, i.e. hiding the moves and intentions from the political competition.

It often takes just a single step from necessary and important autonomous authorities of party leaders to their usurpation of power. However, although the tendencies of increasing the powers of the leaders are almost omnipresent, only some parties are leadership-dominated parties.

Leadership-dominated parties are those parties in which the personality of the leader is a basis for identification and evaluation of the party. Leadership-dominated is only the party in which a party leader may autonomously make even turbulent political moves, while party members follow obediently.

There are two criteria for recognizing the level of leader domination: 1) the power of (re)interpretation of the programmatic principles, and 2) the power of a party leader to regulate the intra-party relations. This tendency becomes predominant when the will of the leader is above party and statutory norms. It is, however, not necessary that the key position of the party leader is built into the norms, which would make it public and transparent.

From a mere identification of the leadership and leadership-dominated parties it is more important to determine the reasons and causes, which enable it. Almost ideal preconditions for development of leadership-dominated parties are social crises, wars and social upheavals, i.e. their consequences expressed in the social, political and ideological vacuum. The lack of clear and recognizable lines of social and political divisions leaves a wide manoeuvre space for an over-emphasized, autonomous position of the leader. Moreover, it creates a climate in which leader’s pragmatic and often contradictory moves may post festum be connected to the basic programmatic principles.

Weak democratic tendencies and a lack of tolerant political dialogue – authoritarian political culture – are an additional reason, which contributes
to the appearance of the leadership-dominated parties. In such societies, intolerance and internally undemocratic structure of the party encourages the spread of such tendencies in other parties.

1.1. Personalisation of politics, leaders and electoral campaigns

On the other hand, the increasing trust in the “first man” and his role is visible even in the more developed states with established democratic institutions. This may be explained by greater personalisation of politics and the role of the media, which affect the creation of the politician's image, depicting him as “one of us”, tormented by the same worries, and determined and capable to fight the problems and resolve them successfully.

Therefore, on the empirical level the key question is: What is the role of the candidate’s image in voters’ decision, i.e. which factors affect the increased importance of party leaders in realising political and electoral strategies of change? The key determinant of voting decisions is the image of the leader, i.e. citizens’ perception of him, which is based on personal qualities of a politician, his party affiliation, competence for state incumbency and political principles.

People tend to form their opinion based on what they see or hear in the media. The more one appears on television, the higher the chances that the voter will seriously consider to vote for him. This explains the electoral advantage that incumbents have during the electoral campaign compared to their less publicly known competition. This is particularly visible (and probably misused) in countries with lasting political transition, such as Serbia. Mass media are not exempted from the political influence, and even if they tried, they would be punished. Therefore, personalisation of politics is an important characteristic of the political public in Serbia. The trend of personalisation of politics could affect the intra-party democracy and political life of the society as a whole. Some of the potential consequences are: declining influence of party’s programmatic principles and ideology and at the same time, strengthening of the leadership and “irreplaceability” of party leaders.

1.2. Presidential authorities

Within the narrow circle of party incumbents, predominance of a leader is secured through the system of (self)selection of his vice-presidents and first deputies and through increasing his authorities from the representative to
managing. In many established democracies and parties with much stricter mechanisms of internal democracy than in the Balkans, party leaders aspire to manage the party themselves rather than being merely primus inter pares.

This follows from the tendency that in the case of an electoral victory, leader of a party or a coalition automatically becomes a prime minister. This is further followed by claims that such a great responsibility needs to be supported by actual rather than formal power. The position of a strong leader includes direct nomination of advisors, spokesmen, executive secretaries and party directors and managers, who then become members of the party organs. Rectification of such “democratic omissions” would contribute to democratic redesigning of intra-party relations.

From the formal standpoint, the most important bodies of political parties are their congress or assembly and party’s main board. However, since those bodies gather either very rarely or work under the control of party executive, it is obvious that the executive part - party presidents are the key driving and steering force of the party. We can argue that presidential powers in Serbian parties are primarily based on his autonomy in relation to other party organs, which is one of the theoretical precondition for presidentialization (Poguntke and Webb 2005).

Furthermore, autonomy (or negative freedom) is just one level of relations between president and the rest of the party - in Serbian case, presidents usually have proactive power and controls presidency, main board and/or congress - “actual source of power of political party leaders lies in chairing the party bodies and the choice of other party officials, so that the party presidents either appoint or propose the members of the party organs which sometimes they chair themselves” (Stojiljkovic, Spasojevic and Mihailovic 2016:82). Again, formally speaking, congress is the main party body because it elects president, adopts party program and statute. However, the real power of congress or main board is usually limited by its’ members and their allegiances. In the first place, majority of congress members are delegates of all party branches and they are most often selected by the leaderships of those branches (instead of inclusive selection process), hence by the party oligarchy connected to party leader with limited space for party dissidents. Other congress members are representatives of different party organs and bodies - e.g. main board, presidency, women and youth cubs, provincial and town organizations.

Centralization and oligarchic tendencies are even more obvious on the level of main board. In the case of one Serbian party (all of them show similar tendencies), congress elects only 40 members of main board, which means...
that even without significant number of MPs or municipal mayors, directly elected members will remain minority compared to members by function. “Clearly, in many cases the number of party lower level representatives can be underrepresented in favor of party oligarchy” which means that “main board can be under control of party oligarchy and without significant power to challenge leadership” (Stojiljkovic and Spasojevic 2016b).

1.3. The genetic features of parties

Important part of party functioning comes from the dominant model of party formation – inclusive (based on bottom up process when different social actors gather and create party) and exclusive (top-down, party is created from smaller group or narrow circle). In almost all cases in Serbia, parties are exclusive in nature, which can be interpreted as the legacy of 90-ties when all opposition parties started as the small dissidents circles and spread. This trend was supplemented with the process of atomisation caused by frequent partition of political parties due to inability of leaders to tolerate internal opposition. Exclusive nature also means that founding group represents party oligarchy from the beginning preventing other significant actors to gain more internal power.

1.4. Political culture and heritage

In the societies with authoritarian tradition, a widespread combination of passivity, cynicism, lack of information and trust in political institutions and actors results in the search for a trustworthy leader. More specifically, when 83% of the respondents in Serbia agree that “only a party with a strong leader can form a stable government” and 76% agree that “different opinions within a political party (party factions) weaken the electoral results of the party”, identification with the leader gets an authoritarian dimension.

In addition, beliefs that different opinions within the party actually weaken the party do not encourage parties to debate internally and suggest that even if such debates existed, they should be hidden from the public because they are perceived as an evidence of crisis and weakness.
2. Empirical findings – how important are party leaders?

Presidential authority can be evaluated also by reverse process: evaluation of power of other parts of party or the level of competitiveness within the party. General lack of competitiveness within party can be confirmed regarding some important issues - selection procedures or rights of party minority to express their standpoints that are frequently used as indicators of internal democracy (Scarrow 2005).

2.1. Selection procedures

Party loyalty plays an important role for candidacy nominations. National party leadership has a dominant role in influencing the composition of the electoral list by deciding on the ranking of candidates and encouraging potential candidates to present their candidacy.

The prevailing role of the national party leadership is already evident in a decision of a candidate to present his/her candidacy and run in parliamentary elections. In our survey, two thirds of respondents, actually 72%, did not make a decision to run in the elections independently. Instead, the decision was made based on the encouragement within the party, as confirmed by 97.4% of respondents (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**: Who encouraged you to run as a candidate?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family, friends, colleagues</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somebody from within the party</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>97.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representatives from a civil society organisation or interest groups</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>78.2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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Our survey confirms the hypothesis that there is a high degree of party centralisation in Serbia. According to our findings, national party leadership is the most influential in deciding on the candidacy nomination (46%). The same Figure shows that political parties do not have democratic nomination mechanisms such as open primary elections or primaries.
Our research suggests not only that party leaders have a dominant role in encouraging party members to run as candidates in national parliamentary elections, but also that the majority of candidates are party officials, and that a final decision on candidacy nominations is made by the national party leadership. Among our respondents, 74.6% have been party officials at the moment of running in parliamentary elections.

Candidacy nomination and selection, as well as a degree of party centralisation are two main criteria for assessing intra-party democracy (Scarrow, 2005). According to our research results, we can conclude that intra-party democracy in Serbia ranks relatively low. The research showed no significant difference between ruling and opposition parties. The party discipline is achieved mainly through the mechanisms of candidacy nominations. When candidacy nomination decisions are made on the national party leadership level (rather than the level of party members or voters), political parties have vast opportunities to control the work of MPs. This mechanism seriously hinders accountability of MPs, and increases the party discipline.

This can partially be explained by the proportional representation system with closed party lists that encourage political party centralisation. On the other side, political parties with developed competitive and inclusive procedures for candidacy nominations may rank the best representatives on the top of the electoral list (even in younger democracies and proportional representation systems).

2.1.1. What kind of campaigns are run by the candidates?

Apart from influencing the candidacy nomination process, the electoral system has a significant impact on election campaigns. Political parties and candidates adopt their strategies, formulate tactics, choose means and campaign types accordingly.

Even though the proportional representation system with closed lists – a current electoral system in Serbia - allows the voter only to cast a vote for the party as a whole and not for the candidates, it does not prevent the candidates to run personal campaigns to increase their party’s electoral chances. Utilizing the responses of candidates running for national parliamentary elections aims to gain insight into their election campaign strategies. Respondents were asked what their aim in the campaign was. Figure 3 shows that the

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1 Question: “Where would you place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means ‘to attract as much attention as possible for me as a candidate’ and 10 means ‘to attract as much as possible attention for my party’?”
average response to this question on the scale from 0 (the primary aim of the campaign was to attract attention for the candidate) to 10 (the primary aim of the campaign was to attract attention for the party) amounts to 7.1.

**Figure 2: Aim of the campaign**

![Bar chart showing the distribution of responses to the question about the aim of the campaign](chart.png)

A closer look into campaign related activities will lead us to interesting conclusions. Looking at the share of most popular campaign related activities - these are media activities (important for 70% of respondents), public speeches and rallies (69%), meetings with party members and party groups (56%), attendance of party meetings (48%). All of these activities fall into the category of promotion of party politics and building internal cohesion of the party. On the other side, activities geared at personal promotion and campaign have been a little important part of the overall activities.

Our survey confirms the hypothesis that candidate strategies mainly focus on promotion of political parties and their leaders, while candidate’s campaigning is primarily oriented towards broadening their partisan base alone, and not the electorate.

It is clear that candidate’s election strategies are focused mainly on the promotion of their political parties and party leaders, and that all activities are geared towards this goal. As argued below, the main reason for this is the electoral system in Serbia. In the proportional representation system with closed lists, the party fixes the candidates’ ranking, and the voter simply casts a vote for the party as a whole.
Our survey indicates that the average profile of the candidate running for national elections is: a loyal party member, living in a large town/city, and on a position within the party at the time of nomination. Political parties in Serbia have not developed democratic mechanisms of candidacy nomination (open primary elections or nominations by party delegates). The decision is rather made by the national party leadership (presidency or main board of the party). This indicates a low level of intra-party democracy in Serbia, which results in strong party discipline and low level of personal accountability of MPs.

The analysis of the electoral campaign draws the same conclusions. Candidates running for national elections do not run their personalized campaigns, but are oriented towards party promotion activities and building a support for the party. This is largely due to a low level of intra-party democracy but also the proportional representation system with closed ballots, which suggests that the party fixes the order of candidates, and the voter simply casts a vote for the party as a whole. This does not provide incentives for candidates to run their personal campaigns.

2.1.2. Citizens’ perception of politics – leaders are important!

The other side of presidentialization and personalization coin is related to citizens’ perception of politics, but this side shows similar picture. Our survey shows that 82% of citizens believe that Members of Parliament (MPs) primarily serve the interests of their political parties, while the citizens are second placed. Every third citizen believes that ‘MPs represent interests of ordinary citizens’, a slightly larger number of them (35%) believe that ‘municipal councilors are willing to take into account needs of ordinary citizens’, where both statements indicate an equal alienation of political elites from the citizens.

However, the most illustrative example of the hypothesis that voters identify with the party leader is the following result - 47% of respondents would ‘vote for a person of trust, if he/she would establish a new political party’. This reflects both a weak party identification and a dominant political practice in Serbia. Even though strong leadership and identification with party leaders are not unique features of Serbian politics (they exist in other consolidated liberal

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2 for more details on the survey see Spasojević Dušan & Vojislav Mihailović (2016). The Influence of the Electoral System on Perceptions and Behavior of Voters in Serbia in Stojiljković and Spasojević (eds.) Voters, parties, elections – How to democratize political parties in Montenegro and Serbia?, Belgrade, Podgorica: Fakultet političkih nauka, CeMI. (pp. 87-104)
democracies too), worrisome is the fact that these features are influencing intra-party democracy and dynamics. More precisely, 83% of respondents agree with the statement ‘only political parties with strong leaders can form a stable Government’ and 76% agree with the statement ‘different opinions within one political party jeopardizes its chances for electoral success’. Looking into these statements, we conclude that the identification with the party leader gets an authoritarian dimension. The common understanding that different opinions weakens the party prevents the existence of internal debates, and even in the cases where these debates occur, they are hidden from public and media attention. Internal debates are perceived as indicators of crisis and weakness.

Another dimension of this problem are the reported reasons why people have confidence and trust in political leaders – the most common response is that because he/she is ‘hardworking, efficient and dedicated’ (59%), ‘educated and smart’ (32%) and ‘capable and entrepreneurial’ (27%), which are all personal attributes. An exception to this is the response that confidence and trust in a leader stems from his/her previous results (43%), while ideas and personal vision matter only to 7% of respondents.

3. Policy recommendations – how to reduce presidential power?

Designing of policy recommendation for this issue is not an easy task. As described previously, presidentialisation is the outcome of complex set of determinants that begins with institutional design but also include political culture and practice. Presidentialisation can also include some state-related phenomenon if party is included in power-sharing mechanism like spoils system or clientelism, centralization of power of authority to appoint state officials. Therefore, we will include broad set of recommendations that will also include our previous work on parliament and electoral system.

3.1. Internal party relations

Internal institutional design is the initial source of presidentialization. Therefore, the role of president should be limited within the party. Our findings
show that presidentialization is not rooted in presidential authority (although in some cases authority can be reduced), but in his autonomy over other party bodies and institutions. Without any doubt, parties should empower assemblies and main board by introduction of higher number of directly elected members and by prevention of subordination of those important bodies to president and his circle. Furthermore, parties can increase the number of position that are won by direct elections in order to increase competitiveness.

Important part of presidential power lies in candidacy procedures. Even when they are well developed and presume complicated procedures that put limitations and provide balance of power, influential oligarchy can override those procedures. It is important to decentralize formation of national electoral list, but it is almost an imperative to allow autonomy to appropriate party levels of organization when it comes to local and provincial elections.

Finally, Serbian parties would have to encourage internal competition and co-existence of different factions and circles. This can be achieved though more open procedures for party leadership selection and by introduction of more participative decision making process and mechanisms for inclusion and protection of party minorities.

3.2. Electoral system as tool for more efficient parliament

The main primary strategic direction of changes is certainly the completion of democratic political and electoral legislation\(^3\) which at least guarantees a sustainable minimal threshold of electoral democracy. Clear electoral procedures and proceeding, possibilities for citizens to learn about offered electoral actors and platforms in the campaigns, to know who and under which conditions gives money to those competing for their vote and trust, as well as permanent professional electoral administration resistant against political pressures are only some of the assumptions for democratic constitution of the government.

3.3. Direct election of MPs?

We have reached the situation that at the moment the majority of parties in Serbia is pleading for a set of key changes within the existing proportional representation system through introduction of “personalized system” (i.e.\(^3\)

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\(^3\) for more details see Bringing MPs closer to citizens - Analysis of the electoral reform proposals (2016), Belgrade: Faculty of political sciences.
the so-called preferential voting). Therefore, the goal is to carry out the changes within the proportional representation system in such a manner as to **optimally combine the advantages and avoid the key weaknesses of both majority and proportional representation systems**.

The electoral system of proportional representation with preferential voting implies the **abolishment of a single and introduction of a larger number of constituencies** enabling the voters not to be faced with a large number of candidates whom they should meet with, or with long voting ballot. The number of constituencies can be equal to the number of MPs (as proposed by a significant number of parties), meaning that one candidate from each of the lists is nominated per each constituency, but it can be significantly lower.

Within this change, a decision about the **number of preferential votes** has to be made as well. In our opinion, in the beginning it would be helpful to choose the simplest variant with single preference. The voter could vote only for the list and give preference to some of the candidates on that list. If he/she circularizes one list and give his/her preference to a candidate from another list, the vote shall belong to the chosen party list. The mandates obtained by the list would be allocated to the candidates according to the number of the obtained preferential votes.

The proportional representation system with preferential voting maintains proportionality, enables for direct (or at least more direct) election of representatives and offers a chance to the candidate to win the mandate regardless his/her position on the list. Voters are enhanced against the party oligarchies, as they decide who will obtain the mandate and not the parties (which still retain the power by the decision on selection of candidates).

### 3.3. Prevention of further atomization of party system and stimulate merging of parties?

The former relative instability of the party system and its atomization led to the consensus about the necessity to initiate reversible processes. Although the attention and the negative odium of the public are sometimes exaggeratedly directed towards small parties, it is equally important to create conditions which would not disable the creation of new parties or coalitions.

One of possible mechanisms for remedying the existing electoral system is the **introduction of a scaled threshold for coalitions**. We propose the introduction of a relatively **moderate scaled electoral threshold** which would imply an increase of the threshold by 2% if the coalition has more
than 2 members per each new party – coalition member. This would mean that a three-member coalition would have to pass 7%, four-member 9% etc.

Having in mind our proposal for introduction of preferential voting as well as the possibility for introduction of several constituencies it must be pointed out that this would potentially bring progress for the stability of the party system as well, since the increase of the number of constituencies would have a similar effect as the increase of the threshold. If in the same time the number of MPs is decreased, than several new mechanisms would produce a synergetic effect; therefore, care should be taken not to go to another extreme and form a too static system.

3.4. Territorially more representative parliament!

The current parliament of Serbia is predominantly based on MPs from big cities – Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš and Kragujevac. However, it would be unfounded to claim that centralization of the parliament is a consequence of the electoral system only – Serbia is a centralized state in many areas. The question is – can we partially reverse this trend by amending the electoral law?

The introduction of preferential voting and several constituencies would to a certain extent alleviate the territorial underrepresentation of certain parts, however probably leading to intense representation of the biggest cities within the new constituencies.

3.5. More efficient parliament?

Almost all actors in Serbia supported the decrease of the total number of MPs with reserves that while decreasing the number of MPs voluntarism should be avoided and the decrease should be guided by some important principles, including an undisturbed, quality work of numerous parliamentary boards. In this context it was proposed to link the number of MPs to the cube root of the number of inhabitants, which is about 180-200 MPs.

In implementing this or some similar measure care should be taken that the decreased number of MPs reduces the possibility for representativeness, i.e. that a significant number of cities and municipalities will nevertheless be without MPs. Also, in our opinion, the number of MPs is not the key problem in the work of the parliament and we oppose the thesis that lower number of MPs should lead to savings, as on the basis of years-long research work
in the parliament we think that an efficient and successful parliament must have larger resources (both human and material) at its disposal. That is why we also propose some mechanism change that would empower parliament in relation to government and MPs in relation to head of parliamentary group (both in order to decrease presidentialisation and concentration of power)\textsuperscript{4}.

3.6. Strengthening the role of parliamentary committees.

First, to intensify the activities and institutions at the disposal to the committees, such is the public hearing and to introduce a sort of public sanction against the representatives of the Government (Ministers and State Secretaries) when not responding to the committees’ invitations. Following is to to open the parliament even more for participation of citizens, experts, representatives of expert public and civil society in shaping public policies. Although the institution of public hearing was introduced, the possibility for the public hearing sitting to be participated by citizens, representatives of citizens associations and experts have not been used in full.

3.7. Improve the cooperation of the National Assembly with independent and regulatory bodies.

With assistance of independent public authorities (elected by the Assembly and accountable to it for their work), to enhance the oversight role of the parliament. These are the independent bodies elected by the Assembly such are the Ombudsman, Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection, State Audit Institution and Anti-Corruption Agency. The relation between the parliament and independent bodies is one of the foundations for establishing balance between the legislative and executive power, and also for good functioning of democracy. The bodies elected by the parliament are obliged to submit their reports in regular intervals, provide it with other sources linked to control of executive power and point to irregularities in work of public authorities. In that sense, independent bodies are an extended arm of the parliament which they are accountable to.

\textsuperscript{4} For more details on recommendation on parliamentary work see Improvement of Democratic Performances of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia (2012), Belgrade: FPS.
3.8. General recommendations

Strict party discipline and career pragmatism is a consequence of the lack of open democratic discussions and fair intra-party competition. Furthermore, the absence of internal debate and intra-party democracy spills over the parties and produces undemocratic political institutions, the deficit of critical thinking, public debate and the lack of effective political accountability.

It is not realistic to believe that the sum of non-democratic, party components will give anything more than merely formal democratic party and political system. The synergy of these two processes forms a kind of vicious labyrinth of power from which it is difficult to find a democratic exit.

What has caused this state of flawed and “defective” democracy?

In our opinion, this is primarily about the “destructive mixture” and strengthening of the dominant authoritarian form of worship and pandering to leaders, relied on clientelistic ties of service exchange. The clientelistic relations are particularly widespread and strong within the partocratic order, in which parties in power impregnate and eventually own the state.

This situation is facilitated by the institutional design, in our case (indirect) proportional electoral system, in which electoral lists are controlled by the leader and his entourage. This is further followed by a political offer that, increasingly, hides in different packages more or less the same content. All aforementioned elements lead to a further increase of distance between almost mythologized leaders and politically immature citizens.

In partocratic regimes, democratic evolution is la mission impossible without the parallel evolution of the civil and political fields, i.e. its democratic institutionalization, monitored and connected to stabilization of the political ground and legitimation of political actors.

Constraining these tendencies would be possible only with the stabilization of the social and political situation and development of democratic institutions. Adequate information - media pluralism and democratic political education, even within the parties, make some of the basic guarantees, which would enable this process.

There are three key pre-conditions of this democratic evolution:

1. The limitation or ideally, abundance of the partocratic regime and patronage system in which ‘to the victor go the spoils’ - by appointing persons to public administration at all levels of governance, the ruling party ‘captures’ the state. The result of this abundance/limitation of the
patronage system will be the professionalization and rationalization of the public administration as well as the introduction of the corporate management in public enterprises.

2. Stabilization and legitimization of the overly fragmented, weak and non-functional party system is the second pre-condition of the democratic evolution. This can be done through raising the threshold for coalitions and reforming the electoral system and introducing preferential voting – where voters would directly elect their representatives.

3. The third pre-condition, which is also a parallel process to the democratic evolution, is the democratization of intra-party power structures. We see a great deal in enhancing the rights and democratic capacities of party members and their organizations, strengthening democratic procedures, organizing opinion polls, party referendums, direct elections for party positions and primaries for elections. Another important advantage of the democratization of intra-party relations is the decentralization of the power at all levels: geographical, social (women's and youths’ forums) and ideological (factions).
Concluding remarks

There is no doubt that party presidents are the key figures in Serbian politics. Their centralization of power and lack of competition within the party are shaping political scene to an enormous extent. Constitutional design and party statues provide presidents with good foundation, but actual power comes from the extension of initial authority through centralization of power and informal mechanisms - oligarchic tendencies, party discipline and authoritarian culture that enable presidents to rule in unchallenged manner. Presidentialization is more developed if party participate in ruling coalition - extensive spoil systems, patronages and clientelistic networks are just increasing attachment to the provider - party president.

Presidentialization of parties is stronger in conservative, sovereignistic and unitary-oriented parties, but also rather strong among liberal and modernist one. These tendencies are not disproved by majority of citizens who actually supports firm-hand rule and share disappointment with political parties, which is not unexpected because they do not operate in inclusive manner and do not include citizens and their representatives into decision making process (internal or public). Actually, citizens only participate in the political process as passive side during electoral campaigns that are also focused at party leaders and without any space for local issues and leaders which just confirms the viscous circle.
Recommended readings


Lončar, Jelena; Stojanović, Boban (2016). The influence of electoral systems on candidates’ election campaign strategies and the work of members of parliament in Stojiljkovic and Spasojevic (eds.) Voters, parties and elections - how to democratize political aprties in Montenegro and Serbia. (pp.69-86)


Spasojević Dušan & Vojislav Mihailović (2016). The Influence of the Electoral System on Perceptions and Behavior of Voters in Serbia in Stojiljković...
and Spasojević (eds.) Voters, parties, elections – How to democratize political parties in Montenegro and Serbia?, Belgrade, Podgorica: Fakultet političkih nauka, CeMI. (pp. 87-104)


