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Central and Eastern European Political and Economic Integration

Introduction

The disintegration of Communism in the Central and Eastern European countries in 1989 has been regarded as integration into Europe. This process included the CEE countries to get aligned with the rest of Europe as to heritage, culture, politics and in economic terms to play an active part in the free market economy. Single market is the process vehicle to take part in the process; by 2007 almost all countries of Central and Eastern Europe have become members of the European Union. However, western Balkan countries and several countries were outside the EU, but there was a process to integrate them as well.

The CEE countries who became members of the EU started to develop democracies and open market to take the benefit of the new economic system; the economic growth of the CEE countries surged similarly to that of their Western counterparts in the last two decades. Adaptation of new polices and modernisation and other initiatives made all these countries wealthier, economically more efficient and significantly better governed. Countries like Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary that were viewed backward or too poor to be in the European family no longer bear this stigma. They have been successful in rising like other members in Europe to carry their own performance in the European political and economic affairs. As southern Europe transformed into 'Western Europe' when Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal underwent a successful economic development as an output of EU membership, so CEE countries benefit from the same process. Therefore, integration into Europe can be considered a success.

On the other hand, there is a complicate picture on how CEE countries get in this process. Because it was easier for Southern Europe to integrate, while for CEE it was not that easy. There were many hurdles in the whole process as their political views and economic process were more nationalised and were less inclined to get integrated in the whole process of the political and economic integration. This had to come a long way to get into the minimum standard. In this process many opportunities appeared for the political entrepreneurs to take the benefits of the shifting choices and momentary setbacks while CEE countries were more indulged into more volatile partisan ambiance, where those opportunities were more easily available than would have been in case of a more stable party-political landscape. Similarly, the political and economic transformation process affected severely the redistribution conflicts that changed the party-political competition and generated constituent groups that would mobilise against different dimensions of the reformation agenda. This is not to say that such mobilisation was

necessary but geared against the European Union as the transformation was quite evident as free market economy was overtaking the world economy. In this transition process, the CEE expected to get significant financial support and Brussels was monitoring the weak countries that were under the set guidelines of the accession process. The complex transformation process was gearing the whole overlapping developments reinforcing or neutralising one another. As a result, the CEE countries varied substantially both in their readiness for EU membership and regarding the political efforts to get into the accession process. It led to important results for the reception of the candidate countries by the concerned European institutions and the perception of the integration process in the future member states.

Reviewing this given situation it can be discerned that the relationship between Europe and the countries of CEE has been governed by a large variety of factors and circumstances. As the focus will lie on party-based Euroscepticism, because political parties are influencing the political institutions whose decisions were more accurately translated into political outcomes, a proper analyses would show how the evolution of the popular Euroscepticism goes around Europe and the CEE countries.

Euroscepticism

This idea has been a topic of considerable scholarship and intense debate for the last 30 years. But none of the proposed conceptualisation has been universally regarded fair as of to date. During the post war period there was a huge public interest for European integration; however, Europe remained to many people an abstraction of idealistic goals causing the need to overcome past grievances and prevent future conflicts. Day by day new members were becoming part of the European integration, the contemporary political system became more complex, delivering more potential conflict. And the decisions made by the institutions started to affect the lives of the people more significantly. Yet, until recently, the European policy-makers could easily point to a general agreement allowing them to proceed with further integration. This permissive decision-making resulted in the decline of the EU process of integration and it geared various effects on national party systems and most notably it favoured the emergence of Eurosceptic parties.

The best known concept for this phenomenon is the following by Paul Taggart:[1] 'Euroscepticism expresses the idea of contingent, or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration', whose work on Euroscepticism covers well-known Eastern European specificities, and differentiates between 'Hard Euroscepticism', the main opposition to the EU and European integration, and 'Soft Euroscepticism' defined as a relevant opposition to the EU based on concerns about another policy where national interest is believed to be against the EU's objectives. Kopecký and Mudde criticised the idea of Soft Euroscepticism as it

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[1] Aleks Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart (eds), *Opposing Europe? The Comparative Party Politics of Euroscepticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7.

is too broad because 'every disagreement with any decision of the EU can be included'.[2] In short, the definition of 'Soft Euroscepticism' fails to count for bargaining hard in the national interest and eventually disregards clear and fast criteria and decision rules. Instead of David Easton's[3] 'diffuse and specific' forms of political support, Kopecký and Mudde[4] proposed a conceptualisation matrix of Euroscepticism that differs from support for the conventional ideas of European integration that detects the EU ('diffuse support') from 'support for the conventional practice of European Integration; that is the EU as it is and as it is developing' ('specific support').[5]

As discussed already in the beginning, we will focus primarily on group-based Euroscepticism because political opinions and sentiments have never taken into account the outcomes but demanded aggregation, interpretation and translation by the political parties. By doing this, we not only look at a party's position concerning Europe but also at the salience of such a position. We will be able to see how the extent to which a party can avail Eurosceptical positions is prominent in its pronouncements, behaviour and programmatic manifestos. The prominence that a party and its voters demand for instance from Euroscepticism is an important defining characteristic as it engages with many other agenda items in the political arena and therefore, parties must take careful and effective choices where to advance relative to others.

The analysis will show how the overview of the evolution of Euroscepticism in CEE focus on common trends and differences to progress in Western European party systems.

The CEE countries and their relationship with Europe – Common trends

Although experts cannot agree on the segmentation or precise level of the post-transition time span but agree that public debates have started from the period of the accession process between the EU and five CEE countries.[6] They are namely the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia. After one year Romania, the Slovak Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Malta got into the accession process. This shift shows how the relationship works between CEE countries and Europe.

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[2]   Petr Kopecký and Cas Mudde, 'The Two Sides of Euroscepticism. Party Positions in European Integration in East Central Europe', *European Union Politics* 3, no 3 (2002), 300.
[3]   David Easton, *A Framework for Political Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 124.
[4]   Kopecký and Mudde, 'The Two Sides', 300.
[5]   Ibid.
[6]   Karen Henderson, 'Exceptionalism or Convergence? Euroscepticism and Party Systems in Central and Eastern Europe', in *Opposing Europe? The Comparative Party Politics of Euroscepticism. Vol. 2: Comparative and Theoretical Perspectives,* ed. by Aleks Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 122; Laure Neumayer, 'Euroscepticism as a Political Label: The Use of European Union Issues in Political Competition in the New Member States', *European Journal of Political Research* 47, no 2 (2008), 125.

The transition and post-transition period

Previous to accession discussions, the public discussion was usually subject to the need for a 'coming back to Europe'. This duration had extremely figurative repercussions by stating not only a significant ambition but also by aiding as a rallying cry to a flabbergasted bequest of political and economic circumstances that were seen as difficulties not only for the quick restoration with Europe but also for a nationwide transformation course. Western European countries like Austria that found it hard to start the endogenous transformation procedure because of many local veto players chose for accession to the European Union largely to receive the internal economic shift and enhance attractiveness.[7]

   Political leaders in developing societies surely found it at ease to validate reform measures by focusing on more acceptable national goals – getting prepared for EU membership – than to defend it in other ways. Another problem for all CEE countries was that they had a legacy of being influenced by outside empires, not only the Soviet Union but also previous imperial Russia, the Habsburg Empire and the Ottoman Empire. External influence had not only delayed modern state-formation but also the architecture of the industrial development and economic progress along centre-related relationship. Thus the 'return to Europe' was seen not only '[…] as a way of definitively exiting from the Soviet orbit, but also as a means of returning as quickly as possible to where the states would have been if the Communist takeovers of the 1940s had never happened'.[8]

   Yet, in many CEE countries the legacy of foreign dominance had geared a high preference for inter-govern mentalist ideas of European integration. Therefore, a vision of a 'Europe of Nations' has been accepted by major political players in the region, such as the major Hungarian party Fidesz–Hungarian Civic Union, which rejects the idea of a 'European Super Sate'.[9] As a result, the debates about the end result of integration and the transfer of national control to another remote political centre, Brussels, seem to be more noticeable in CEE that in Western Europe. Yet, accession to the EU was assumed inevitable. Moreover, the economic benefits expected from EU membership because of better access to markets, investments and knowhow were advocated by political elites to validate the need for EU accession. However, economic benefits were secondary for chasing EU membership during the post-transition period.[10] Briefly, this early stage, if only on a general and rather superficial level, was assumed to have a '[…] positive, if

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[7]   Reinhard Heinisch, *Populism, Proporz, Pariah. Austria Turns Right, Austrian Political Change, its Causes and Repercussions* (New York: Nova Science Publishers Inc., 2002).
[8]   Henderson, 'Exceptionalism', 121.
[9]   Agnes Batory, *Attitudes to Europe. Ideology, Strategy and the Issues of European Union Membership in Hungarian Party Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 56.
[10]   Heather Grabbe and Kirsty Hughes, 'Central and east European views on EU enlargement: political debates and public opinion,' in *Back to Europe. Central and Eastern Europe and the European Union,* ed. by Karen Henderson (London–Philadelphia: UCL Press, 1999), 188.

only romantic and illusory, consensus among the political elites and the public alike to become part of Europe' as Petr Kopecký[11] puts it when referring to the Czech case.

The main document that started the new political integration of Europe was the Treaty on European Union, better known as the Maastricht Treaty named after the city where it was signed. This treaty pushed the political interface forward and the Western European public became more aware of the aftermath of European integration.[12] Many Western European countries tried to stop the unification process by referenda but this treaty entered into force on 1 November 1993, and thus it started to transform the European Community into European Union. However, the assumption of the pro-European elites moved further with deep European integration while infamous sentiment rose against the EU. Also, due to the unfathomable formal incorporation of political decision-making, the EU developed a policy of broadening its membership. In consecutive rounds of expansion, it grabbed new member states, totalling the intricacy of the Union. However, once that almost all of the wealthy Western European countries had become member states, upcoming rounds of expansion were vulnerable to accept only poorer countries from Europe's border. These would consequently not only have unconstrained admission to Western labour markets and draw away funds but also be allowed to substantial allocations in wealth through the so-called EU structural funds. The latter had been made under the backing of consistency policy to lessen regional inequalities across Europe and were a significant inducement for poorer countries to hunt EU membership. The outlook of Eastern expansion and the likelihood of the future accession of Turkey also amplified public anxiety about the EU, exactly in those countries that saw themselves most affected by these developments. Meanwhile, huge chunks of the public in CEE remained highly 'Euroenthusiastic' throughout the 1990s as they required further understanding of the so-called Maastricht practice or European integration more generally.[13]

Accordingly, while the 'permissive consensus' to further integration began to erode in Western Europe, general pro-integration thoughts prevailed in CEE until the end of the decade. With regard to party competition in CEE polities, the broad consensus excluded a dispute over Europe from rising. This is not to say that European issues did not play a role in the political discourse. However, the major political players neither examined the goal of reaching EU affiliation nor did European issues bid political parties a chance to expanse themselves from their contestants. As a consequence, Taggart and Szczerbiak[14] equated the partisan debate over Europe in most CEE republics to those mutual in 'systems of constrained' rather than 'open contestation' to high spot the intense landscape of the condition in which a whole matter was hollowly closed off from political

[11] Petr Kopecký, 'An Awkward Newcomer? EU Enlargement and Euroscepticism in the Czech Republic', in *Euroscepticism. Party Politics, National Identity and European Integration,* ed. by Robert Harmsen and Menno Spiering (Amsterdam – New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2004), 226.

[12] Richard C Eichenberg and Russell J Dalton, 'Post-Maastricht Blues: The Transformation of Citizen Support for European Integration, 1973–2004', *Acta Politica* 42, no 2 (2007), 128–152.

[13] Søren Riishøj, 'Europeanisation and Euro-scepticism: Experiences from Poland and the Czech Republic', *Středoevropské politické studie* 6, no 4 (2004), 19–27.

[14] Szczerbiak and Taggart, *Opposing Europe?* 349–350.

competition. The state of affairs was evidently dissimilar in CEE political organisms. There, the two ideological bases of Euroscepticism – anti-market and anti-libertarian orientations – were regularly hustled together as a programmatic schema for a particular political party. Karen Henderson,[15] taking after Herbert Kitschelt's work on Eastern party systems (1992), elucidates this as follows: During the early growth phase of party systems in post-Communist transition countries, the chief skirmish was between the post-Communist party's representatives of strict sociocultural views and anti-market attitudes on the one side and culturally libertarian parties with pro-market orientations on the other. The latter had arisen from the civic and political opposition to the Communist establishment and thus rejected what the latter had symbolised in terms of sociocultural and economic policies.

To deliver a more nuanced image and increase a better empathy of the growth of the connection between the European Union and CEE, we offer three case studies that demonstrate important features of the so-called return to Europe.

The Czech Republic

In 'returning to Europe', the Czech Republic relished clear benefits compared to all other transition countries. Releasing itself of less efficient Slovakia in succeeding the velvet separation in 1991, the country was ethnologically justly united, could look back at a fruitful pre-Communist middleclass democracy, had a custom of endogenous societal and economic reconstruction, and was also less laden by a large retrograde agrarian sector than either Poland or Hungary. In fact, during the early and mid-1990s, the Czech Republic was generally measured '[…] the most successful transition economy in Central and East Europe'.[16] Moreover, its far-reaching transfer package was growing at a degree faster than was the case in other transition countries. At the same time Prague accomplished to avoid unwarranted levels of inflation and unemployment as well as other economic disturbances so classic of post-Communist economies. As a result, the Czech Republic (along with Slovenia) outdid the rankings of European transition economies in terms of GDP growth, cutting inflation and fiscal firmness. This confirmed the country's international status as the leader among the post-communist inheritor states.[17]

The economic triumph was coordinated by political improvement in terms of good control, respect for civil liberties and political transparency. The so-called 'Czech miracle' was escorted by a flawless sense of national uniqueness and a general consensus about the country's path. Whereas Catholicism employed a special jerk in Polish society while Hungary constantly struggled with the 'shock (of the Treaty) of Trianon', ensuing in both cases in political agendas that clashed with modernisation, the Czech society looked

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[15]   Henderson, 'Exceptionalism', 121–122.
[16]   World Bank, *Czech Republic: Toward EU Accession – Main Report* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank), 1999.
[17]   cf. Robin H E Shepherd, *Czechoslovakia: The Velvet Revolution and Beyond* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

free from such political commotions. This sagacity of certainty that the Czech Republic would rapidly take its equitable dwelling among the more progressive Western European countries was shared by a self-confident and forward-looking community that viewed the return to Europe as a national destiny long repudiated to them by an impartial history.

In party political terms, the breakdown of the Civic Forum in 1991 cemented the way for the formation of a new normal party – the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) – moulded around a loyally anti-communist and market-liberal viewpoint. Surprisingly, it would also emerge as one of the few genuinely Eurosceptic parties in CEE. Summing up, the Czech case demonstrates the slow alteration of sentiments toward European addition from Euroenthusiasm to Eurorealism.

Hungary

During the post-transition period, the new Hungarian political elite and the public at large decided on the objective of 'returning to Europe '. In contrast to the Czech Republic, this aim was not inspired chiefly by economic thoughts but by the belief that Hungary '[…] had always been at the 'heart of Europe''.[18] Illustration of historical experiences as part of a transnational party-political unit, the former Austro–Hungarian Empire's succession to the EU was widely professed as an expressive need and crucial step on the road to transformation and to contravene with the Communist past. Yet, in view of the fact that Hungary was subjugated by exterior forces for much of the time of its existence there has been a breeding ground for chauvinism.

With the formation of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy in 1867, Hungary officially recovered its independence after 170 years of Ottoman rule and 200 years of being part of the Habsburg Empire. Yet, Hungary remained in fact controlled by Austria. After the First World War, the Treaty of Trianon finished the historic Kingdom of Hungary that had been founded in 1000 and existed for about 500 years. Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory and around 3.2 million ethnic Hungarians were divided from their motherland. The 'trauma' of Trianon is kept alive in the Hungarian shared memory until today and is frequently invoked by various nationalist forces.

The position of sociocultural subjects in Hungarian party rivalry completely links to the theoretic argument put forth by Kitschelt.[19] Thus, the discussion about European integration in Hungary has been mostly enclosed in cultural and not in economic terms. In contrast to other party systems in CEE, the two sources of Euroscepticism, anti-market and authoritarian-nationalist locations, did not meet in the main Hungarian Communist descendant party. Instead, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) was one of the 'immediate campaigners' that had already begun its change to modern Social Democracy in the late 1980s.

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[18]   Batory, *Attitudes,* 64.
[19]   Herbert Kitschelt et al., *Post-Communist Party Systems* (Budapest: Central European University, 1999).

This quick transformation commanded to a discrete pro-EU profile of the MSZP as it professed EU membership a first precedence for Hungarian foreign policy.[20] Thus, the cleavage between Communism and anti-Communism that organised party rivalry in Hungary in the early 1990s did not accord with a pro-/anti-EU cleavage as it did in other countries during the post-transformation period. This opinion holds true even in view of the existence of another Communist heir party, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP) that rallied the Communist hardliners. The party clearly disallowed European integration on grounds of its anti-Capitalism[21] but was unsuccessful to secure parliamentary representation. As a result, during the post-transition period, all parliamentary parties were in favour of EU accession. Thus, the pro-/anti-EU cleavage did not have any significance in Hungary in the early 1990s. This 'Euroenthusiasm' at the elite level was coordinated by public opinion. As the Central and Eastern Eurobarometer indicated, four out of five respondents held EU accession in 1992.[22]

Summing up, we could certainly detect a shift from Euroenthusiasm to more Euro-realism in Hungary, both at the party level and in public opinion. Nevertheless, subjects related to European integration are normally not of great significance in public debate. However, exact events can bring EU-related topics to the vanguard of the debate such as the so-called Status Law of the Orbán Government in 2001. In dealing with the highly complex domestic political issue of the millions of ethnic Hungarians living abroad, the government passed a law conceding social rights to ethnic Hungarians holding foreign citizenships.

The criticism of the law by the EU and other international governments was a hot topic in the media as well as in political and public debate.[23]

Poland

Poland is a stimulating case because the growth of the public debate about Europe differs from other Central and Eastern European countries by showing a new Euroenthusiasm or a 'second return to Europe'[24] after having been ruled by Eurosceptic parties. This growth at the party level is reflected also in public opinion: With the start of the succession talks, support for EU membership had tumbled from nearly 80 per cent in 1994 to between 55 and 60 per cent in the mid-1990s. At the same time, a large bloc of anti-EU public opinion arose that, according to the CBOS polling agency, was made up by between 20 and 25 per cent of the Poles surveyed.[25]

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[20] Batory, *Attitudes,* 52, 23.
[21] Ibid. 51.
[22] Ibid. 64.
[23] Ibid. 56.
[24] Aleks Szczerbiak, *Poland within the European Union. New Awkward Partner or New Heart of Europe?* (London – New York: Routledge, 2012), 20.
[25] Szczerbiak and Taggart, *Opposing Europe?* 223.

Until 2007, the percentage of those who considered EU membership a 'good thing' remained below 60 per cent (with the exclusion of 61 per cent at the time of the accession referendum in 2003). However, in that year a genuine Europhile party, the Civic Platform (PO), won the national elections and support for EU membership jumped to 67 per cent.

Previously, the comparative success of parties critical of, or opposing EU membership, particularly their victory in the 2001 parliamentary elections, was construed by many critics as a 'Eurosceptic backlash'. As was the Polish veto against the Constitutional Treaty at the EU summit in Rome in 2003. This growth particularly drew public and academic attention to the wonder of Polish Euroscepticism. The well-known slogan 'Nice or die' – referring to the so-called Nice Treaty – expressed by the law-making converted a sign of the Poles' robust aims to protect their national concern; for example, the snub to accept new voting principles in the Council of the EU which would have caused a discount of Polish vote stocks.[26]

What is more, from 2005 to 2007, the party of the Kazcyński twins, Law and Justice (PiS), ruled in partnership with the fundamental parties Self-Defence (Samoobrona) and the League of Polish Families (LPR). While the former typically supported the requirement of defensive nationwide welfare, Self-Defence rummage-sale radical-populist bombast to marshal those voters who saw themselves as the failures of the economic transition. The LPR was an alliance of numerous Catholic-nationalist parties and right-wing groupings whose petition to the radical religious right was heightened by the support of Radio Maryja21.

Although conceptual reasons for why the two gatherings censured European integration are fairly clear, it is valuable to highpoint how one of the major Polish parties debunk Europe in party rivalry. During the 2001 election campaign, the PiS adopted a dangerous path toward the accession talks because the EU was to propose a 'second class membership' to Poland. This bombast was escorted by some law-making initiatives directing to recover the agreement circumstances and uphold nationwide rule in complex policy turfs like authority, moral standards and ethos as well as land possession. Many critics understood this conduct as a main 'Eurosceptic turn' while the party frontrunners labelled themselves Eurorealists.

Regarding the incentives behind this 'Eurorealism', the appearance of electoral-strategic as well as coalition-tactical aspects was the most likely. Obviously, the party responded to the achievement of the LPR in the 2001 parliamentary responses: By an ornamental plan of its dangerous prides toward the accession circumstances, the PiS intended to guide an indication that it would be set to ally itself with the LPR if the latter would relax its fundamental anti-EU posture. In addition, the party obviously tried to entice voters from the LPR who were worried about Poland's EU membership.[27] Yet, in terms of categorising the PiS, one of the main parties in Poland, the literature has not come to a consensus.

[26] Riishøj, 'Europeanisation', 19–20.
[27] Szczerbiak and Taggart, *Opposing Europe?* 133.

Some researchers construe the stress the PiS has sometimes located on sharply defensive national benefits within the EU as well as its favourite for inter-governmentalism as strong cyphers of a Eurosceptic turn of the party, while others, like Szczerbiak[28] more recently, said that the party neither competes against European integration in general nor enunciates clearly any perilous station toward the present or future trajectory of all-encompassing integration.

Conclusion

Ensuring a high degree of democratic liability is also key for European political institutions. This is particularly significant given the upsurge during the emergency of the degree of European interruption of national economic and fiscal policies, which have re-distributional penalties. For instance, anxieties have been pronounced that European provision to countries under stress, and the circumstances on which it is decided, are defined only by the Eurogroup, that is, by administrations of euro area nations, themselves subject to law-making controls of very different kinds.

Stronger participation of the European Parliament could be a way to lessen such worries. It would be likewise significant for European subjects to articulate their views more conspicuously in national legislative affairs and in national discussions so that peoples can make their voices heard. But above all, only in a truly European public space can common answers occur. We can observe today a renationalisation of European politics, and this could result in objections to European tactics. This renationalisation carries with it the seeds of an erosion of our common values.

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