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1

The EU and Party Politics in Central and Eastern Europe: Questions and Issues

*Paul G. Lewis*¹

1.1 EU factors in the party politics of Central and Eastern Europe

The broad principle of Europeanization was a guiding light for the transformation that has taken place in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) since communist rule began to crumble in 1989. This was no less true of political parties and party systems than of other major components in the transition to democracy. The dominant Soviet hegemony that prevailed until 1989 was swiftly replaced by a strengthening Western influence composed, in its early phase, of a loosely defined idea of 'transition to democracy' and considerably more concrete processes of capitalist construction ('free market' development) as well as steadily growing military cooperation. Parties were formed and developed on Western models, and transnational links both with the different party internationals and equivalent associations based on the European Parliament (EP) have been instrumental in shaping political identities and underpinning the development of the institutions that seek to represent them.

From this point of view the enlargement that took place on 1 May 2004 emerges as just one further feature in a broad pattern of enhanced Western involvement in the European Union (EU) that has prevailed throughout CEE since the late 1980s. The achievements of the CEE countries in developing electorally competitive parties and relatively stable party systems played, conversely, a major part in producing the political situation that made these countries viable candidates for EU membership. Post-communist democracy is now firmly rooted and relatively stable party systems are emerging – albeit to a greater extent in some countries (Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovenia) than in others.

But the formal expansion of the EU also brings other new factors into play. During the run-up to the decision taken in December 2002 at the Copenhagen summit on final conditions for the accession of eight new post-communist members (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) and in the course of preparations for accession itself in 2004, clearer signs of the impact of the range of factors involved in the enlargement process on CEE party politics began to appear. Early public enthusiasm for European integration had been declining in many CEE countries and, on the eve of the 2003 accession referendums, was well under 50 per cent in Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia and the Czech Republic. In Poland the level of party support for accession shifted markedly as strongly Eurosceptic groups such as Self-Defence and the League of Polish Families (LPR) entered parliament, although levels of Euroscepticism were higher on the whole in Czech parties. Further, less than 46 per cent of the Hungarian electorate voted in the 2003 referendums, and participation was not much higher in Slovakia, the Czech Republic or Poland. The demands of EU conditionality had begun to produce significant levels of discontent, and the positive commitment to EU membership was being replaced by a more grudging acceptance of its inevitability.

The early impact of EU enlargement on CEE politics and patterns of party government also seemed to be quite negative and was often destabilizing in its effects. Leszek Miller, Poland's prime minister, resigned from office on 2 May 2004 one day after his country joined the EU. This was, of course, not a direct consequence of EU accession, but EU-related issues had certainly played a part in weakening his position and bringing about a situation in which the country's whole party system, as it had been formed for the past 15 years, seemed to be in fundamental crisis. The outcome of elections to the European Parliament (EP) held the following month was not favourable for the leaders of most other CEE countries, either. Turnout was uniformly low and those who did vote generally refused to support the existing government. The core party of the Czech governing coalition, the Social Democratic Party, came fifth out of the six groups that succeeded in sending representatives to the EP in Strasbourg and the government collapsed just two weeks later. The result was less disastrous for Hungary's ruling Socialists, but they still came in well behind the opposition and the party chairman (who was also foreign minister) soon announced that he would not run for the leadership again. But this was not sufficient to calm disputes within the governing coalition and Prime Minister Medgyessy felt compelled to resign in August.

Opposition parties also won in Slovenia while the relatively unknown Labour Party, only founded in Lithuania the previous October, won twice as many votes as any opposition group. The unpopularity of governments in both countries was confirmed by their defeat in national elections in the autumn. Controversy over the nomination of the speaker of the Latvian parliament as European commissioner contributed to the growing instability of the government and its final collapse in October 2004. The catastrophic showing of Res Publica in the EP elections in Estonia also led to the resignation of its chairman, Juhan Parts, as prime minister in early 2005. All in all, closer involvement with the EU turned out to be highly destabilizing for many CEE governments, and it seems reasonable to ask whether the main impact of the EU might be to weaken rather than help strengthen party government in the region or to reinforce existing currents of fluidity in their party systems rather than contribute to their consolidation.

At the beginning of the 21st century Central and Eastern Europe is therefore a region of renewed political change. The early assumption that greater European integration would strengthen democratic consolidation is placed under some question by post-accession developments. The recent, and ongoing, eastward enlargement is a process that raises new questions about CEE party politics and the growing impact of EU involvement throughout the continent. Bulgaria and Romania are scheduled to join in 2007, and EU influence has strengthened in the West Balkans. It is, nevertheless, only recently that political scientists have begun to focus on the more specific party impacts of the EU throughout Europe as a whole. Some years ago John Gaffney (1996, p. 1) observed that 'very little of the literature on integration is on political parties, and very little of the literature on political parties is on integration'. Analyses of a broadly conceived Europeanization of national parties did not begin to appear much before 2002 (Goetz and Hix, 2000; Bartolini, 2001; Ladrech, 2002; Marks and Steenbergen, 2004). Specific areas of change were also explored by Knill and Lehmkuhl (1999) and Risse et al. (2001). More recently publications that focus specifically on CEE developments have also begun to appear (Batory and Sitter, 2004; Cabada and Krašovec, 2004; Lewis, 2005; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005).

This book will extend and develop the study of CEE parties in the context of EU enlargement in a number of ways. It presents a comprehensive set of case studies representing all eight of the CEE countries that joined the EU in 2004, as well as analyses of the two countries scheduled to join in 2007. Together the chapters seek to establish the range of impacts – both direct and indirect – the EU has had on CEE party politics, to explore the

nature and extent of EU influence that has been exerted on party policy, activity and organization, and to determine whether EU involvement has served to transform or strengthen CEE party systems or weaken the degree of party system stability that has so far been achieved.

The rest of this introduction sets the scene and helps develop a common conceptual framework by surveying existing work on the impact of the EU on the party politics of longer established member states and raising general questions about the nature of Europeanization in this area of the national political system. It then moves on to examine the nature of CEE political parties and national party systems as they have developed during the past decade and a half of post-communist change, highlighting similarities and differences between established EU members and the new accession states with a view to identifying possible outcomes in the sphere of CEE party politics.

1.2 EU impacts on national party systems

Early analysis suggested that the impact of 'Europe' on national party systems in the EU was minimal. 'Of the many areas of domestic politics that may have experienced an impact from Europe', Peter Mair (2000, p. 28) has argued, 'party systems have perhaps proved to be most impervious to change'. Another analysis also found that the core features of the democratic polity across Europe proved to be strikingly resilient to the transformational effects of integration (Anderson, 2002). The measures of European impact in Mair's analysis were two, relating to the *format* of the systems – that is, the number of relevant parties in contention in the national electoral arena – and to the *mechanics* of party systems in terms of the way in which their prime components interact with one another.

In the 12 members of an early and more exclusive EU, more than 140 new parties emerged between 1960 and 1998 to contest elections, but only three of these could be directly linked with the issue of European integration. In this respect, it was concluded, Europe has had virtually no direct or even demonstrable impact on the *format* of the national party systems. The effect of Europeanization on the *mechanics* of party systems was measured with reference to party positions on the issue of European integration. Only 17 per cent of parties were judged to be anti-European in this sense and they received – at 8 per cent – an even smaller proportion of national votes. In this sense, too, Europeanization did not seem to have had a 'significant direct impact' on the mechanics of the party systems of member states.

Other approaches have, moreover, led to different conclusions. One has charted how the different European party families have coped with integration issues and examines the ways in which the response of parties has been 'filtered by historical predispositions' rooted in the social cleavages that structure competition in West European systems (Marks and Wilson, 2000, p. 433). This study charted the response of the different party families to the issue of European integration. The response of liberals and conservatives has on the whole been quite differentiated and it is difficult to draw any general conclusion about the impact of Europe in this respect. As the single market came into being during the 1980s, though, the attitudes of social democrats shifted as they saw the advantages that could be derived from closer engagement with integration processes and moves towards a model of regulated capitalism. In this sense, European issues brought about a major shift in the policies of many social democratic parties (Marks and Wilson, 2000, p. 447). The impact of Europe has thus been pervasive and quite profound, but by no means direct in Mair's sense. More interesting in terms of general political impact is likely, indeed, to be the *indirect* effect of EU governance outcomes on domestic political institutions and input processes in domestic political systems (Hix and Goetz, 2000, p. 10).

Another study has directed attention to the patterns of conflict that have arisen from European integration, and again stresses the differentiation that arises in the diverse areas that need to be examined. For one thing, 'Europe' and the process of European integration itself has hardly been a constant. European integration is 'not merely a moving target; its ideological bearings have shifted 180 degrees over the past two decades' as integration moved from being essentially a market-making project to a process in which issues closer to the interests of the left, such as social and employment policies and environmental questions, played a larger part on the agenda (Marks, 2004, p. 236). Given the changing character of European integration – or, alternatively, the diversity of European issues – it is hardly surprising to find that analysis of the parties shows that there is no strong or durable relation between left/right positioning and degrees of support for integration in general. For mainstream parties Europe thus remains something of a 'slumbering giant', and it is only to parties on the extremes of either left or right that Europe emerges as an issue offering major incentives for determined positions to be taken up (Marks, 2004, p. 239).

Moving on from questions of direct and indirect impact, another observer noted that existing approaches had so far failed to view national parties either as actors in the integration process or entities significantly

affected by it, and identifies five areas of potential investigation of the impact of Europeanization on political parties in general. They are the areas of: (1) policy and programmatic content; (2) organization; (3) patterns of party competition; (4) party–government relations; and (5) relations beyond the national party system (Ladrech, 2002, pp. 390–6). Linkage of the different areas of party change was seen to offer particular advantages, and again diversity of outcomes was to be expected. It may well be difficult to devise unambiguous measures of the impact of Europe on party change, but consideration of broader and less direct influences must nevertheless be regarded as an important part of the analysis of party development and party system change in the EU. Empirical analysis in this area also suggests that EU impacts have generally been limited or taken some considerable time to feed into the dynamics of national party competition (Appleton, 2004; Deschouwer, 2004). Others have found that the range of EU effects on parties has been larger than is normally described in the literature, and that national political processes may internalize EU issues quite successfully with little threat of party destabilization (Conti, 2005).

1.3 Questions of Europeanization

An overall assessment of EU impact, either at a regional level in terms of national party systems or at the level of individual parties, is clearly not easy to reach. There is, to be sure, relatively little solid evidence so far and few research findings on which to draw. The area is a complex one to approach and any conclusions reached suggest that outcomes are highly differentiated across the different countries and party organizations. But the issues involved are not just those arising from concrete research. The problem often seems to be less one of empirical analysis – has there been any political impact or significant influence? – than that of methodology and conceptual approach: how should any such impact be properly conceived and how should influence be gauged? In effect, the problem may lie in the old social science conundrum of causality and of how any discrete outcome can be accounted for amid a vast range of mutual influences and interlocking relations. It is a standard methodological issue in mainstream comparative politics whose parameters can be readily identified in the EU context. Much of the discussion in this area, as Haverland (2005) also indicates, has focused on the concept of Europeanization.

On the face of it the concept seems relatively uncontentious, referring to institutions and processes that are not just European in character but are more specifically linked with the development of the EU. As Ladrech

puts it, an intuitive understanding of the concept readily emerges: 'one would think that Europeanization has something to do with the penetration of the European dimension into national areas of politics and policy-making' (Ladrech, 2002, p. 391). In some ways the questions raised in the context of Europeanization seem rather strange, as they refer to countries that are clearly European already – although the exercise can be seen as a rather different one so far as the CEE countries are concerned in view of their experience of a Sovietized diversion from the mainstream of (West) European political and regional development. As research activity in this area has intensified, however, the apparent clarity of what Europeanization might mean has disappeared and a number of ambiguities have become apparent. Broadly speaking, research has moved from a bottom-up idea of the process, and a focus on how the activities of EU member states were leading to the development at European level of distinctive structures of governance, to a top-down view that directed attention to how EU processes impinged on national processes and encouraged the convergence of national practices (Major, 2005, p. 176). It is, naturally enough, the latter conception that most concerns us in this book.

But it has become increasingly obvious that further distinctions are involved. Even from a top-down perspective it is clear that feedback from the national level will be involved and that Europeanization should be regarded as an 'ongoing, interactive and mutually constitutive *process* of change linking national and European levels'. Yet further consideration has led to the observation that the mutually constitutive nature of the process makes it difficult to define any 'result' or end-point of the process. Europeanization, it now tends to be recognized, is 'both process and constantly changing result at both European and national levels'. But in terms of analysis and empirical research on a practical basis it is clearly necessary to distinguish between process and effect. The final suggestion in this context is, therefore, that of a more parsimonious definition which associates the main idea of Europeanization with 'the aim of retracing the effects of the European integration process at the national level' (Major, 2005, p. 177). In this we return to some of the more straightforward conceptions outlined above, as well as the approach taken in the discussion so far, but the ambiguities and complexities alluded to above should still be borne in mind when considering Europeanization in any particular case.

1.4 Europeanization and CEE party systems

What implications might such conclusions that have been reached and the conceptual debates on Europeanization have for an attempt to assess

EU impacts on CEE party politics? On the face of things, perhaps not a great deal. Early research suggests that models derived from the analysis of integration in Western Europe do not travel well in providing theoretical insights into the impact of the EU in the East (Bielasiak, 2005). The recently democratized party politics of the new EU members differ in a number of significant respects from that of the old members, while the conceptual problems outlined above have arguably less relevance to the CEE member states in that the direction of EU influence is likely to be more definitely that of the top-down variety. In terms of party systems, those of the original 12 EU members (the focus of Mair's analysis) are relatively solid and well established, with considerable powers of survival and resilience to the impact of 'Europe' and processes of European integration. The CEE situation is certainly different in that respect. Pluralist party systems in Central Europe are of more recent provenance and clearly less consolidated, while in some cases it may well be queried whether inter-party relations have any systematic character at all.

It is obvious that we are not dealing with long-established party systems, and some query whether it makes any sense to talk of party systems at all in some CEE countries. Sceptical views direct attention to the continuing fluidity of CEE political life in this respect and to the problems of identifying party systems where formal conditions of systemness – in terms of party instability and problems of institutional survival – do not really exist (Lewis, 2000, p. 125). It can be argued that, among the CEE states, only Hungary and the Czech Republic show clear signs of orthodox party system development on West European lines. One study directs attention to the present fragmentation of East European party systems, referring to debates about EU membership that relate to critical but 'one-shot' decisions which may or may not map themselves onto underlying social cleavages and involve exogenous shocks that may 'temporarily perturb the political system' (Zielinski, 2002, p. 188).

But others take the view that contrasts with Western Europe should not be exaggerated. It has been argued that 'the party systems of East-Central Europe resemble those of Western Europe much more now, in the beginning of the new millennium, than they did in the early 1990', and the likely effects of the centrifugal and unifying forces of the process of European integration in bringing the region's party systems yet closer to the 'European standard' have been pointed out (Kostelecký, 2002, p. 177). Differences between West European systems and those of CEE have been seen as quantitative rather than qualitative in nature – and that comparison between West European party systems and those of CEE is indeed valid, with most now falling into the category of moderate

pluralism (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2002, pp. 32–3). The picture that emerged after the 2004 EP elections in terms of how CEE party delegations fitted with existing EU party families was a mixed one, though. Three fitted very closely and three rather badly, and two were around the EU average (Siaroff, 2005).

Post-communist party systems are, however, significantly more fragmented and have a higher number of political actors than not just established European democracies but also other regions during earlier periods of democratic transition. The high effective number of electoral parties produces a distinctly more fractured political scene with less institutionalized party systems than in other cases of democratic transition (Bielasiak, 2002, pp. 202–3). But in terms of parliamentary representation, the core CEE countries have shown a marked degree of stability for much of the post-communist period. Hungary and the Czech Republic had only one or no new parliamentary entrant in the second and third parliaments elected after the end of communist rule. Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia generally had two new entrants during this period. This situation changed in some countries following the fourth elections (2001–2), though, when four new, or previously unrepresented, parties entered the parliaments of both Poland and Slovakia.

Further, if systematic analysis of the influence of European factors on the parties of long-standing EU member states is still in its relative infancy, this is even truer of CEE parties. There can, nevertheless, be little doubt that West European and EU-based influences have been constant, pervasive and quite radical since the beginnings of democratization in 1989 and have helped produce a number of distinctive outcomes. A wide-ranging study of patterns of *party competition* and representation discovered evidence of considerable Europeanization with, not surprisingly, significant variation between the leading democratic states and those less advanced in the transition process (Kitschelt et al., 1999). A strong element of convergence between the forms of *party organization* in the new democracies of Southern and East-Central Europe has been observed (van Biezen, 2003). CEE *party ideologies and policies* also show a clear West European imprint. A range of networks have helped transmit a variety of EU messages emanating from party groups in the EP, others in the Parliamentary Assembly, specific party groups such as the Socialists, Christian Democrats or Liberals, traditional party internationals and bilateral links between individual parties in different countries (Pridham, 2001, pp. 184–5). This process has been particularly marked on the left of the party spectrum and in relation to the social democratization of former regime parties, but it has not been absent on the right and has

affected all three strands of conservatism that can be identified in the region (Chan, 2001, p. 170).

German political foundations have been particularly influential in encouraging CEE party development (Dakowska, 2002, p. 277). Difficult though it is to measure such effects with any accuracy, it does seem that the socialization undertaken by international party cooperation has been more successful in Eastern Europe than in other parts of the world (Smith, 2001, p. 73). To the extent that relatively stable party systems have emerged, their 'early freezing' has been attributed directly to the fact that East-Central European parties 'can survive internationally and domestically only if they fit into the West European party systems, into the party internationals' (Ágh, 1998, p. 207).

In broad, if indirect, terms the influence of European integration and the prospect of EU enlargement have been pervasive and so strong that it is virtually impossible to disentangle them from the fundamental processes of democratization that have dominated much of the political agenda in the region since 1989. This distinguishes the recent, and ongoing, enlargement from all previous ones. Though perhaps not directly apparent in relation to the precise format and mechanics of CEE party systems, the influence of European institutions and political models in terms of such factors as integration with international and EU-based party groupings, the careful tailoring of electoral mechanisms to regional norms, and the development of parliamentary procedures according to international practice has been so strong that it is indeed difficult to classify it as just indirect.

Even if European issues did not impinge directly on party policies and alignments, too, the question of enlargement and EU membership throughout the 1990s in CEE was the subject of an overwhelming consensus among the main political parties, groupings and elites. There may well have been different emphases in national parties and differing positions taken by individual politicians, as well as shifts in public opinion (generally towards a lower level of Euro-enthusiasm), but there was nevertheless a strongly dominant mood in favour of enlargement and a degree of commitment to EU membership throughout the 1990s that verged on the willing acceptance of its inevitability. This contingent acceptance of EU integration reinforced and built on the deep-rooted attachment to Europe as a symbol of political community. From this perspective, processes of EU integration were strong and pervasive for a lengthy period that began well before actual accession – Europeanization was in this sense both adaptive and anticipatory (Ágh, 2003). It has also had further characteristics that are likely to exert a profound influence on how the CEE

countries develop within the enlarged EU. Europeanization in the East has been yet more of a top-down affair than it was in the West, while the institutional and policy effects of accession have been more immediate than they were in other parts of the EU. But, although immediate and clearly delineated, it has also been observed that the Europeanization effects may in fact be less profound and that patterns of 'institutionalisation for reversibility' are likely to prevail (Goetz, 2004).

1.5 European impacts on CEE party politics

It is therefore possible – and even likely – that the effects of enlargement may be quite different in CEE from the impact of Europe on longer-established EU members. CEE party systems are still more fluid – and thus presumably open – than those in the West, and there is already a strong tradition of EU influence. The great majority of observers have generally argued, or even just assumed, that Europeanization and EU enlargement will exercise a major influence on CEE by fostering political stability and party system development (Pridham, 2002, pp. 953–4). But it would also have been surprising if political responses to these developments had not changed as eastward enlargement changed from being a broad prospect and medium-term promise to become a practical proposition with potential disadvantages as well as major benefits. An overview of the relatively brief history of party growth and development in the post-communist period shows it, indeed, to be an uneven and often turbulent process. EU enlargement may well generate further pressures that impinge on party systems in direct terms with greater strength than during comparable periods in Western Europe – possibly to the extent of destabilizing the partially formed existing systems and even endangering the level of post-communist democracy achieved so far.

From this point of view, as one study has already concluded, the demands of enlargement 'have both constrained responsive and accountable party competition and . . . encouraged populists and demagogues' (Grzymała-Busse and Innes, 2003, p. 64). For some years the evolution of CEE party competition was strongly constrained by Western blueprints for public policy and took on a markedly technocratic character. While elite opposition to EU membership was muted and generally ignored, public awareness of the costs of accession and the feeling that the electorate was offered little choice in the process of integration strengthened currents of Euroscepticism and populist opposition. This occurred either within mainstream parties (Fidesz in Hungary or Klaus and the Civic Democratic Party in the Czech Republic) or through the

emergence of new anti-EU forces (Self-Defence and LPR) in Poland (Grzymała-Busse and Innes, 2003, pp. 65–9; Raik, 2004). But so far both sides of the argument largely rest on the assumption that the EU has, or could have, a pervasive influence on CEE domestic politics, and there is so far little conclusive evidence either way (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005, p. 3). More research as well as more time is needed to prove either contention.

There is certainly some empirical evidence that throws light on possible developments in this area. CEE party perspectives on Europe are already somewhat different from those in longer-established member countries. There are higher levels of support for Eurosceptic parties in CEE than in older member states, while parties expressing soft Eurosceptic views occupy a more central place in their party systems than those in long-standing member states. In view of the solid pro-Europe, pro-Western consensus of early post-communist CEE, the expression of anti-EU sentiments in the countries of the region is indeed more likely to manifest itself in terms of scepticism and the moderation of pro-Europeanism than outright opposition (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2004). Structural disincentives to the emergence of outright anti-EU parties in the political mainstream may be even stronger in CEE than they have been within the EU as it has been constituted so far. Formal commitment to enlargement is largely inevitable in this context, but any broad-based political force will also find it difficult to avoid the emergence of some Eurosceptic tendencies within its own ranks (as the major British parties have also found on more than one occasion). Euroscepticism has also tended to be stronger in countries that were closer to EU membership than those with more distant prospects, these having been virtually non-existent for a long period in Bulgaria, for example. This suggests that enlargement may well have a more negative impact on CEE party orientations and the developing configuration of party systems than some have foreseen.

At this stage some simple principles may be advanced to structure analysis of further developments: mainstream parties are likely to be resilient to anti-EU positions and will favour further elements of Europeanization, while anti-Europe platforms will continue to be located on the margins of the party system. CEE party systems are, nevertheless, both more fluid than those in Western Europe and contain more individual parties; there is to this extent greater scope for enlargement to make a direct impact on CEE party systems in terms of the number of actors and stronger incentives for parties to form and make their bid for influence on this basis. The major implications of enlargement for CEE party politics therefore

point in two quite different directions: while there may well be considerable scope for anti-EU activity in party systems overall, there are no strong prospects of it taking root in parties closeto the political centre or in those with reasonable chances of taking part in government. A survey of key CEE party system changes in the pre-accession period helps provide a preliminary idea of the early impact of EU involvement on the party politics of the region. Early impacts did appear to be limited, but EU issues were prominent in at least two cases. Significant developments could be seen in the Polish parliamentary elections of 2001, when major shifts in parliamentary representation took place, and parties showing not just sceptical attitudes towards the EU but voicing outright opposition to Poland's membership won places in parliament. Poland was the only CEE country to show such a rise in the parliamentary representation of Eurosceptic forces (Lewis, 2005, pp. 181–4). In this case it might be concluded that 'Europe' had made an impact and that the format of the party system had indeed been changed with the emergence of parties that stood on a clear anti-integration platform. Of the four scenarios for Europeanization proposed by Bartolini it is only Poland that fits the conditions he outlines in terms of the internalization of a pro/anti-European cleavage (Bartolini, 2001, p. 41).

Similar links may be drawn with the lack of party system stability in Slovakia and significant change in the mechanics of the party system. The successful promotion by the EU of a discourse of accession had a significant impact on the coalition potential of the Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) as pro-EU views came to dominate the arena of party competition and cooperation. Despite narrowly winning the 1998 election as the single most popular party, HZDS no longer had the potential coalition partners it needed to form a government. This led to significant party system change – one of the rare cases where the EU has led to party system change at national level, being particularly successful in forcing a large party that aspired to government power to moderate its behaviour (Henderson, 2005). While the changes in the party system were clearly multi-causal, the issue of EU accession was indeed high profile. Slovakia was the only case in which EU democratic conditionality pressed democratic parties to cooperate for the sake of EU membership as well as mobilizing the electorate to support them (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005, p. 214). The outcomes in terms of party representation and positions on EU issues were quite different in the two countries, but the prospect of EU membership was likely to have been a significant factor in both countries' developments.

1.6 The context of CEE party politics post-accession

Anti-EU parties did not play a major role overall in either the pre-accession elections or the accession referendums. It is possible that this just reflected a general satisfaction on the part of CEE citizens with the steady move towards EU membership. The evidence suggests, however, that this is not a wholly accurate representation. Levels of mass support for EU accession have fluctuated and generally declined following the very high level of enthusiasm for EU membership in the early 1990s. On the whole, it has been argued, popular anti-EU sentiments were generally under-mobilized in the run-up to the accession referendums (Arki, 2004, p. 13). In this respect there are signs that the brief CEE experience of political processes involving the EU is already taking a rather different form from that of West European countries during earlier stages of EU enlargement. The low CEE turnout in the 2003 referendums combined with the high support for accession on the part of those who actually voted, for example, contrasts quite significantly with a Western syndrome of high participation with low support for EU membership – i.e. ‘passive citizenship and a high virtual support of a less politicized, less articulated (therefore, less divided) society’ (Bozóki and Karácsony, 2003, pp. 23–4).

The accession of eight CEE countries to the EU in 2004 took place in a context where popular trust in political parties remained at a relatively low level, party identity was often unclear or politically underdeveloped, and both party membership and electoral turnout are tending to decline – from, in many cases, not very high levels at all. One particular reason for the relatively minor impact of EU enlargement on CEE party politics might therefore be the limited development of the region’s party systems overall and their restricted capacity to represent the views of national electorates. In this sense, the parties already to some extent inhabit the political space into which the more evolved Western parties have recently been seen to move: their affiliation lies more with the state than with civil society, their role is more procedural than representative, and partisan identity remains weak (Mair, 2003). But the CEE parties started from a narrower base – or barely one at all in many cases. From one point of view EU membership thus coincided with – or even caused – a general crisis of CEE party systems.

This derived from a situation where for much of the post-communist period the parties had been tightly squeezed by conflicting pressures: externally by the need to meet the euro convergence criteria imposed by the EU, and internally by the high expectations of a democratic electorate for ‘normal’ standards of living and effective public services. By 2004,

once they had achieved their prime objective of EU membership, parties had even less to offer. They had no new programmes and no new messages for the citizens of countries which now formed part of the EU (Ágh, 2005). Despite the successful conclusion of the accession process and widespread evidence that there has been broad popular approval of EU membership, recent CEE developments thus also suggest more negative ways in which EU involvement may have affected party politics. One major example was the opportunity the enlargement context provided for a populist anti-EU party such as Poland's Self-Defence, where shifting popular sentiments following the collapse of Miller's social democrats in early 2004 briefly made it the most popular party in the country. This reflected a negative conjuncture of growing social fatigue and rapidly declining support for the political establishment that enhanced existing tendencies to instability. But such tendencies have not been limited to one country.

The likelihood that non-traditional and populist parties will be more successful in post-communist Europe than in more established democracies is linked with the atmosphere of permanent crisis that develops as 'cycles of disillusion' become entrenched in some CEE countries, a development already documented in Slovakia (Učeň, 2003, pp. 50–3). This tendency is also associated with the declining capacity of traditional parties to perform their conventional representative functions as processes of contemporary governance become more important – a factor also associated with the increasing precedence that EU institutions and procedures are taking over national politics in the region. As part of the growing prominence of governance over established patterns of coordination and political rule in general, indeed, European integration is widely understood to be responsible for a loss of responsiveness on the part of traditional intermediary institutions and organizations – particularly of political parties (van Kersbergen and van Waarden, 2004, p. 159). One aspect of EU–national party system relations that this points to is that of political instability and the growing possibility of unpredictable outcomes emerging in the region, rather than the progressive anchoring of the new democratic regimes in stable party systems within a more integrated Europe.

Nevertheless, there have so far been indications that CEE developments in party politics overall follow the pattern seen in the longer-established member states of the EU, where it is generally concluded that EU involvement has had no or little discernible impact on party systems and that EU politics operates on a different, and largely separate, level from that of national party activity. The issue then becomes one of distinguishing specific EU *impacts* from a more general EU *influence*. 'Europe', and more

specifically the structures and processes of EU involvement, has provided much of the context in which a post-communist democratic politics has been constructed in CEE. Europe has in this sense provided more the means of political change than its content. The formation and encouragement of competitive parties, the development of liberal-democratic procedures and the acceptance of the rule of law, the establishment of appropriate electoral mechanisms and funding regimes, the adoption of professional campaigning and organization management, and the use of modern media and campaign techniques have all frequently occurred under a European aegis – although there has often not been anything specifically European about them apart from that. So the problems of identifying specific impacts on CEE party politics does not necessarily mean that EU involvement has had little influence overall or that CEE party politics has not been subject to Europeanization in a general sense. Much of the impact of Europe has in this sense been indirect, and it is this complex process of influence and supranational interrelations that the subsequent chapters seek to explore.

Each of the following chapters will draw on recent research to present a fully documented analysis of the development of CEE party politics in the context of growing EU involvement. The chapters (particularly those concerning the new member states) will follow a common format in presenting an outline of national party systems and the position of individual parties on EU issues, a survey of popular views of Europe and their expression in accession referendums and EP elections, analysis of how these views are articulated politically and represented within the party system, and the overall impacts of EU involvement on national party systems, voting behaviour and party development. This common framework will provide a solid basis for a concluding analysis and further study of EU impacts.

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