The Democratisation and Europeanisation of Party Systems

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ESSAYS

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A »cordial link« between Democratisation and Europeanisation Processes

The last wave of EU enlargement involved countries for which the processes of democratisation were closely linked to the processes of Europeanisation.[1] Namely, in Central European post-socialist countries the transition to a democracy interfered with a geopolitical shift expressed in the slogan »back to Europe«. In addition, to a great extent a »cordial link« between democratisation and Europeanisation was also established by the EU political conditionality defined by the Copenhagen criteria. While all of the 2004 enlargement wave post-socialist countries were eager to fulfil them, in the case of Slovakia this was true for some time primarily on the declaratory level. The only 2004 EU accession country where the EU interfered in domestic politics was Slovakia since in other countries the EU membership incentive worked as a sufficient EU instrument. Yet, in the Slovakian case, the EU intervened in the domestic party system dynamics in such a way that practically true pro-European political parties (as opposed to the previous government's only declaratory pro-European orientation) emerged as winners at elections and enabled Slovakia to remain in the 2004 EU enlargement group of countries (see e. g. Harris, 2004; Henderson, 2005; Haughton and Malová, 2007). An earlier general model of patterns of the relationship between democratisation and Europeanisation (see Fink-Hafner and Krašovec 2006), also involving the Slovakian two-level political game, has now been further developed in this special issue for the purpose our research in a comparative article by Danica Fink-Hafner.

The countries we look at in more detail in most of this special issue (all but Slovenia) have experienced a delayed transition to democracy as well as an involvement in a war. Their experience has so far been closer to the Slovakian »model« of democratisation/Europeanisation dynamics (especially Croatia), but at the same time these countries were given other kinds of statuses and additional EU conditions to be fulfilled in order to achieve closer relations with the EU. In fact, in the case of all the investigated countries except for Slovenia we can see the impact of »the EU policy mix« on the domestic (national) party system dynamics related to the EU integration

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[1] In this special issue we primarily understand Europeanisation in terms of European pressure (setting preconditions and conditions for integration with the EU, political pressures on potential candidate states to fulfil the EU's expectations). Our research interest is restricted to the top-down Europeanisation of certain aspects of the adaptation of a party system.

issue. The EU policy mix has consisted of: a) a combination of a »one-size-fits-all« EU policy of spreading political democracy (especially in the case of Croatia); as well as b) a predominantly foreign policy attitude vis-à-vis third countries involving some elements of inconsistency also known from the EU's attitudes to other regions in the world (for more inconsistencies, see Schimmelfennig 2007).

What we can still observe in all the investigated countries is that domestic political interest in integration with the EU has developed in a close relationship with the transition to a democracy. While in Slovenia these processes openly took place already in transition from the late 1980s to the early 1990s (even the reformed League of Communists of Slovenia used the slogan »Europe now/Evropa zdaj« in its election manifesto for the first free elections in 1990), in other former Yugoslav republics we have seen a delayed or postponed transition to a democracy (clear cases are Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro having watershed elections in 2000 or at the end of the 1990s). So with a delay of approximately ten years (when compared to transitions in Central European post-socialist countries including Slovenia) a delay in strategic orientation as regards integration with the EU could also be noticed. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a special case with its still unfinished transitions to a democracy and market economy and externally defined political system (its Constitution was determined by the Dayton agreement signed in 1995 enabling the political elites involved in the Yugoslav war in the first half of 1990s to stop the war). Kosovo has some similarities with Bosnia due to its intensive ethnic conflicts and the crucial role of international forces in keeping the peace as well as in the building of a functioning political system. Macedonia leans in a way towards the Bosnian and Kosovar experiences with regard to its heavily ethnically-based party politics, fragile democracy burdened by ethnic conflicts, significant indirect involvement in a war and dependence on world powers for maintaining peace. Still, Macedonia has been able to govern itself.

The Europeanisation Impact on National Party System Dynamics

Only since the end of the 1990s has Europeanisation research seemed to have developed into a distinct research area in EU studies. Although it has developed in a quite lively way since 2003 (see an overview of the literature in Sedelmeier 2006), it has offered some valuable insights especially into impact on the polity – e.g. on the implementation of liberal democratic principles (democracy and political rights) as well as the adaptation of national executives, parliaments and administrative structures. One of the least researched areas is the EU's impact on politics, especially political parties, party systems and interest groups. This issue of the Politics of Central Europe focuses exactly on national politics. It not only presents some research findings that fill in the gaps in the existing literature (research into parties and party systems in the Europeanisation framework), but it also covers countries that have so far been less researched and at the same time also (with the recent exception of Croatia) been left out from a realistic range of full EU-membership expectations. From the theoretical

and conceptual point of view it is also important that we combine the Europeanisation theoretical approach with the Comparative Politics approach (the latter having been very much left aside in the literature until very recently).

The European Union's impact on national party systems has so far been the subject of just a few, relatively recent research attempts. The most visible of these have so far been presented in the following publications: Mair, 2000; Ladrech, 2002; Rybář and Malova, 2004; Henderson 2005; Rybář, 2005; Pennings, 2006; Poguntke, Aylott, Carter, Ladrech and Luther, eds. 2007; Lewis and Mansfeldová, eds. 2006; Enyedi and Lewis, 2006. Only in the case of Slovakia has a substantial EU 'social influence' (Rybář, 2005) arisen in order to change the course of the national party competition. Namely, EU actors focused their activities on the opposition party actors and voters. We expected to find more similarities between the Slovakian pattern of party dynamics regarding EU integration issues and other investigated former Yugoslav republics, with the exception of Slovenia (Slovenia being similar to the majority of the post-socialist countries of the 2004 wave of EU enlargement). So a significant EU impact on national party competition was expected in the circumstances of relatively big gaps between the EU's political criteria and a third country's political characteristics. We also expected to find domestic political actors the EU can relate to in the circumstances of the national political elite's two-level game regarding the fulfilment of EU criteria – similarly to the case of Slovakia (voters, NGOs and oppositional pro-European political parties). Still, in order to make these party system dynamics work several pre-conditions need to be met. The research model for analysing specific elements of a party system dynamics is presented in more detail in a comparative chapter by Danica Fink Hafner. We hypothesised those possible explanatory variables that have led to the very different characteristics of party system mechanics seen in the investigated countries. They are: a) institutionalisation of the party system; b) the European socialisation of national parties; and c) the characteristics of voters' attitudes to their country's integration with the EU.

Research Questions, Factors and Country Selection

In this special issue we predominantly focus on four former Yugoslav republics – Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro. The selection is based on the main characteristics of the predominant logic of party organisation. Namely, in these four politico-territorial units political parties based on a liberal principle (the representation of individuals) seem to have prevailed – when we compare them with the predominant ethnic-based logic of party organisation in other former Yugoslav politico-territorial units (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia). Since political parties can (and currently still do in Serbia) to a large extent stand for nationalist policies and those voting for most of them express extreme-right ethnic feelings they may currently still be seen as »a borderline case« compared to parties in the other three countries (Slovenia, Croatia and Montenegro).

In the country case studies and in three-country comparative article the authors present the following three main factors of a country's national party system's adaptation to common European pressures: a) institutionalisation of the national party system; b) the European socialisation of national party elites; and c) voters' attitudes to integration with the EU. The following indicators were used to capture the selected variables:

a) for institutionalisation[2] – the stability of the core parties in the national party system and the autonomy of parties in relation to external centres of power, such as organised crime, the 'grey economy', the tolerance of a conflict of interests between members of party elites and other influential social positions, party links with important state structures (such as the military, secret police) and influential veteran interest organisations.

b) for the European socialisation[3] of national party elites – the links between national parties and European Union-level party federations (timing of the first unofficial links, timing of the first official links and memberships), the importance of EU-level party links in relation to other international party links such as international party associations and changing domestic party characteristics under the influence of EU-level party federations.

c) voters' attitudes to integration with the EU – national public opinion survey data (general/abstract support for one's own country's inclusion in European integration processes; informed support for one's own country's inclusion in European integration processes – support involving voters' awareness of the EU's pre-conditions as well as the relationship between voters' support for EU integration and voters' support for integration with NATO).

The abovementioned research model was applied thoroughly when investigating the Croatian, Serbian and Montenegrin party systems' dynamics in the process of Europeanisation. As Slovenian studies concerning the described research questions have already been published before (Lajh and Krašovec 2004; Krašovec, Lajh and Kustec Lipicer 2006), the findings on the Europeanisation of Slovenian parties and the Slovenian party system's idiosyncrasies are incorporated in comparative articles by Fink Hafner as well as by Lajh and Krašovec, while Deželan's contribution presents an insight into changes in political party election activities brought about by the first European elections in Slovenia in 2004. Deželan's contribution confirms previous studies' findings that, in general, Slovenian political parties and party system competition do not exert a substantial amount of change due to European integration (similarly to most Central European post-socialist countries which became EU members in 2004).

Krašovec and Lajh move further toward future research steps by discussing the potential interlacement of democratisation and the Europeanisation processes of party

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[2] See e.g. Mainwaring and Torcal (2006) and Enyedi (2006).
[3] On social constructivism see e.g. Risse (2004).

politics in Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, namely the two 'extremes' in the territory of former Yugoslavia. Research into the EU's impact on national parties and party system dynamics in other former Yugoslav politico-territorial units (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kosovo) remains on the agenda as special cases of neighbouring countries (or countries in the making – such as Kosovo) burdened by ethnic conflicts and characterised by special EU foreign and security interests (Tzifakis 2007).

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