

Political Elites in Eastern Central Europe: Paving the Way for ‘Negative Europeanisation?’

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***Abstract:** Political developments in Eastern Central Europe (ECE) question political achievements connected to Europeanisation. This paper outlines reasons for growing populism and nationalism of ECE political elites. The author argues that political elite behaviour is a main cause for populist and nationalist developments. ECE political elites have internalised a ‘negative political culture’ including unethical behaviour and an egoistic struggle for political power contradicting principles of liberal democracy. Within a democratic framework, elites prefer populist and polarizing power strategies not caring that these undermine democratic national institutions. In the context of Europeanisation, the author examines why political elites have turned away from positive Europeanisation culminating in EU accession and questions the success of Europeanisation. While political elites cooperated readily to become part of the European Union, they now increasingly oppose further political integration and tend to nationalize and polarize political issues, thus turning to a ‘negative Europeanisation’ of their countries.*

Keywords: *Europeanisation, Political Elites, Populism, Political Culture*

‘Time for mental processing of the transformation has been too short.’ Václav Havel

Introduction

The transformation of state and society in Eastern Central Europe (ECE) toward democracy and Europeanisation seems to be a success story. Poland, Hungary, the

Czech Republic and Slovakia have overcome state socialism by founding pluralistic regimes, restructuring their economies and integrating into European structures. In general, formal institutions function according to democratic principles, and fulfil the requirements of western European democracies – most expressively underlined by the accession of ECE countries to the European Union in 2004. However, recent developments have been startling: in Poland, a populist and nation-oriented government succeeded in giving Poland a bad-boy image within the European Union. In both Poland and Hungary, a political elite struggle for presenting themselves as the better Pole or Hungarian dominated the political landscape. Slovakia was co-governed by the nationalist Slovak National Party (SNS) and the populist Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS). Additionally, leading political representatives rejected further European integration, namely the Czech and Polish Presidents, Václav Klaus and Lech Kaczyński.

This paper argues that there is a significant gap between formal institutions and political elite behaviour, and that the mismatch is mainly due to the conduct of the political elite. This paper analyses ECE political elites' ambiguities of formally acting according to the rules, but not changing inherent (undemocratic) attitudes toward political adversaries and the public. In this context, the paper concentrates on political elite behaviour and structure in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic pointing to critical points that endanger political achievements such as confrontational elite behaviour and strong thinking in terms of hierarchies. In fact, political elite behaviour might question the in-depth change to liberal democracy in Eastern Central Europe. Consequently, there might be the danger that populism and political confrontation of political elites in ECE countries question the political achievements connected to Europeanisation.

The author first presents a path-dependent approach arguing that a change of political elite culture has taken place only partly after the establishment of a liberal democratic framework in Eastern Central Europe, and old beliefs continue to influence present developments. Then, the paper discusses the difference between formal institutional provisions and political elite conduct and outlines that institutional shortcomings are not a question of insufficiently designed political institutions, but of political elite behaviour. The following paragraph argues that ECE political elites have internalised a 'negative political culture' including unethical behaviour and an egoistic struggle for political power. These power strategies contradict principles of liberal democracy and undermine the institutional setting of the state.

In presenting patterns of elite conduct in ECE, the paper aims at giving reasons for growing populism and nationalism of ECE political elites, and consequently identifies political elite behaviour as an important cause for populist and nationalist developments. This is connected, in the second part, with attitudes of ECE political elites toward the European Union. The author examines why political elites have

turned away from positive Europeanisation culminating in EU accession, and why some elites question the success of Europeanisation. Consequently, the argument is that political culture can be a powerful source for Euroscepticism as opposed toward European integration. This part examines each of the four ECE countries, and points to the most relevant issues of 'negative Europeanisation'. The general conclusion is that while political elites cooperated readily to become part of the European Union, they now increasingly oppose further political integration and tend to nationalize and polarize political issues, thus turning to a 'negative Europeanisation' of their countries.

1. Political Developments in ECE

A Path-Dependent Approach

An analysis of political developments in ECE means firstly an overview of political elite behaviour and certainly has to consider aspects of political culture. As political culture has developed over time, historical legacies such as the socialist past, even pre-War political traditions, have left their traits in political elite behavior¹. Values and norms are socially based, and these may continue independently of elite (or institutional) changes (Ekman and Linde: 354–74). Within a path-dependant approach, values, beliefs and institutions from the old regime may be regarded as assets that continue to influence present developments. However, Eastern Central European countries have to cope with different legacies – different histories and traditions. The communist legacy is in fact only one part of it, and each state socialist society had unique characteristics². If one wishes to generalize, however, socialist policy-making was characterized by strong hierarchies and the all-mightiness of the communist parties that mostly concentrated on their party needs, not on the need of the public (Lane 2002).

What remained from the pre-War period was a general acceptance of the dominance of the state over society (White 1990), authoritarian governing (with the exception of inter-War Czechoslovakia) and little experience with democratic policy making. However, ECE countries, especially Poland and Hungary, initiated significant reforms well before 1989. The communist value system was never deeply internalised except by a relatively small section of the population. A path-dependent analysis of political elites behaviour also has to take into account that there was a widespread revulsion towards the political system, a rhetorical rejection of everything that it stood for after 1989; nevertheless, this was coupled with an attachment to some institutions and ideas (such as social equality, employment for everyone) it stood for. The legacy of rejecting the old system had a positive influence on developing national consciousness, but caused also certain resentment against new supranational

projects. Additionally, rejecting the old system did not automatically mean that a new, democratic, political culture could be installed immediately.

The fall of the state socialist regime did not signify a start from institutional scratch; some institutions continued to work more or less unchanged or were adapted under new circumstances; examples for ECE countries are executive structures such as the police or the judiciary. Also, the formal replacement of political institutions did not mean that expectations of ordinary citizens and political elites concerning state goals and citizen duties changed (Higley et al. 2002). On the whole, within the new democratic framework, both political elites and citizens of Eastern Central European states proved suspicious of supra-national developments and of their own political institutions, expressed by the periodic *Eurobarometer* surveys³. High levels of dependence on the state and the correspondingly low levels of individual initiative were paralleled by unrealistic beliefs about economic effects of democracy and pessimism about the future. Both the citizenry and the political elite have continued to be suspicious of politics, which resulted in difficulties to accept democratic mechanisms in daily ECE politics.

Political Elite Behavior vs. Political Institutions

Political developments after 1989 in Eastern Central Europe, especially after the EU accession of the ECE countries Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic, reveal that formal democratic arrangements do not guarantee a full democratic and fair behaviour of political elites acting within them. Thus, a grave problem is the mismatching of formal institutions with political behaviour; while formal institutions might be consensual and cooperative in structure, political elites might act in a confrontational and non-transparent way. A good example is if the genuine democratic institution – the political parliament – is confronted with corrupt behaviour of political representatives and has severe difficulties to force the accused in front of a fact-finding commission or to resign from their posts, as the examples of former Polish Deputy Prime Minister Andrzej Lepper or former Czech Prime Minister Stanislav Gross. Behaviour of the highest political representatives in ECE countries suggests that these political elites can avoid transparency and accountability even within a democratic framework.

In Eastern Central Europe, institutional shortcomings are not a matter of elections – elections are held regularly in a fair and democratic manner; an institutionalised party system also exists, volatile to some extent in countries as Poland, but thus far stable. Generally, political elites struggle for political power within a given institutional framework. Shortcomings of institutions manifest themselves rather in negligence and poor commitment of its embedded actors. A characteristic of democ-

racy should not be to use the democratic framework only for their personal purposes. But this is actually happening Eastern Central Europe.

Examples might include the lengthy process of constituting a Czech government after the elections 2006, with the Social-Democrat Party not acting against the democratic framework, but using it to hinder the Civic Party ODS as long as possible in forming a government⁴. In Slovakia, even the constitution had to be changed, and the president had to be elected by the people, because the elites were incapable of the necessary compromise⁵. In the region, inabilities are generally apparent in reaching political consensus on the necessity to form efficient working governments. Rather, political parties prefer to cooperate with populist and anti-modern parties, such as the Slovak *Smer* party, which has cooperated with the nationalist Slovak National Party SNS and the populist Movement for a Democratic Slovakia HZDS or the Polish Law and Justice PiS party opted for an inefficient government with the populist Self-Defence Party of the Republic of Poland *Samoobrona* and the nationalist-conservative League of Polish Families LPR. Also, no-confidence voting has been a popular political instrument, especially in Poland and the Czech Republic, to enforce egoist party and individual interests which prevail in political party struggles⁶.

Political institutions have proved to be only as strong as political actors want them to be. Consequently, political elites might be more powerful than the formal framework regulating their deeds. The institutional framework can also lead to an ambiguous behaviour of political elites, formally acting according to the rules, but not changing their inherent attitudes towards political adversaries and the public. This can lead to a curious official following of democratic principles of a democracy, but a practical ignoring of the latter. One can argue that political elites in ECE determined the transition process and not the institutions. Ideally institutions would have determined the elite's behaviour, however, elites have shaped democratic institutions according to their needs. In political institutions, especially in state administration, representatives of the old system continue in relevant positions even if endangered by lustrations⁷. These persons might have the necessary expertise, but also the mentality of hierarchy-strength, social control, secrecy and collectivism (Wagner 2006). A problem is that this mentality dominates most of the institutional structures. Here, patron-client relations – rather than institutions – draw the boundaries of policy-making at the governmental level (Korkut 2003: 149f); and result in the reproduction of a similar thinking political elite and culture, with leaving little opportunity for “intellectual outsiders” to provoke a behaviour change.

In sum, institutional shortcomings are not a question of insufficiently designed political institutions, but more a question of the behaviour of the political elite. Few formal institutions that supervise elite behaviour and modes of cooperation such as anti-corruption agencies exist in ECE. In fact, they face the threat of being disempowered, as in the case of the anti-corruption agency in Slovakia, or instru-

mentalised by politicians as the Polish Institute of National Remembrance IPN. Informal mechanisms as a control for non-cooperation and corruptive behaviour barely exist. Of course, institutions do exist that are placed above elites and may determine their behaviour formally, but loyal agents of the elite might infiltrate them. More importantly, the question should be what incentives elites do have to change fundamentally. The answer for now must be that the institutional incentives are few. In spite of the new democratic context, Eastern Central European political elites prefer power strategies and action options that satisfy their own interests and undermine democratic national institutions, e.g., the judiciary or anti-corruption agencies.

The Culture of ECE Political Elites

Consequently, the development of political elite behaviour will determine where Eastern Central European countries will head in the future; it might prove under the worst scenario that a transition can also not work even if certain democratic institutions are in place. Thus, political elite culture should become a more prominent discussion topic, both within ECE countries and on the European scene. Already, some of the discussion concerning consolidation of democracy and Europeanisation focuses on the nature of elites and whether elites can be considered to be a pacted or a consensual elite (Higley et al. 2000). The strength or weakness of elites and the extent to which they are united or confront each other determines political developments and the outcomes of state change. A stable state development is only possible if there is elite compromise that results in a consensually unified elite (Higley et al. 1998)⁸.

In spite of that model examples of ECE political elites and their belief systems rather illustrate the contrary: Instead of forming a consensually unified elite, political actors are divided, characterized by polarization and non-cooperation. In general, ECE political elites seem to equate arrogance with political capability and strength. In Hungary as well as in Poland, a culture of confrontation dominates the political scene. Model examples of individual political elite behaviour in the Czech Republic include the Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek refusing to cooperate with Czech media mirrored by Robert Fico's hostility to the Slovak media⁹; or the elitarian and hierarchical leadership of former Czech Prime Minister Jiří Paroubek. Only few voices within the elite speak against this phenomenon and point to the necessity to develop a more cooperative relationship facing the social and economic problems that have yet to be overcome.

These and the following thoughts lead one to the assumption that political elites in ECE have internalised a 'negative political culture'. Values and beliefs of political elites in ECE are centred on confrontational behaviour, a strong orientation to hierarchies and an egoistic struggle for political and economic power. The reason

is that political elites only had preliminarily incentives to develop a liberal democratic culture and to subsequently change their political culture, power strategies and methods of bargaining. The problem that hinders a truly liberal democratic thinking and acting elite might be called elitism. It concludes that the political elite considers itself a separate category or class – indeed, a truly political class – not accountable to the public¹⁰. To the extent that elitism remains embedded in the operations of the political elite the building of a democratic society and a truly liberal democracy will be hindered. Thus, elitism not only impedes a positive impact of democratic principles on elites but also on the whole society. There is no mutual respect of different political party representatives, even political party leaders of the same party lack this respect. Thinking is based on terms of power and influence, and a strong patron-agent concept.

Also, in the Western European world, politicians strive for power and influence, but most of them are cautious about mutual relations. Therefore, most Western societies, especially Scandinavian countries that built on consensual decision-making, hardly understand the vigour of political arguing in ECE. However, this political culture causes sharp political confrontation and a block thinking that places the political adversary in a state-enemy category – visible in all four countries in question. In ECE, therefore, Europeanisation in the sense of a ‘return to European values’ of the political elite according to liberal principles and consensus has only partly worked.

A fractured political elite culture dominates in ECE countries – officially sticking to democracy but often counteracting democratic principles in daily political business, for example when claiming limiting media coverage of political issues and proposing restrictive media laws¹¹. This also implies that the public also cannot trust political elite statements and cannot assess their likely behaviour according to their statements; especially visible in the erratic policy of the former Polish government under Jarosław Kaczyński¹². In all ECE countries it is common to make public statements and act differently; not only in elections campaigns when promises on reduced taxes or living costs are made. This behaviour might suggest that political elites still consider political information as secret. Such thinking supports corruptive behaviour, because the public has no idea which decisions are important, discussed and how much money or power is attached to a given problem. A critical view could also suggest to view Eastern Central European rhetoric as a remnant of state socialism: Elites try to assure the public of some outcomes and goals, which are only a façade. Rhetorically, the system is out of the question, but there might be an inherent critique of current institutions and political principles.

While lacking positive state visions, populism that builds on blurred promises and has no strategic political concepts became fashionable to sell leading ECE politicians. In fact, populism is a welcomed power instrument for certain politicians, at the same time suitable to point to institutional weaknesses of ECE political systems and

political adversaries, but not offering fundamental solutions or an alternative value system. Populist measures mostly rely on the charisma of its leader and his ability to camouflage the real problem-solution¹³. The Hungarian political scene is an example here, in particular the campaign for the elections in 2006 when the leading political parties outbid themselves with public expenditure promises. Additionally, political elites in Hungary, Slovakia and Poland have returned to more concrete value-connected politics, with nationalist 'values' being the most prominent ones¹⁴. Namely, nationalist tendencies have become prominent in ECE after the accession to the European Union, and have been propagated as securing ECE societies from outside enemies and from self-alienation (=Europeanisation). As local public opinion institutes prove, most citizens in Eastern Central Europe are disappointed by the daily politics and welcome political elites presenting scapegoats and easy explanations for complex problems¹⁵. In this context, populist and nationalist rhetoric are instruments in providing simple (and also primitive) value codes and in consequently mobilizing frustrated voters and citizens.

2. The Façade of Successful Europeanisation

The Development of Euroscepticism in ECE

The EU accession of ECE countries in 2004 implied the formal recognition of East Central European EU readiness and democracy maturity. The European *acquis* had drawn mainly on formal requirements, such as administrative procedures and regulations, and the compatibility of laws. Formal procedures seemed to work smoothly and democratic institutions were considered to be consolidated, and elite behaviour was monitored carefully when it came to EU-relevant issues; but the general behaviour of ECE elites was not in the foreground. Unfortunately, corruption requirements were left out the *acquis*. Formally, the rule of law in ECE could be assured even if there was a high level of corruption¹⁶. And indeed, other formal democratic principles were fulfilled: elections, the establishment of governments or the evolution of the party system were assessed positively.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, ECE elites had urged European integration as a return to Europe; also determined by political opportunism and the influence of former dissidents. It was a goal everybody agreed to (Kopecký 2004), even former communists; some analysts even spoke of Euroenthusiasm (Pridham and Ágh 2001). In fact, enthusiasm was much due to expectations of well-being and prosperity, and less to expectations of moral renewal and elite culture change; especially on the political elite side. Euroscepticism implying rejection of the entire project of European political and economic integration, and not wanting to join the other Europe was not existent. However, there were some critical views (Harmsen and Spiering 2004),

but generally, only the most prominent of them, such as Czech Prime Minister Václav Klaus, were reported on in Western Europe.

In general, Euroscepticism in ECE has been a feature of certain political parties or social groups in Eastern Central Europe¹⁷. Several parties or factions in ECE were hostile and sceptical toward the EU before accession and reflected public fear of the unknown; for example the *Samoobrona* party or the League of Polish Families parties LPR in Poland, the Nationalist Party in Hungary; or the conservative Civic Democratic Party ODS in the Czech Republic¹⁸. In general, ruling elites were not criticizing the project too openly on the domestic scene, even less on official European venues. First disruptions came to the all-European surface in the pre-accession stage with Poland claiming equal voting rights for all members. Former Polish President Kwaśniewski agreed with Czech President Klaus that the new members should have the same rights as the old members, i.e., that the Treaty of Nice voting-weights should also apply for the new ECE members¹⁹. Polish politicians were eager to claim an important role for their country both because of its size and historical merits against fighting communism. Polish parties in general did not react enthusiastically when it came to EU accession; also expressing the reluctance of Polish voters²⁰. The most European-friendly party was the Ex-Communist Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) of Leszek Miller (*Szczerbiak* 2004, *Riishøj* 2007). As a consequence of the Nice voting quarrel, right-wing political parties in Poland (an oppositional force at that moment) discovered EU-scepticism as a support-source and have not incorporated a EU friendly stance since then²¹.

After the 2004 accession ECE approval rates among ECE citizens have risen significantly, especially among the Polish population. Ironically, the Polish public has become more supportive of the Union, but its ruling elites have not²². In contrast to the ordinary citizens, political elites in ECE seem to become more and more sceptical of the European Union, and after 2004 ruling parties expressed scepticism toward integration projects. Evidently, political elites are more concerned with self-interest than the benefits the EU brings to its citizens – Thus, a deduction would be that the EU does not support ECE political elites as far as they have expected, and present advantages, such as mobility for Polish and Czech citizens, prepare no positive base for future integration efforts.

So far, majoritarian and government party Euroscepticism were connected to qualitative opposition to European integration²³. Thus, party leaders are not against the EU in principle, instead they outline that the organization is not the right instrument to solve structural problems and issues of state reform (*Melich* 2005). In sum, critical voices in high political positions in Central European countries have become more prominent after accession – mainly due to the European Constitution project. And, the Polish parties were the most radical during the short-lived Jarosław Kaczyński government.

Further efforts for political integration beyond accession have encountered mistrust on the new member's side. The failed referenda on the EU Constitution in the Netherlands and France in 2005 encouraged ECE elites to concentrate more on national developments and questions of national self-identification and thus on the 'negative' side of Europeanisation. According to the Czech President Václav Klaus the referenda for the EU Constitution had to fail because they were far from public opinion, and indeed, a majority of the Czech – and the ECE – people was actually against further political integration. For example, in April 2007, three fifth of the Czech people thought that a EU Constitution was not necessary²⁴.

Tendencies of 'negative Europeanisation'

In autumn 2006, an audio recording became public in which the Hungarian Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány of the Hungarian Socialist Party MSZP admitted of having lied to the public on the state of the country; in spite of several weeks of demonstrations and public outrage, the prime minister refused to step down and thereby intensified political polarization in Hungary. In Czech Republic, it proved impossible to build a stable government after the 2006 elections for over half a year; additionally the Eurosceptic Václav Klaus continued in a publicly relevant position. In Poland, the short Kaczyński-government (2005–2007) raised critical voices toward the European Union, and Slovakia was co-governed by the populist and nationalist-parties HZDS and SNS²⁵. Overall, critical voices and reluctance toward future integration projects increased. Now that ECE countries became members of the European Union, day-to-day economic and political problems turned more relevant. Being confronted with either offering long-term negotiated and difficult-to-accept solutions or short-term populist politics, ECE political elites tended to select the easier latter option (also showing better election results for themselves). Political elites justified their growing EU-reluctance with the fear of losing national culture and independence by accepting supranational domination and subordination.

Tendencies of 'negative Europeanisation' are mainly found in Poland, Hungary and Slovakia. Negative tendencies of Europeanisation do not only include Euro-scepticism that is also relevant for the Czech Republic (almost exclusively publicly presented by the Czech President Václav Klaus²⁶), in fact, 'negative Europeanisation' goes further than the concept of Euroscepticism that centres around party-based scepticism and the distinction between soft and hard scepticism, i.e., criticizing EU policies and projects and future integration measures vs. rejecting the EU completely. An analysis of negative Europeanisation and its tendencies focuses on concrete domestic politics enabling populism, polarization and nationalism, and consequently, on political elite behaviour.

Increasing scepticism in Eastern Central Europe is also due to political change and new political actors. For example in Poland a right-wing government consisting of the anti-European parties of the Polish Family League LPR, the *Samoobrona* Party and the Euro-critical Law and Justice (PiS) party significantly influenced the relations with the EU and the Council of Europe. Thanks to their rejection of the post-communist Polish reality and populism, the Kaczyński-brothers won the elections in 2005 for their PiS party, and could come into office as Polish Prime Minister and President. Consequently, the PiS focused on a conservative and nationalist government policy, polarized the freedom and justice discussion; and gave European Union criticism a prominent position. As the ruling PiS and its leaders parted from a pure nationalist view of politics – fighting for Polish identity in Europe – they focused on national issues, the eradication of communist legacies in Poland and the utopia of building a IV Republic. However, issues such as the discussion of the communist past and how to treat former regime members or the demonisation of the West divided the political landscape into two blocs²⁷.

The national-conservative government in Poland strengthened prior conservative and nationalist tendencies that became more and more oriented toward either Polish neighbours, i.e., ‘historical enemies’ (Polish Prime Minister Jarosław Kaczyński on Germany). Interestingly, the refusal of further EU integration went hand in hand with attacks on Germany and permanent conflict with Russia. The Polish President and Prime Minister joined in the criticism of Czech President Václav Klaus of future integration projects, in fact being more radical and nationalist-oriented than the latter. *Vis-à-vis* the Union, it seemed necessary to enhance domestic self-confidence and unity. In this context, the focus on ‘traditions’ and a closing off from the ‘other’ are supposed to foster the unity of the nation with social and economic programs becoming of secondary importance. In a context of negative Europeanisation, governing elites concentrated on easy-instrumentalising topics, identity politics and issues of nationality, instead of daily politics²⁸. Additionally, the focus on national values was seen in contrast to EU-formalism and rationality having no emotional connotations – besides of being suspected to be an instrument for re-colonizing the country. Therefore, the PiS-government in Poland stressed the importance to keep control of policies they considered important for the nation. So far, in Poland, negative Europeanisation tendencies might be outweighed by the election victory of Civic Platform PO in October 2007, which has proved less hysterical on national issues.

In Hungary, the relationship with the European Union is far better than in Poland, in fact, populist claims and nationalist tendencies have not yet influenced the relationship with the Union as in the case of Poland. Here, a ‘negative Europeanisation’ shows itself in a political culture of lies and extreme political competition²⁹, blaming the other political side of mistakes, but not assuming self-responsibility. In Hungary, politics is not only polarized, but also nationalized³⁰. Even more pronounced as in

Poland, the important political blocs connect current political problems to historical events, e.g., Trianon, the 1956 uprising. In fact, Hungarian political actors are so occupied with their domestic political struggles that international issues become only relevant if attached to Hungarian-related topics, especially if tangling with Hungarian minorities in neighbour countries.³¹

The September 2006 political crisis showed how tense social relations are in Hungary. Both political elites and citizens were ready to accept false promises of prosperity and well-being in spite of critical economic figures. When the façade could no longer be maintained, the situation got out of control, also because the two mainstream political blocs of *Fidesz* and the Hungarian Socialist Party MSZP do not accept that the other side has the legitimacy to lead and govern the country. Here, a purely confrontational political culture is in place with an almost hysterical arguing, even more pronounced than in Poland. The government is identified with all vices of the political system, and the opposition uses all instruments available to make an efficient governing of the country impossible. Mutual distrust regularly culminates in ‘verbal wars’ accusing each other of destabilizing the political system and threatening democracy.

The opposing conservative and socialist political sides have accumulated such hatred, that one side maintains of the other to be a threat for democracy and the country’s stability. Thus, in Hungary, liberal democracy is questioned by the current way of how political parties govern, a dangerous feature within the country’s ‘negative Europeanisation’ tendencies³². After the ECE accession to the EU, Hungarian political elites are the only ones in Eastern Central Europe that claim for themselves to have the right to decide which political side is the legitimate one, even if the ‘illegitimate’ side has won democratic elections³³. If the political adversary is not considered as legitimate political representation a wide range of political measures may be possibly justified, besides the fact that fundamental democratic principles are not accepted by political actors. This thinking is a serious obstacle for cooperation and a political culture based on consensus, and a development leading to a positive Europeanisation.

Slovakia was a prominent example for a ‘negative Europeanisation’ when being governed by Vladimír Mečiar, and the recent formation of a populist-nationalist government gave way to speculation about a possible turn-away from the Europeanisation-path undertaken after the Mečiar-episode when political elites kept repeating that Slovak values had finally become European values. In spite of never specifying them in detail, after Mečiar’s election loss in 1998, political elites enhanced political and economic reforms; being the most radical in the region³⁴. As reform pressure was more urgent than in the other Eastern Central European countries, the state turned to a model-example for the region under the Dzurinda government. Without

this clear commitment toward a value and regime change, Slovakia would have not become EU member in 2004.

However, with Robert Fico from the *Smer* party coming into office in 2006 there was the danger of abolishing the previous reforms completely; in fact, the government tended to first abolish the flat tax and to reinforce central state control – but was constrained by its desire to join the Eurozone³⁵. As with Poland, political realities showed that Europeanisation-progress is heavily connected to governing elites. Also in Slovakia, the population has been very adaptable to populism and nationalist topics. In this context, Robert Fico and his coalition partners play the role of ‘negative Europeanizers’. Fico accepted the Slovak National Party SNS and Vladimír Mečiar’s Movement for a Democratic Slovakia HZDS in the government, in spite of being overtly anti-Hungarian, publicly declaring anti-Hungarian slogans and disseminating nationalist propaganda. Thus, in the Fico-government national and populist issues filled the gap of non-provision of fundamental political and economic concepts.

The Czech Republic might stand by the side to some extent if compared with their ECE neighbours Slovakia, Poland and Hungary, as nationalist and populist tendencies have not been as pronounced as in the latter states. Beside arrogant political elite behaviour and the country’s severe political corruption problems, the country is not as polarized and nationalized as its ECE neighbors³⁶. However, the parliamentary elections in 2006 and the resulting political deadlock also proved the incompetence and unwillingness for compromise of the Czech political elite for democracy’s sake.

Conclusion

If we can depict negative political culture and negative tendencies of Europeanisation at a national level, ECE elites showed commitment to Europeanisation measures at a European level at the same time; especially in agricultural and regional development issues. Only major European integration steps caused a lively discussion within the ECE political elite, otherwise the subject was held low, and ECE elites cooperated readily in order to reach a higher degree of European integration. In spite of questioning the sense of a European Constitution, relevant on the Czech and Polish political scene, a revised document was re-negotiated and agreed on in spring 2007. The idea of a common Europe was not questioned finally, but ECE political elite behaviour caused serious problems at the EU level.

ECE elite behaviour after EU accession revealed more clearly both on the EU and domestic levels that not everything went perfectly with Europeanisation and democratisation, and that political institutions and political elites had developed in different directions. Hopefully, the old EU members have become aware of this fact and will take measures at least on the European scene. The re-negotiation of the EU Constitution has already proven that political instruments of ECE political elites

tolerated on the domestic scene are not welcomed on the EU level. The EU itself has problems of democratic legitimisation, but EU elite behaviour generally matches with the democratic requirements of their respective European nation states. A lesson that has still be learned by ECE political elites both for the European and the national scene.

Additionally, for Eastern Central Europe, (European) bureaucracy is even more connected to control and potential dangers than in Western Europe. As a consequence, Eastern Central Europeans – both elites and the public – fear a loss of identity and originality when confronted with bureaucratic measures from Brussels. Practical considerations would urge less formality and more concrete EU support for the new members. For example, in their struggle with the faded Soviet imperia – be it Estonian problems with historical legacies or Polish agricultural exports to Russia. ECE political elites might question the sense of a common European foreign policy if they cannot be sure of adequate interest enforcement and representation by a supranational European foreign policy or even membership in an organization that cannot be relied upon when facing foreign threats.

Notes

- ¹ Compare with the discussion of Jiří Pehe in *Respekt* 36, 4–10 August 2006.
- ² For an extensive overview Miller et al. (1998).
- ³ For example http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_223_en.pdf (EB62.2) or the Eurobarometer 67 surveys for ECE countries: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb67/eb_67_first_en.pdf.
- ⁴ *Radio Prague* 5 June 2006, <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/79733>, 2 January 2007, <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/86798>; and 22 January <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/87491>.
- ⁵ For Robert Fico *BBC News* 4 November 4, 1998 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/207930.stm>; the media relationship of the conservative politician Mirek Topolánek and of his social democratic predecessor Jiří Paroubek are discussed in *Radio Prague*, 29 September 2007: <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/95814>. For the leadership-style of Paroubek *Fleet Sheet* 25 April 2005 or 26 March 2007 <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/89701>.
- ⁶ In the Czech Republic, a social democratic non-confidence vote led to the downfall of the first Topolánek-government in June 2007. In Winter 2007, again, the social democratic party threatened with a no-confidence vote when the Topolánek-led government went through a crisis. *Der Standard*, 2 November 2007, <http://derstandard.at/?url=/?id=3097025>.
- ⁷ A rather typical example is the case of Prague Criminology Institute head Jan Hlaváček. A check in 2007 revealed his collaboration with the former Czechoslovak Secret Police StB – which he rejected. The accused had already undergone several confidential vettings resulting in negative certificates. *Lidové Noviny*, 3 May 2007, http://www.lidovsky.cz/ln_domov.asp?c=A070503_075448_ln_domov_fho.
- ⁸ Neo-institutionalists such as Stephen White or Paul Lewis would contend that institutions limit elite activities. If the institutional preconditions are not in place, the transition fails (Lewis 2003).
- ⁹ ECE elite hostility toward media has been widespread, *The Economist*, 2 August 2007.

- ¹⁰ Korkut (2005) outlines elitism that might also be regarded as a t authoritarian and socialist remnant ECE countries.
- ¹¹ See Footnote 9.
- ¹² On a concrete policy level, the government managed to appoint five finance ministers in a year and led a ideology-led policy toward the Central Bank. *CNBC European Business* November 2006, <http://cnbceb.com/2006/11/05/poles-apart/>. And, *Der Spiegel*, 11 July 2006, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,426197,00.html>.
- ¹³ For Czech Republic Melich (2005).
- ¹⁴ In Poland, Kaczyński-government aimed to purge school reading lists and to introduce 'patriotism' as a subject.
- ¹⁵ In Poland, the Public Opinion Research Center CBOS, http://www.cbos.pl/EN/cbos_en.shtml, or the Czech Center for Empirical Research STEM, <http://www.stem.cz/>.
- ¹⁶ Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International, http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi.
- ¹⁷ For example peasants in Poland (Szczerbiak 2004) or conservative and right-wing parties in Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic (Riishøj 2007).
- ¹⁸ In Czech Republic, the ODS is widely known for its Eurorationalism, i.e. its Euroscepticism – in contrary to other mainstream parties that speak in favour of the Union. The most prominent sceptic voice has been Václav Klaus claiming ECE equality and warning of Soviet Union-like developments.
- ¹⁹ France had proposed less votes for Poland than Spain; even if claiming that it was a printing mistake, ECE countries, especially Poland suspected the old members of weighting with different measures.
- ²⁰ Polish CBOS, http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2004/K_016_04.PDF.
- ²¹ Hanley et al. (2007) discuss popularity of centre-right parties in ECE.
- ²² Polish CBOS-surveys, http://www.cbos.pl/PL/Raporty/r2007.shtml#LABEL_news; a comparison with Szczerbiak gives important insights into changing attitudes.
- ²³ For a detailed discussion Taggart and Szczerbiak (2001), Kopecký and Mudde (2002), Szczerbiak (2004), Kopecký (2004) and Riishøj (2007). Taggart and Szczerbiak (2007) and Riishøj (2007) give an overview of categorizing party-based Euroscepticism.
- ²⁴ The Centre for Empirical Research STEM; <http://www.stem.cz/show/15> and <http://www.stem.cz/tisk.php?id=1290>, press release April 2007. Compare with the most recent Eurobarometer 67 surveys for ECE countries: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb67/eb_67_first_en.pdf.
- ²⁵ In Slovakia, voices against Europe have not been too prominent so far, this might be due to the Mečiar-episode when Slovakia was banned from the official EU-accession negotiations. Riishøj (2007) gives details on Slovak Euroscepticism. Voices against co-members, especially Hungary, have been pronounced and one might classify this policy as a voice against Europe.
- ²⁶ The ODS failed to present a coherent Eurosceptic view regarding the European Constitution; see the discussion in *Lidové Noviny*, 24 November 2007.
- ²⁷ The Kaczyński-brothers created a 'culture of mistrust' in Poland; Włodzimierz Borodziej, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 20 August 2007. Additionally, Luboš Palata (*Respekt*, 2 October 2006) and Tomasz Maćkowiak (*Respekt*, 13 November 2006) on the polarizing nature of the brothers. The Polish political scientist Alexander Smolar even

- went so far to claim that Poland was hostage of the private psychological problems of the president and the prime minister (www.przekroj.pl 15 February 2007).
- ²⁸ Such as abortion or death sentence discussions. The President of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly condemned President Kaczyński's statements on the reintroduction of the death sentence as an attack on liberal Europe. Andrzej Stasiuk presents the positive side of Polish identity politics (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 8 January 2007).
- ²⁹ Petr Morvay provides details on the political polarization of the country (*Respekt*, 25 March 2007).
- ³⁰ As a consequence of the nationalization of Hungarian politics, the *Fidesz* party has made a nationalist-turn under Victor Orbán (details in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 27 March and 4 March 2007); also János Székely on the negative consequences of *Fidesz* nationalization (*Respekt*, 10 September 2007).
- ³¹ A strong topic is Hungarian diaspora support, also in the form of a Status Law protecting ethnic Hungarians in neighboring countries; *BBC News* "Hungary Amends 'Status' Law," 24 June 2003 and http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no4_ses/contents.html.
- ³² Péter Nádás pointed to the culture of political elite corruption as a serious danger for Hungarian democracy (*Élet és Irodalom*, 13 July 2007).
- ³³ In the 1990s, Slovakia was the only ECE state where political opponents were written off as intrinsically hostile to the country's interests.
- ³⁴ See the German Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation report on Slovak reforms, proving elite-decisiveness to Europeanization, http://www.kas.de/db_files/dokumente/laenderberichte/7_dokument_dok_pdf_10645_1.pdf
- ³⁵ Marián Leško assesses the Slota co-governing in *Respekt*, 4 December 2006 and Ulrich Schmid in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 29 August 2006.
- ³⁶ For example the political scandals around Jiří Čunek; Martin M. Šimečka in *Respekt*, 17 September 2007.

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