

**Notes:**

1. Semi-presidentialism was defined as a regime, where “a popularly elected fixed term president exists alongside a prime-minister and cabinet, who are responsible to parliament” (Elgie 1999: 13).

**Sources:**

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Miloš Brunclík

Institute of political studies, Charles University  
in Prague; CEVRO Institute

**Requejo, Ferran  
and Nagel, Klaus-Jürgen, eds.:**

**FEDERALISM BEYOND FEDERATIONS:  
ASYMMETRY AND PROCESSES OF  
RESYMMETRIZATION IN EUROPE.**

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Following the Second World War and in some cases even before the conflict, many European countries embarked upon a path of decentralization which challenged the unitary character of the state. A redistribution of power resulted in various forms of political and territorial organization. Denmark, Finland and Portugal granted broad autonomy to their insular regions, preserving the centralised structure of the mainland. Italy and Spain regionalized their entire territories,

while the United Kingdom granted peripheral nations self-governance. France, loyal to a legacy of Jacobinism, opted for a “light” version of decentralization which was more administrative and functional in nature. In Belgium, the reform was far-reaching, ultimately resulting in the country’s conversion into a fully fledged federation. And in Eastern Europe, as well, a vertical dispersion of power took place. The Russian Federation presents a quite complex multilevel system, at least formally, while Ukraine has allowed Crimea special status.

The study of federalism and/or of other principles underlying the division of power is no novelty in political science. And yet many variables and relations among variables remain to be explored, examined or re-examined. The authors of the volume under review observed that in the cases noted above, decentralization was initiated on the basis of an asymmetric formula. It is precisely this phenomenon of asymmetry and its development that is the focus of the book.

The research group remarks that asymmetry is commonly linked to decentralization processes, whereas centralization is associated with notions of symmetry. They call this assumption into question. More precisely, they see it as more probable that there is a link between resymmetrization and deepening decentralization, simultaneously arguing that asymmetry should not be paired with a lower level of decentralization. One of the publication’s main objectives is to justify and provide proof of the correctness of this hypothesis. Alongside asymmetry and the decentralization process, special attention is paid to the process of resymmetrization. The authors attempt to discover whether the ten cases selected have shown evidence of the later dynamics of resymmetrization. And, if so, they ask, what does the connection between resymmetrization and decentralization look like? Does resymmetrization increase or decrease the level of decentralization?

The researchers also explore the chief political actors in favour of resymmetrization and examine the primary arguments for its legitimation these actors employ.

The book consists of twelve chapters. The first, written by Ferran Requejo, one of the editors and a Professor of Political Science at Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, serves as an indispensable introduction. It presents the objectives of the text, provides structure for the individual studies and presents the theoretical background behind the research. Requejo defines the main concepts, elaborates on terms and phenomena and clarifies the fundamental conceptual points. In this endeavour, he is entirely successful. The only thing I find questionable is that in accounting for which countries to select for the research, Requejo provides perfect justification for excluding Switzerland and Germany, as well as the overseas territories of some European countries, but includes Russia and to a lesser extent, ex-Ukrainian Crimea, which to my mind is not clearly defensible. Even though the *de jure* or formal prerequisites for a decentralised entity could be met, the Russian Federation (and likewise Ukraine) is not a standard democracy. It is instead a hybrid regime which does not function in the same manner as liberal, pluralist democratic political systems. And isn’t democracy a *conditio sine qua non* for the distribution of power? The comparative nature of the research is highly desirable and worthy of praise. But here a shadow of doubt remains as to whether Russia has been legitimately incorporated into the comparison, and unfortunately there is no comment upon the matter.

Chapters Two to Eleven comprise single studies. The first essay (the second chapter) explores the intricate system of Belgian federalism. Wilfried Swenden argues that the state’s power configuration is less asymmetrical than is usually supposed. This assertion might appear surprising, since the Flemish drive for stronger self-governance is appar-

ently more intense than is the case for the Walloons. Nonetheless this brilliant, in-depth analytical study validates Swendens' words. The author ascertains that it is more correct to speak of symmetrical decentralization than a deepening of asymmetry and provides proof that this is the proper description.

The third chapter, by John Loughlin, deals with the United Kingdom. It opens with a description of the formation of the Union State, of which asymmetry is an inherent feature. Loughlin later explores the dynamics of devolution, focusing on leading institutions, actors and factors behind the process. His conclusions are noteworthy and valuable. He decomposes devolution into a set of dimensions, and in so doing provides more comprehensive insight into the process, its essence and its context, noting both the presence of asymmetry and the forces of symmetrization in the system. My sole reservation is confined to two phrases on pages 53 and 54. In commenting on the "West Lothian Question" the author asserts, "The logical solution would be to elect an English Assembly and to devolve matters to it similar to those devolved to the Scottish Parliament. This, however, would mean the creation of a federal system and a complete symmetrisation of the political system and this is unlikely to happen." Although I agree that "English" devolution doesn't seem a likely scenario, I cannot assent to the rest of the statement. There is no proof that the creation of an English Parliament would cause complete symmetrization of the system. The special position of Northern Ireland, the historical prerogatives of Scotland and the slightly inferior position held by Wales are not directly tied to the hypothetical existence of an English Assembly. Similarly, as regards the other part of the assertion, why speak about a federal system? Spain, despite being a wholly decentralised country with substantial regional self-governance, is not, at least *de jure*, a federation. Considered in its full context, though,

this is a fairly minor issue which doesn't affect the otherwise excellent analysis.

The treatise on Italy is exceptionally well structured and could also work as a general depiction of the Italian model of decentralization. The chapter is both descriptive and analytical and thoroughly prepared. In spite of this, I found myself missing a more detailed treatment of the distinct position of the five *regioni a statuto speciale*, particularly as regards the dual nature of Trentino Alto Adige-South Tyrol. But the study nevertheless meets expectations, dutifully sticks to the objective of the volume and presents findings which are well-grounded.

With sincere respect for an acknowledgement of all the chapters, number five stands out. The study is highly analytical in nature, forgoing any introduction (which in this case is in any event unnecessary) on the *Estado de las Autonomías*. It promptly dives deep below the surface, going into great detail and unveiling processes and phenomena which are far from apparent. It is here that we encounter the dynamics of resymmetrization in conjunction with re-centralization. These two processes according to Ramón Máiz and Antón Losada stand behind the *de-federalization* of the system. What I find especially remarkable is the genuinely normative conclusion on page 103. It is not a foregone conclusion today that political science research will go beyond investigation to offer a solution. Here, though, there is one. The authors address how Balkanization of the system or a return to centralism may be circumvented. Without walking back my praise, I do have two fairly minor points to raise. The first is that I am not sure I agree with the authors' decision to define Spain as a federal state (p. 85). My reasoning stems from the weak application of the shared-rule principle in the system. And the second is that I disagree with the inference: "...the population of some ACs (Autonomous Communities) is too small for substantive self-government." Some Swiss

Cantons have only thousands or dozen of thousands inhabitants and yet they are able to govern themselves as a federal units.

Chapters 6, 7 and 10 cover systems in which urban areas preserve their unitary character, while one or more particular territories are granted political autonomy. This is not to imply that the studies overlook the mainland. As for decentralization, in whatever form it takes due attention is given to the entire country. The essays are well written and draw very relevant conclusions. In this regard, they are as valuable as those dedicated to perhaps more intricate systems. Soren Desenrode focuses on Denmark's Faroe Islands, Markku Suksi on Finland's Aland Islands and Carlos E. Pacheco Amaral on Portugal's Atlantic territories. Chapter Eleven also has an island in its name. But unlike the above-mentioned cases, Corsica is not the sole regionalized entity in France. Thus Ivan Serrano has to cope with whole process of French decentralization, albeit with special a focus on the Mediterranean island.

As far as structure and assignment are concerned, the chapter on Russia corresponds perfectly to the rest of the volume. Richard Sakwa dwells upon the historical context, the nature of Russian state organization, its internal dynamics, actors, institutions etc. His findings about the shifts towards re-centralization are well grounded, based on thorough analysis. The analysis also uncovers the fact that the mechanisms behind political processes in Russia differ from those of "traditional" democracies. This is the point to which I make reference in the introduction to the review. I doubt systems as dissimilar as those of the Western European states and ever-peculiar Russia may be compared. One of the main traits of strengthening authoritarian rule is a (re)centralization of power. But we may not assume that the forces of recentralization in Spain or the United Kingdom are in any way tied to a weakening of democracy. These are different countries, with

different traditions and different polities. The same goes for Taras Kuzio's Chapter 9 on Crimea.

The closing chapter (Chapter 12) presents final conclusions and makes comparisons across all cases. The editors, Klaus-Jürgen Nagel and Ferran Requejo, deal firstly with the history and dynamics of the processes of decentralization, paying special attention to the phenomenon of resymmetrization. Then they elaborate on the *de facto* and *de jure* asymmetries present in the political and territorial configurations of the ten countries and assess the differences and similarities among them. They also examine who is behind the resymmetrization and what arguments these actors employ to justify their stance. Finally the authors comment on the relations between the processes of decentralization/recentralization and resymmetrization/symmetrization. Nagel and Requejo's findings, grounded in the investigations of their colleagues, are well arranged and provide a proper ending for the volume.

All in all, the book is a worthwhile effort. The questions raised in the introduction are definitely legitimate and relevant to the field of study. The research contains both theoretical and empirical dimensions. The descriptive component of the essays provides the necessary background for analytical work and is valuable in and of itself. The analyses are carefully prepared, with original, valuable results. Despite some minor flaws and inconsistencies, which I have addressed in the review, I must express praise for the publication. My biggest reservation is the inclusion of Russia and Ukraine in the research. But I do not believe their inclusion lessens the value of the work as a whole, since the eight other cases ensure a representative, respectable polling of the data.

*Pavel Dvořák, Ph.D. Candidate  
Faculty of Social Studies  
Masaryk University Brno*