

DEMOCRACY, STATE AND SOCIETY

**European Integration
in Central and Eastern Europe**

Edited by Magdalena Góra and Katarzyna Zielińska

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Nicole Gallina

POLITICAL ELITE BEHAVIOUR IN EASTERN CENTRAL EUROPE: PROVOKING POPULISM AND NATIONALISM?

Abstract: The political developments in Eastern Central Europe (ECE) question the political achievements connected to Europeanisation. This paper outlines the reasons for the growing populism and nationalism of ECE political elites. The author argues that political elite behaviour is one of the main causes of populist and nationalist developments. ECE political elites have internalised a “negative political culture” including unethical behaviour and an egoistic struggle for political power contradicting the principles of liberal democracy. Within a democratic framework, elites prefer populist and polarising power strategies and do not care that these undermine democratic national institutions. The article examines why political elites have turned away from the positive Europeanisation that culminated in EU accession. While political elites cooperated readily to become part of the European Union, they now increasingly oppose further political integration and tend to nationalise and polarise political issues, thus turning to a “negative Europeanisation” of their countries.

“The 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) – Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia – toward democracy and Europeanisation seems to be a success story. These countries have overcome state socialism by founding pluralistic regimes, restructuring their economies and integrating into European structures. In general, the formal institutions function according to democratic principles, and fulfil the requirements of Western European democracies – most ex-

for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), and regularly clashed with its neighbour Hungary on language issues (even when de-powering those parties). 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 struggle in the political elites to present oneself as the better Pole or Hungarian dominated the political landscape. Hungary boosted this policy, running the danger of turning into an authoritarian regime.

This paper argues that there is a significant gap between the formal institutions and the behaviour of the political elite, and that this is mainly due to the conduct of the political elite. The paper analyses the ECE political elite's 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 the behaviour and structure of the political elite in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. It points to critical elements that endanger democratic political achievements, such as confrontational elite behaviour and strong thinking in hierarchies. In fact, the behaviour of the political elite might question the in-depth change to liberal democracy in Eastern Central Europe. Consequently, there might be the danger that the national populism and political confrontation of the political elites in the ECE countries question the Europeanisation of those countries.

The author first presents a path-dependent approach, arguing that a change in the 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 the behaviour of the political elite. The next paragraph argues that the ECE political elites have internalised a "negative political culture" including unethical behaviour and an egoistic struggle for political power. These power strategies contradict the principles of liberal democracy and undermine the institutional setting of the state. In presenting patterns of elite conduct in ECE, the paper aims to give reasons for the growing populism and nationalism of ECE political elites, and consequently identifies political elite behaviour as an important cause for populist and nationalist developments.

The insights of the first part are connected in the second part with the attitudes of the ECE political elites toward the European Union. The author examines why the 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 analyses 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 nationalise and polarise political issues, thus turning to a "negative Europeanisation" of their countries.

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 behaviour.¹ Values and norms are socially based, and these may continue independently of elite or institutional changes (Ekman and Linde 2005). Within a path-dependent 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 socialist state had unique characteristics.² If one wishes to generalise, socialist policy-making was characterised by strong hierarchies and the almightiness of the communist parties that concentrated on their party needs, not on the needs 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 (besides inter-war Czechoslovakia) and little experience with democratic policy making. But the 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 elite behaviour also has to take into account that there was a widespread revulsion against the political system after 1989, and a rhetorical rejection of everything that it stood for. Nevertheless, this was coupled with attachment to some institutions and ideas of the old system (such as social equality, employment for everyone). The formal rejection of communism had a positive influence on developing national consciousness, but also caused certain resentment against new supranational projects. Additionally, abolishing 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 an institutional start from 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 the expectations of ordinary citizens and political elites concerning state goals and citizen duties changed (Higley and Lengyel 2000). On the whole, within the new democratic framework, both the political elites and citizens of Eastern Central European states proved suspicious of supra-national developments and of their own political institutions, expressed by the periodically issued Eurobarometer

¹ Compare with Jiří Pehe's discussion in *Respekt*, 2 September 2006.

² For an extensive overview see Miller et al. (1998).

surveys.³ High levels of dependence on the state and the correspondingly low levels of individual initiative were paralleled by unrealistic beliefs about the economic effects of democracy and pessimism about the future. Both the citizenry and the political elites have continued to be suspicious of politics, which has resulted in difficulties in accepting the democratic mechanisms in daily ECE politics.

Political elite behaviour vs political institutions

The political developments after 1989 in Eastern Central Europe, especially after the EU accession in 2004, reveal that formal democratic arrangements do not guarantee the full democratic and fair conduct of political elites. A grave problem is the non-matching of formal institutions with political behaviour: while formal institutions might be consensual and cooperative in structure, the political elites might act in a confrontational and intransparent way (Pehe 2009; Gallina 2008). A good example is if a genuine democratic institution – the political parliament – is confronted with corrupt conduct of political representatives. Rarely, does the parliament as a whole succeed in ousting corrupt members. Examples are the former Polish deputy prime minister Andrzej Lepper or former Czech prime minister Stanislav Gross. The 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 does also exist, volatile to some extent in countries such as Poland, but so far stable. Generally, the political elites struggle for political power within a given institutional framework. The shortcomings of institutions manifest themselves rather in negligence and poor commitment of their embedded actors. A characteristic of democracy should not be to use the democratic framework only for personal purposes. But this is actually happening in Eastern Central Europe.

Examples include the lengthy process of constituting a Czech government after the 2006 elections, when the Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) did not act according to the democratic framework, but used it to hinder the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) in forming a government as long as possible.⁴ No-confidence voting has been a popular political instrument to enforce egoistic party and individual interests. In the Czech Republic, a social democratic no-confidence vote led to the downfall of the first Topolánek government in June 2007. In winter 2007, the Social Democratic Party threatened with another no-confidence vote when the Topolánek-led government went through a crisis. The final, mortal, no-confidence vote against the Topolánek-

-government took place during the Czech EU presidency in 2009.⁵ In Slovakia, the elites were incapable of reaching the necessary compromise for the election of the state president. Finally, the constitution had to be changed in order to have the president elected by the people.⁶

Sometimes, conservative parties prefer to cooperate with populist and anti-modern parties: The Slovak Smer party cooperated with the nationalist SNS and the populist HZDS between 2006 and 2010. The Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS) opted for a government with the populist the Self-Defence Party of the Republic of Poland (Samobrona), and the nationalist-conservative League of Polish Families (LPR). In 2010/2011, the populist VV-party had a significant representation in the conservative Czech government.

Political institutions have proven to be only as strong as political actors want them to be. And the inabilities of the political elite have been striking when it comes to reaching a political consensus. Consequently, the political elites might be more powerful than the formal framework regulating their deeds. The institutional framework can also provoke ambiguous behaviour among political elites, who formally act according to the rules, but do not change their inherent attitudes towards political adversaries and the public. This can lead to a curious official following of democratic principles, such as media freedom, but a practical ignorance of it. One can argue that the political elites in ECE determined the transition process and not the institutions. The elites have destabilised democratic institutions according to their needs: they have made dubious deals to form governing coalitions, based governing on populism and nationalism, or provoked no-confidence votes.

In political institutions, especially in the state administration, representatives of the old system continue to stay in relevant positions even if they are questioned by the public and the media or endangered by lustrations.⁷ 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. Vertical and patron-client relations – rather than institutions – draw the boundaries of policy-making at the governmental level (Korkut 2005: 149f). They result in the reproduction of a similarly thinking political elite, leaving little opportunity for outsiders to initiate a behaviour change.

In sum, institutional shortcomings are not a question of insufficiently designed political institutions, but more one of political elite behaviour. Of course, institutions do exist that are placed above elites and may determine their behaviour formally, but they might be infiltrated by loyal agents. Few efficient formal institutions exist

³ See for example the Eurobarometer on Social Capital: 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 <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/79733> and <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/86798>, also <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/87491>.

⁵ <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1887551,00.html>.

⁶ Slovak government changes constitution due to elite inabilities: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/207930.stm>.

⁷ The discussion on the newly proposed police director of the Czech Republic has been an example of that: <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/news/news-2010-07-16#3>. Another, 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 denied. The accused had already undergone several confidential vetting procedures, resulting in negative results. http://www.lidovky.cz/ln_domov.asp?c=A070503_075448_ln_domov_fho.

in ECE that supervise elite behaviour and modes of cooperation, for example anti-corruption agencies. Their independence has been challenged, as in the case of the anti-corruption agency in Slovakia, or instrumentalised by politicians as the Polish Institute of National Remembrance (IPN). Informal institutions that control corruptive behaviour barely exist. In spite of democratic procedures, the Eastern Central European political elites prefer power strategies and action options that satisfy their own interests and undermine democratic national institutions.

The culture of ECE political elites

More importantly, the question should be which incentives elites do have to change fundamentally. As institutional incentives are few, the development of political elite behaviour will determine where the Eastern Central European countries will head in the future. It might prove under the worst scenario that a transition can also not work if certain democratic institutions are in place. Thus, political elite culture should become a more prominent discussion topic, both within the ECE countries and on the European scene. Already, some of the discussion concerning consolidation of democracy and Europeanisation focuses on the nature of elites (Higley and Lengyel 2000). The strength or weakness of elites and the extent to which they are united or confront each other determine political developments and the outcome of state change. A stable state development is only possible if there is an elite compromise that results in a consensually unified elite (Higley et al. 1998).⁸

Analysis of the ECE political elites and their belief systems rather illustrates the contrary: instead of forming a consensually unified elite, political actors are divided, characterised by polarisation and non-cooperation. In Hungary, as well as in Poland, a culture of confrontation dominates the political scene. Elites behave in an elitarian and hierarchical way (such as former Czech Prime Minister Jiří Paroubek) (Gallina 2008; Hanley et al. 1995). Additionally, the elites do not accept independent agencies, as expressed, for example, in Robert Fico's hostility toward the Slovak media.⁹

Only few voices within the elite speak and act (Donald Tusk, Karel Schwarzenberg) against those phenomena and point to the necessity to develop a more cooperative relationship to face the social and economic problems that have yet to be overcome.

What then are the general characteristics of the ECE political elite systems? Confrontation and hierarchy (which also implies secrecy) are important aspects. The values and beliefs of the political elites in ECE are centred around confrontational behaviour, strong thinking in hierarchies and an egotistical struggle for political and economic power. ECE political elites seem to equate arrogance with political capability and strength. There is no mutual respect between different political party repre-

sentatives; 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 imagination.

The public cannot trust political elites and cannot assess their likely behaviour according to their statements; especially visible in the erratic policy and statements of the two Kaczyński brothers.¹⁰ In all the ECE countries it is common to make public statements and act differently; not only in election campaigns when promises on reduced taxes or living costs are made. This behaviour might suggest that political elites still consider political information a secret. This kind of thinking supports corruptive behaviour, because the public has no idea which decisions are important and discussed and how much money or power is attached to a given problem. A critical view could also suggest viewing Eastern Central European elites' 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. In this sense, a fractured political elite culture dominates the ECE countries. Officially, the elites stick to democracy, but often they act against democratic principles in daily political business, for example when claiming limiting media coverage of political issues and proposing restrictive media laws.¹¹

Another important point concerns populism and nationalism. Populism builds on blurred promises and has no strategic political concepts. In fact, populism is a welcome power instrument for certain politicians, suitable for pointing out the institutional weaknesses of the ECE political systems and political adversaries. But populism does not offer fundamental solutions or an alternative value system. Populist measures mostly rely on the charisma of the leader and his ability to camouflage the real problem-solution.¹² The Hungarian political scene is an example here, in particular the run-up to the elections in 2006, when the leading political parties outbid themselves with public expenditure promises. The political elites in Hungary, Slovakia and Poland have turned to value-connected, i.e. nationalist, politics.¹³ Nationalist tendencies have become prominent 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

¹⁰ The government under Jarosław Kaczyński managed to appoint five finance ministers in a year and led an ideology-led policy toward the Central Bank. <http://cnbceb.com/2006/11/05/poles-apart/>, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,426197,00.html>. See also his recent statements, e.g. <http://www.wbj.pl/article-50358-more-explosive-statements-from-jaroslaw-kaczynski.html?typ=wbj>. A recent example: <http://www.digitaljournal.com/article/299143>. The president of Poland, Lech Kaczyński, died in the tragic aeroplane accident at Smolensk in April 2010. His brother, Jarosław, continued with his confrontational policy and as PiS leader.

¹¹ See Footnote 10. Additionally: the 2010 adopted media laws in Hungary.

¹² Read Melich (2005) for the Czech Republic. See the new publication on national populism and Slovak-Hungarian relations by Kálmán (2010). Available online: http://www.foruminst.sk/index.php?p=publications&t=a&xp=&publ_id=406&link=publ/egyeb/populizmusang/populism,,&MId=&Lv=&Ind=1&P=index,en.

¹³ In Poland, the Kaczyński government aimed at purging school reading lists and at introducing "patriotism" as a subject. Viktor Orbán established June 4th as Hungarian national memorial day to remember the Trianon Treaty of 1920.

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 For the leadership style of Paroubek see <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/89701>. Jiří Paroubek and his conservative successor Mirek Topolánek are a good example of hostility toward the media: <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/95814>. See *The Economist*, 2 August 2007 for a general picture.

in Eastern Central Europe are disappointed with daily politics and welcome political elites presenting scapegoats and easy explanations for complex problems.¹⁴ Populist and nationalist rhetoric is useful for providing simple (and also primitive) value codes and mobilising frustrated voters. Often these two features are combined into national populism, i.e. emotional slogans that underline the uniqueness of a respective nation or national feature.

Those thoughts lead me to the assumption that the political elites in ECE have internalised a "negative political culture". The reason is that the political elites had only 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 truly liberal democratic thinking and acting elite might be called elitism. It includes the political elite considering itself a separate category or class – indeed, a truly political class – not accountable to the public (Korkut 2005). Elitism remains embedded in the operations of the political elite and impedes a positive impact of democratic principles on elites and the whole society. 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 worked out partly.

The façade of successful Europeanisation

The development of Euroscepticism in ECE

The EU accession of ECE countries in 2004 implied the formal recognition of Eastern 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. The formal procedures seemed to work smoothly and the democratic institutions were considered to be consolidated. Elite behaviour was monitored carefully when it came to EU-relevant issues; but the general behaviour of the ECE elites was not in the foreground. Unfortunately, corruption requirements were left out of the *acquis*. Formally, the rule of law in ECE could be assured even if there was a high level of corruption.¹⁵ Indeed, other formal democratic principles were fulfilled: regular elections, the establishment of democratic governments and multi-party systems.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the 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, or the rejection of the entire project of European political and economic integration, was not relevant. Critics existed (Harmsen and Spiering 2004), but only the most prominent of them, such as the Czech prime minister (and later Czech president) Václav Klaus, were reported on in Western Europe.

In general, Euroscepticism has been a feature of certain political parties or social groups, such as peasants in Poland (Szczerbiak 2004) or conservative and right-wing parties in Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic (Riishøj 2007). Several parties were hostile and sceptical toward the EU before accession and reflected public fear of the unknown. For example Self-Defence or the League of Polish Families (LPR) in Poland, the Nationalist Party in Hungary; or the conservative Civic Democratic Party (ODS) in the Czech Republic.¹⁶ In general, ruling elites were not criticising the project too openly on the domestic scene, and even less in official European venues.

The first disruptions came to the all-European surface in the pre-accession stage, with Poland claiming equal voting rights for all members. The former Polish president Kwaśniewski agreed with the 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 members.¹⁷ Polish politicians were eager to claim an important role for their country because of both its size and historical merits fighting against communism. Polish parties in general reacted unenthusiastically when it came to EU accession, also expressing the reluctance of Polish voters.¹⁸ The most European-friendly party was the 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 an EU-friendly stance since then.¹⁹

Since the 2004 accession, approval rates for the EU among ECE citizens have risen significantly, especially among the Polish population. Ironically, the Polish public has become more supportive, but its ruling elites have not.²⁰ In contrast to ordinary citizens, political elites became more sceptical of the European Union and toward integration projects. Here, the political elites have been more concerned with self-interest than with the benefits the EU brings to the citizens – a possible deduction is that the EU does not bring as much benefit to ECE political elites as they expected.

¹⁶ In the 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 sceptical voice has been Václav Klaus, warning of Soviet Union-like developments.

¹⁷ France had proposed fewer votes for Poland than Spain, but then claimed that it was a printing mistake. Especially Poland suspected the old members of weighting with different measures.

¹⁸ Polish CBOS, http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2004/K_016_04.PDF.

¹⁹ For the relationship between the PiS and Europe see Riishøj in <http://www.cepsr.com/clanek.php?ID=211>.

²⁰ Polish CBOS surveys, http://www.cbos.pl/PL/Raporty/r2007.shtml#LABEL_news; a comparison with Szczerbiak gives important insights into changing attitudes.

¹⁴ The Public Opinion Research Center CBOS for Poland: http://www.cbos.pl/EN/home_en/cbos_en.php, or the Czech Centre for Empirical Research STEM, <http://www.stem.cz/>.

¹⁵ Consult the Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International (CPI) on levels of ECE corruption, http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi.

So far, government elite Euroscepticism was connected to qualitative opposition to European integration.²¹ Thus, party leaders are not against the EU in principle; instead they outline that the organisation is not the right instrument to solve the structural problems and issues of state reform (Melich 2005). There has been an underlying emotional opposition to the project. The failed referenda on the EU Constitution in the Netherlands and France in 2005 encouraged ECE elites to focus on national developments and questions of national self-identification and thus on the “negative” side of Europeanisation. According to President Klaus the referenda for the EU Constitution had to fail because they were far from the public opinion. A majority of the Czech – and ECE – population was actually against further political integration. For example, in April 2007, three fifths of Czechs thought that an EU constitution was not necessary.²² Due to the European Constitution project, political elites turned more critical. And, the Polish right-wing parties were the most radical, in particular during the Jarosław Kaczyński government.

Tendencies of “negative Europeanisation”

In autumn 2006, an audio recording was published in which the Hungarian prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány of the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) admitted 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 polarisation in Hungary. In the Czech Republic, it proved impossible to build a stable government after the 2006 elections for over half a year; additionally the Eurosceptic and Václav Klaus continued with his anti-EU speech. In Poland, the short-lived Kaczyński government (2005–2007) criticised the European Union continuously. Slovakia was co-governed by the populist and nationalist-parties HZDS and SNS until 2010, which mainly caused problems with neighbouring Hungary. Slovakia is the only country where voices against Europe have not been prominent so far. This might be a legacy of the Mečiar episode, when Slovakia was banned from the official EU accession negotiations and turned into an outsider in ECE. But in 2010 the country voted alone against the EU support package for Greece.²³

Tendencies of “negative Europeanisation” are mainly found in Poland and Hungary. They include Euroscepticism that is also relevant for the Czech Republic (almost exclusively publicly presented by Václav Klaus²⁴). The concept of Euroscepti-

²¹ For a detailed discussion consult Taggart and Szczurbiak (2001), Kopecký and Mudde (2002), Szczurbiak (2004), Kopecký (2004) and Riishøj (2007). Taggart and Szczurbiak (2007) and Riishøj (2007) give an overview of party-based Euroscepticism.

²² Centre of Empirical Research STEM; <http://www.stem.cz/show/15> and <http://www.stem.cz/tisk.php?id=1290>. Compare with the Eurobarometer 67 surveys for ECE countries: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/cb/cb67/cb_67_first_en.pdf. New material is available under http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/cb/cb73/cb73_en.htm.

²³ <http://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/slovakia-greece.5u7>. Riishøj (2007) gives details on Slovak Euroscepticism. Voices against Hungary have been pronounced and one might classify this policy as a voice against Europe.

²⁴ He tried to turn the ODS (which he had founded) into a fully-fledged Eurosceptic party. Ultimately, he did not succeed and stepped down from all party posts in 2008.

cism centres around party-based scepticism and the distinction between soft and hard scepticism, i.e. criticising EU policies and projects and future integration measures vs rejecting the EU completely. But “negative Europeanisation” goes further than that: it highlights political elites’ behaviour, especially domestic political conduct such as polarisation and national populism.

Increasing scepticism in Eastern Central Europe can be the effect of political change and new political actors. For example in Poland, a right-wing government consisting of the anti-European parties of LPR and Self-Defence and the Europe-critical PiS significantly influenced the relations with the EU and the Council of Europe. Thanks to their rejection of post-communist Polish reality and populism, the Kaczyński brothers won the 2005 elections, and were able to come into office as Polish prime minister and president. Consequently, PiS focused on a conservative and nationalist government policy, polarised the discussion of freedom and justice, and gave criticism of the EU 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 Fourth Republic. However, the discussion of the communist past and how to treat former regime members and the demonisation of the West divided the political landscape into two blocs.²⁵

The national-conservative government strengthened prior conservative and nationalist tendencies that now aimed at Poland’s neighbours, i.e. “historical enemies” (the Polish prime minister Jarosław Kaczyński on Germany). 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 the Czech president Václav Klaus of future integration projects, being more radical and nationalist-oriented than the latter. Vis-à-vis the Union, it seemed necessary to enhance domestic self-confidence and unity. The focus on traditions and self-isolation are supposed to foster the unity of the nation, and social and economic programmes become of secondary importance. In a context of negative rhetoric, governing elites concentrated on easy-instrumentalising topics, identity politics and issues of nationality, instead of daily politics.²⁶

The focus on national values was seen in contrast to EU formalism and rationality, having no emotional connotations – besides, EU formalities have been suspected to be instruments for re-colonising the country. Therefore, the PiS government in Poland wanted to keep control of policies important for the nation. So far, in Poland, “negative Europeanisation” tendencies have been outweighed by the election victory of the Civic Platform (PO) in October 2007. The new government, led by Donald

²⁵ The Kaczyński brothers created a “culture of mistrust” in Poland; Włodzimierz Borodziej, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 20 August 2007. The Polish political scientist Aleksander Smolar said that Poland was a hostage to the private psychological problems of the president and the prime minister (www.przekroj.pl, 15 February 2007).

²⁶ Such as discussions on abortion or the death sentence. 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 summarises the positive side of Polish identity politics in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 8 January 2007.

Tusk, has proved less hysterical on national issues, at the same time following a similar line to the previous government. PiS continued with the role of provocateur, even more after the tragic events of April 2010.

In Hungary, the relationship with the European Union has not been in the foreground. The important political blocs connect current political problems to historical events (e.g. Trianon, the 1956 Hungarian Revolution) and have been occupied with their domestic political struggles. International issues were only relevant if attached to Hungarian-related topics, especially if tangling Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries.²⁷ Populist claims and nationalist tendencies have not yet influenced the relationship with the Union. This is a very interesting fact: after the election victory of Fidesz leader Viktor Orbán in 2010, quarrels with Slovakia on the Hungarian minority have been significant, the Hungarian minority policy in general provocative, and tendencies toward authoritarianism obvious.²⁸

In the case of Hungary, "negative Europeanisation" has been first a political culture of lies and extreme political competition, blaming the other political side for mistakes, but not assuming self-responsibility.²⁹ The September 2006 political crisis was intense and continues to have serious effects on the country. It was provoked by the publication of the so-called lie speech.³⁰ Ferenc Gyurcsány, the leader of the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), had used all methods available to achieve power, but ultimately went too far. Both the political elites and citizens were first 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.

This escalation was also due to the fact that the two mainstream political blocs, Fidesz and the MSZP, could not accept that the other side had the legitimacy to govern the country. The Hungarian political elites claim for themselves the right to decide which political side is the legitimate one (and their respective side is always the right one), even worse if the "illegitimate" side has won democratic elections. Here, a purely confrontational political culture is in place, with almost hysterical arguing, still more pronounced than in Poland. The government is identified with all vices of the political system, and the opposition uses all instruments available to hinder the efficient governing of the country. Mutual distrust has regularly culminated in verbal wars, both sides accusing the other of destabilising the political system and threatening democracy. After the election victory of 2010, Orbán went a step further: under his authoritarian leadership, Hungarian politics continues to be polarised, and has increased in being nationalised and de-democratised.

²⁷ Strong topics are language and citizenship. For example, in the form of a Hungarian Status Law protecting ethnic Hungarians in neighbouring countries; BBC News "Hungary Amends 'Status' Law," 24 June 2003 and http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no4_ses/contents.html. The revised version was presented in 2010. In this context, Slovakia presented own Language Laws: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8232878.stm>.

²⁸ As a consequence of the nationalization of Hungarian politics, the Fidesz party has made a nationalist turn under Viktor Orbán. See János Székely on the negative consequences of Fidesz nationalization (*Respekt*, 10 September 2007).

²⁹ Petr Morvay has details on the political polarisation of the country (*Respekt*, 26 March 2007).

³⁰ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/5354972.stm>.

The newly acquired two-thirds majority of Fidesz has already been used in parliament to adapt constitutional amendments, new laws on the media, manning of the constitutional court and Hungarians abroad. Measures of the new government have included the installation of loyal directors in the most important state agencies and the introduction of a state-controlled media council.³¹ The way in which Viktor Orbán governs Hungary since the 2010 elections questions liberal democracy.

Slovakia was a prominent example for "negative Europeanisation" when governed by Vladimír Mečiar (1994–1998). His populist-nationalist government turned the country away from the Europeanisation path – the EU interrupted negotiations with the country. But, after Mečiar's election loss in 1998, the country continued with reforms. The reform pressure was more urgent than in the other Eastern Central European countries, and political elites enhanced political and economic measures that were the most radical in the region.³² The state turned into a model example for the region under the Dzurinda government and made a clear commitment to European values.

However, with Robert Fico from the Smer party coming into office in 2006, there was the danger of the previous reforms being abolished completely. The government tended to abolish the flat tax and to reinforce central state control – but was constrained by its desire to join the Eurozone. As with Poland, political realities showed that the progress of Europeanisation has been heavily connected to governing elites. Robert Fico and his coalition partners have played the role of "negative Europeanisers". He accepted the SNS and Vladimír Mečiar's HZDS to form a government, ignoring their anti-Hungarian slogans and nationalist propaganda. Moreover, his Smer party partly adapted to national and populist issues, which also filled the gap of not providing fundamental political and economic concepts.³³

The Czech Republic might stand to the side to some extent if compared with their ECE neighbours Slovakia, Poland and Hungary: 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,³⁴ the country is not as polarised and nationalised as its neighbours. However, the volatility of governments has underlined the incompetence and unwillingness for compromise of the Czech political elite for democracy's sake and led to public frustration with the democratic system.

³¹ <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,5723651,00.html>.

³² See the German Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation report on Slovak reforms, proving elite-decisiveness to Europeanisation, http://www.kas.de/db_files/dokumente/laenderberichte/7_dokument_dok_pdf_10645_1.pdf.

³³ Tom Nicholson on Slovak populism in *The Slovak Spectator*, 12 June 2006.

³⁴ For example the political scandals over Jiří Čunek and the general prosecutor Renata Vesecká <http://www.praguepost.com/news/5712-member-of-judiciary-mafia-falls.html> and <http://www.praguepost.com/news/6023-ods-cover-up-alleged-as-prosecutor-remains-in-post.html>.

Conclusions

The Eastern Central European elites were positive toward Europeanisation measures at a European level; especially when it came to agricultural and regional development issues. The major steps of European integration caused a lively discussion within the ECE political elite. Here, Europeanisation has been perceived critically – otherwise the subject was held low or elites cooperated readily in order to get the necessary European funding. The Czech and Polish political elites questioned the sense of a European Constitution, but a revised document was renegotiated and agreed on in spring 2007. The idea of a common Europe has not been ultimately rejected.

The renegotiation of the EU Constitution showed that the political instruments of the ECE political elites tolerated on the domestic scene are not welcomed at the EU level. The EU itself has problems of democratic legitimisation, but EU elite behaviour should match with democratic requirements. This is a lesson that still has to be learned by ECE political elites for both the European and the national scene.

Elite behaviour shows that not everything went perfectly with Europeanisation and democratisation, and that political institutions and political elites have developed in different directions. The most urgent case seems to be Hungary. However, the old EU members have so far not become aware of the dangerous Hungarian anti-democratic and nationalist policy-making. Supposedly, Hungary will become a test case for the European project.

On a broader level, for Eastern Central Europeans, (European) bureaucracy is even more connected to control and potential dangers than in Western Europe. One side has been interest representation within EU institutions and the EU. Eastern Central Europeans – both elites and the public – fear a loss of identity and self-esteem when confronted with bureaucratic measures from Brussels. The decision of Slovakia not to provide funding for the emergency package for Greece has to be regarded in this light. Another side has been interest enforcement outside the EU. Practical considerations would urge less formality and more EU support for the new members; for example, in their struggle with the faded Soviet empire – be it Estonian problems with historical legacies, Polish agricultural exports to Russia or gas/oil pipelines in general.

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