

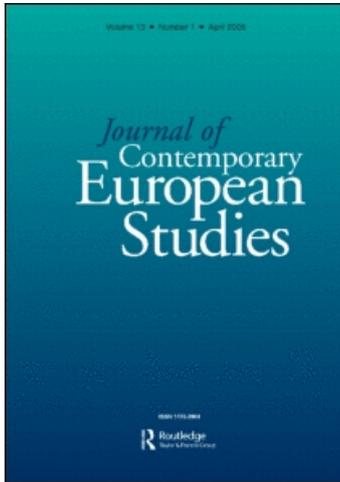
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Journal of Contemporary European Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title-content=t713429588>

The Extreme Right in Eastern Europe: EU Accession and the Quality of Governance

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Online Publication Date: 01 August 2009

To cite this Article Bustikova, Lenka(2009)'The Extreme Right in Eastern Europe: EU Accession and the Quality of Governance',*Journal of Contemporary European Studies*,17:2,223 — 239

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/14782800903108668

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14782800903108668>

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The Extreme Right in Eastern Europe: EU Accession and the Quality of Governance

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ABSTRACT *This paper investigates variation in voter support for extreme-right parties in Eastern Europe, especially among the new EU members. It suggests that the success of the extreme right is a reaction to corruption and the absence of political accountability, and that extremists thrive in competitive democracies where the rule of law is weak. Moreover, it shows that the accession process and EU conditionality contributed to emptying the policy-oriented issue space, and that as EU conditionality has withered away, so too have rapid improvements in the quality of governance. Variation in cross-national support for the extreme right is therefore a reaction to the convergence of the major political parties on the most salient policy issue of the late 1990s—joining the EU. The technocratic and bureaucratic process of EU accession, which was accompanied by declining improvements in the quality of governance, contributed to a ‘vacuum’ effect in the policy space that led to party competition based on identity-based appeals, such as ethnic hatred, and set the stage for the success of the extreme right in Eastern Europe.*

KEY WORDS: extreme right, Eastern Europe, policy convergence, corruption, EU, legacies

The accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union (EU) in January 2007 enabled the European nationalists, for the first time in more than a decade, to assemble a short-lived bloc in the European Parliament. At the same time, the new EU members began experiencing a certain malaise after the enlargement (Ramet, 1999; Rupnik, 2007). The populist backlash, which replaced accession enthusiasm, refocused attention on extremist parties, the most pronounced critics of democratisation and economic liberalisation processes in Eastern Europe. Despite the vocal presence of the extreme right in Eastern Europe, relatively scant scholarly attention has been devoted to the systematic analysis of such parties, in stark contrast to their West European cousins (Mudde, 2007).

The objective of this paper is to redress that scarcity in the comparative study of extreme-right parties in Eastern Europe, and to do so with an emphasis on the new EU members. This paper first addresses the classification of extreme-right parties in the new EU member states, identifying three policy issue dimensions that characterise them: nationalism, anti-communism and intolerance to ‘the other.’ The second section of the paper presents the argument that the success of the extreme right can be understood

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as a reaction to corruption and the absence of political accountability. The analysis shows that support for the extreme right co-varies across countries with the quality of democracy. Extremists thrive in competitive democracies where the rule of law is weak. Moreover, as European Union (EU) conditionality withered away after the accession, so too did rapid improvements in the quality of governance. The EU accession process and EU conditionality contributed to emptying the policy issue space over time. As a result, cross-national support for the extreme right can be seen as a reaction to convergence between the major political parties on the most salient policy issue of the late 1990s: joining the EU. The technocratic and bureaucratic process of EU accession produced a vacuum effect in the policy space, resulting in party competition based on identity-based appeals, such as ethnic hatred.

The literature on the East European extreme right can be conveniently categorised using an analytical framework deployed to study the radical right in the West: the distinction between the supply side and the demand side of the political process (Eatwell, 2003; Hainsworth, 2000; Kitschelt, 2007; Norris, 2005). Supply-side arguments analyse the role of political parties, political elites and political competition in enhancing the appeal of the extreme-right parties. The demand-side focuses on voters, societal support and the socio-economic base for the extreme right.

The Demand Side—the Voters

According to some demand-side scholars, the reason for the rise of the populist movements is ‘the need for protection against the destabilizing effects of the transition to competition and the market’ (Tismaneau, 2007, p. 37). The losers of the post-communist economic transition, the lower-income class and those who reside in the periphery are often viewed as the core of the extreme right’s support (Minkenberg, 2002, p. 352; Pop-Eleches, 2004). For example, in Hungary and Poland, the supporters come from the eastern regions that lag in economic development.

But others think that ‘the losers’ voting for the extreme right are the middle class on the way to becoming poor. The Greater Romania Party ‘is supported largely by medium-to-higher status strata and has a disproportionately young electorate with 90 per cent of their voters under 40 years of age (Minkenberg, 2002, pp. 352–354). The voters for the Hungarian Truth and Life Party ‘came not from the poorest social groups but from the three most fashionable districts of Budapest’ (Karsai, 1999, p. 146). Since the status of the middle class depends on the welfare protection provided by the state, it is more in danger of falling into poverty. The losers of the reforms, by contrast, exit the political system and do not vote (Greskovits, 2007).

On top of destabilising economic changes, the extreme right operates in an environment of low trust in political institutions. The extreme-right parties are ‘more extreme and openly anti-democratic’ when compared to the contemporary extreme right in Western Europe (Minkenberg, 2002, p. 336). Values attributable to political culture and the history of ethnic relations and irredentism stemming from inter-war arrangements (such as the Trianon Treaty of 1920) constitute fertile ground for the extreme right. For example, a 2007 survey on anti-Semitism found that 60 per cent of Hungarians think that ‘Jews have too much power in the business world’ (ADL, 2007). A recent survey by *Gazeta Wyborcza* from November 2007 found that almost half of Poles surveyed would not want to have a Jew as their boss, 73 per cent would reject

a Roma/Gypsy boss and 84 per cent would reject a gay or lesbian as their boss (Gazeta Wyborcza, 2007). An ethnic understanding of the nation and the distinction between nationality and citizenship is common in most of Eastern Europe (Hockenos, 1993; Zubrzycki, 2001). This is reflected in the constitutions of the East European states and in the politicisation of ethnicity. Ramet has shown that almost all the post-communist constitutions 'make reference to either popular sovereignty or national sovereignty' (Ramet, 2007, p. 41).

Assertions that the rise of the extreme right can be attributed to political culture and ethnicised nationhood are plentiful: 'winning [political] coalitions are built around cultural rather than strictly socioeconomic issues' (Jasiewicz, 2007, p. 30); many point to the undemocratic political culture and the tolerance of extremist discourse in Eastern European politics (Butora, 2007, p. 50; Minkenberg, 2002, p. 357; Mudde, 2005, p. 177; Weaver, 2006). Authoritarian legacies are deemed relevant in this view since: 'in almost all of the countries . . . one can witness the emergence of parties which seek inspiration in monarchical or fascist pre-communist ideas. The Bulgarian Revivalist Movement, the National Union for Christian Revival in Romania, the Party of Rights in Croatia, the Slovak National Party and the Polish National Party have all made direct references to the inter-war context' (Anastasakis, 2001, pp. 18–19). The Greater Romania Party and the Party of Romanian National Unity, by contrast, built on the legacy of communist authoritarianism (Anastasakis, 2001; Shafir, 2000).

The Supply Side—the Parties and the Politicians

An alternative approach to the study of the extreme right focuses on the study of parties and their strategies for attracting voters. The crucial moment in the history of the extreme right was when the extreme parties that were under the anti-communist umbrella started competing independently. Some elements of the anti-communist movements became extreme-right. This was notably the case with the Hungarian Democratic Forum and the Polish Solidarity Electoral Action. The extreme right operates in the environment of weakly institutionalised parties and inability to sustain solid ruling coalitions (Ekiert, 2006; Jasiewicz, 2007; Tavits, 2008). The extreme right may also thrive in the presence of mainstream parties that accommodate extreme-right challengers (Art & Brown, 2007).

The extreme right has been linked to political elite collusion, political corruption and economic mismanagement (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2007; Pop-Eleches, 2004).¹ The middle class disenchantment with liberal elites results in calls for redistribution to people with "real" Hungarian identity' (Greskovits, 2007, p. 44). Political elites in the process of consolidating their privileges are perceived as lacking accountability and having betrayed their voters.²

While many view populism as a threat to the consolidation of East European democracies, Philippe Schmitter has offered a positive take on political radicalism: as a possible source of democratic rejuvenation, it helps to decompose collusive party systems and bring new issues into politics (Krastev, 2007). If class-based cleavages are translated into political competition, this is a possible effect, assuming that 'class cleavages are crucial for the long-term consolidation of inclusive liberal democratic politics' (Ost, 2005). When politics cannot be legitimately organised around class cleavages, however, political mobilisation arises around symbolic and identity issues.

The European Union

Mungiu-Pippidi criticised the EU accession process for its unaccountable and technocratic character: ‘elections and changes of government during the negotiation years were seen as necessary evils, as Commission country teams . . . had come to have a vested interest in the community of the political and bureaucratic elites with whom they had been working closely and feared that fresh elections would slow down negotiations’ (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2007, p. 15).

According to Vachudova (2008), the parameters of party competition were broadened after the accession, which, temporarily, unleashed nationalistic and culturally conservative parties. Similarly, O’Dwyer & Schwartz (2007) noted that EU enlargement was followed by intolerant anti-liberal politics. The EU lost significant leverage after EU accession and the EU-accession process has contributed ‘to the . . . tendency toward “emptying” party competition’ (Rupnik, 2007, p. 22). Bruszt and Stark have criticised the accession process because the regulatory framework that was adopted had not been tailored to individual countries (Bruszt & Stark, 2003). The EU had also reduced the space for economic policy manoeuvre thanks to the euro-adoption criteria and caps on budget deficits and inflation. The populist surge reacts to the limited policy space due to the perception that ‘there is no choice’ in economic policy-making (Rupnik, 2007, p. 20; Greskovits, 2007).³

This paper finds evidence that support for the extreme right can be linked to the quality of governance, which initially improved with the accession-process emphasis on building institutions that would protect the rule of law. As improvements in the quality of governance dissipated, political parties raced to adopt policies prescribed by the EU. This negotiation process led in turn to a reduction in policy options available to politicians and severely constrained the political decision-making space.

Theoretical Framework

The process of economic reforms and restructuring at the beginning of the 1990s, and later the technocratic nature of the EU accession process, narrowed the policy options of governing political elites in the new East European member states. The elementary choices of economic restructuring had their nuances, but all the countries privatised large enterprises, liberalized prices, opened up their trade and exposed their currencies to international competition. These economic policies are known as the ‘Washington Consensus.’ The second reduction of the policy space occurred during the course of the negotiations when the countries adopted complex and ‘one size fits all’ *acquis communautaires*. This process did not fully expropriate the policy-making of domestic elites, but it constrained (and improved) the regulatory framework of these countries. It was obvious, however, that there was no alternative to joining the EU, for the costs of staying outside would be immense.

This international process is referred to as the ‘vacuum effect’ on the policy space of party competition. I build on a spatial model of programmatic party competition, wherein parties converge on policy issues (Kitschelt & McGann, 1995). As parties converge on economic policies, a new dimension of party competition gains salience, namely the dimension of ‘the other.’ This is a dimension where history, ethnicity and a complex web of contextual clues weigh so heavily that what happened between the wars and during WWII invades twenty-first-century politics. Extremist parties succeed in poorly governed

Table 1. Voter share of extreme-right parties in lower chambers of the Legislature in 1990s and 2000s.

Country	Elections in 1990s: 1st	Elections in 1990s: 2nd	Elections in 1990s: 3rd	Elections in 1990s: 4th	Elections in 2000s: 1st	Elections in 2000s: 2nd	Elections in 2000s: 3rd	Elections in 2000s: 4th	Average 1990s	Average 2000s
Albania	5.00	2.30			~2.4	0.60			3.65	1.50
Bulgaria	1.13	0.54	0.18		0.07	8.93			0.62	4.50
Croatia	43.20	30.00	42.50	42.90	26.70	40.28		3.50	39.65	40.79/23.5
Czech R.	(1.00)	5.98	8.01	3.90	1.08	0.17			5.96 (4.72)	0.63
Estonia	15.68	12.11	0.00		0.55	0.20			9.26	0.38
Hungary	1.59	5.47			4.37	2.20			3.53	3.29
Latvia	5.35	11.99	14.73		5.39	6.94			10.69	6.17
Lithuania	3.55	4.01			2.77	0.28			3.78	1.53
Macedonia	boycott	28.44			29.60	40.01			28.44	34.81
Poland	1.14	0.11	5.70		7.87	8.00		1.30	2.32	5.72
Romania	11.61	8.85			19.48	12.92			10.23	16.20
Russia	23.50	11.00	5.98		12.00	8.80			13.48	10.40
Serbia	22.58	28.10			8.60	27.61		28.59	25.34	23.56
Slovakia	13.94	7.93	5.40	9.07	6.98	11.73			9.09	9.36
Slovenia	10.02	3.22			4.39	6.27			6.62	5.33
Ukraine	6.40	~10			NA	~3		NA	~8.2	~3

Note: Small vote share for Croatia in third elections is due to the re-classification of HDZ as more moderate.
Source: Author's calculations.

Table 2. Positions of extreme/radical right parties on issue dimensions (2001–2004).

	Left–right ¹	Joining EU ²	Nationalism ³	Foreign land ownership ⁴	Social ⁵	Former communists ⁶
Czech Rep.	15.3	4.4	19.2	18.6	15.9	16.5
<i>Bulgaria</i>	<i>13.4</i>	<i>13.7</i>	<i>18.6</i>	<i>15.5</i>	<i>13.5</i>	<i>10.9</i>
Hungary	19.1	2.5	19.8	19.0	19.0	18.9
Latvia	16.3	15.6	19.3	17.3	14.5	17.1
Poland	16.4	1.5	19.0	19.3	19.1	17.6
Romania	11.5	11.0	19.6	18.2	18.7	2.8
Slovakia	15.1	8.5	19.4	19.5	16.1	11.4
Slovenia	10.1	6.8	17.1	17.4	11.7	9.3

Notes: ¹Position on general left–right continuum) Left (1); Right (20)

² Against joining the European Union (1); For joining (20)

³ Cosmopolitan consciousness (1); Nationalism (20)

⁴ Supports foreign land ownership (1); Opposes (20)

⁵ Favours abortion, homosexuality and euthanasia (1); Opposes (20)

⁶ Keep former communist party officials out of public life (20); Opposes (1)

Source: Expert Survey (Benoit & Laver, 2006).

electorally competitive democracies where the EU accession process ‘vacuums’ the policy making space for political parties. The extreme-right parties are the most competent manipulators of this dimension, which cannot be outsourced to any other international actor, and which is resistant to the ahistorical homogenising thrust of culturally liberal EU policies.

Analysis

Two questions must be addressed at once. Who are the extreme-right parties in the post-communist member states of the EU and what is their electoral strength over time? Table 1 shows how the electoral strength of extreme parties varies over time.⁴ Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia have had strong and established extreme-right parties since the early transition period. The Czech Republic and Estonia, after an initial surge of the extreme right, have seen a downward trend over time. Bulgaria and Poland experienced a surge of independent vote shares for the extreme right later in the transition period. The Bulgarian leader of Attack, Volen Siderov (journalist), the young Czech leader of National Party, Petra Edelmanová (PhD student in political science), and the leader of the New Generation Party, George Becali (owner of the Romania Steaua football club), represent an emerging generation of radical leaders who are entrepreneurial and media savvy.

This paper focuses on the 2003–2006 period when the EU accession process was approaching completion.⁵ The expert survey conducted by Benoit & Laver between 2002–2004 puts parties on issue dimensions in selected policy areas (Benoit & Laver, 2006). On the basis of these positions, it is possible to classify extreme-right parties on important issues. As we would expect, extreme-right parties are located on the right of the general left–right political spectrum. Their position on the EU-accession scale confirms the ‘Euro-scepticism’ of the Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Slovak and Slovenian extreme-right parties. However, the Bulgarian, Latvian and Romania extreme-right parties are not opposed to the process of joining the EU.⁶

The spokesmen of the Slovak National Party (SNS) and a Slovak MP, Rafael Rafaj, denied that the SNS was against the country’s accession to the European Union since the EU has contributed to the staggering growth of Slovakia. The SNS opposes specific EU minority protection policies and what is viewed as infringements on Slovak national sovereignty, but not the EU as a concept.⁷

Extreme-right parties oppose the culturally liberal agenda of the European Union, such as the promotion of gender equality or the protection of ethnic and sexual minorities (O’Dwyer & Schwartz, 2007). For example, in March 2008, the Polish parliament experienced a crisis over the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, because the Law and Justice Party (former coalition partner of the League of Polish Families) demanded an addendum so that ‘homosexual marriages cannot be imposed’ on Poland (Financial Times, 2008).

The extreme right can be classified on three dimensions of the issue space: nationalism, cultural conservatism and anti-communism which evolves around the issue whether to allow ex-communists to participate in public life. Romania is an exception since its extreme right builds on the legacy of communism, as opposed to other post-communist extreme-right parties that cultivate a legacy from the inter-war period (Anastasakis, 2001). Romania’s PRM is a party of ‘radical continuity,’ claiming the legacy of the communist Ceauşescu era. It is Romanian parties of so-called ‘radical return’ who assert the legacy of interwar fascism (Shafir, 2000).

Legacies

What claims do the extreme-right parties make on the legacies of the inter-war period? With the exception of Romania, all the extreme-right parties are anti-communist, including relatively moderate Latvian TB/LNNK members who sympathise with the inter-war 'Thundercross'. Almost all extreme-right parties of Eastern Europe make a direct claim to the legacy of an inter-war fascist or pro-Nazi movement, all of which were strongly anti-communist. Fascist movements stood for the independence of the newly emerging states after the collapse of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires. The Baltic states were fighting for their independence vis-à-vis Russia (the Soviet Union). The Slovenian, Romanian and Hungarian extreme right turn nostalgia into the hope that territory lost during the turbulent history of the nineteenth/twentieth century may be regained. A quick look reveals that the extreme right has sought to expropriate the legacy of heroic struggles for national glory or independence.

The Baltic countries have been struggling with their interpretation of inter-war history, since some of the 'freedom fighters' that fought against the Soviet Union and for independence were linked to pro-Nazi-Germany fighting units. The Estonian fringe party ERKL (Estonian Central Union of Nationalists) claims to be the ideological successor of the pre-war Estonian Union of Freedom Fighters, which was a 'semi-fascist' organisation oriented towards the German Nazis (Poleshchuk, cited in Mudde, 2005, pp. 61–75). Similarly, the fringe Lithuanian Youth Union existed in the pre-war Republic of Lithuania (1933–1940) 'as a large and influential nationalistic organisation' (Kiaulakis, cited in Mudde, 2005, p. 134).

In Bulgaria, the relatively newly established extremist Attack does not claim any specific historical legacy. It is the moderate nationalistic right-wing party VMRO that claims to be a successor of the original VMRO in 1893. VMRO is active in Macedonia as well and calls for the unification of Macedonia and Bulgaria. One of the major goals of VMRO, as a nationalistic liberation movement in the nineteenth century, was to fight against Ottoman oppression.

In Hungary, MIÉP is a party that advocates the restoration of Hungary's borders before the Trianon treaty, which cut the territory of Hungary by one third. The Slovenian National Party is a nationalist party with irredentist tendencies going back to the 1848 programme of United Slovenia, which demanded the unification of Slovenian speaking areas.

In Poland, the leader of the League of Polish Families, Roman Giertych, reactivated the so called 'All Polish Youth' group which was active in the inter-war period. The organisation fought with the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*) in the Polish resistance movement in WWII. The League of Polish Families claims the tradition of the pre-war 'endecja' (National Democracy) which was in opposition to Pilsudski.

The Greater Romania Party seeks union with the Republic of Moldova. Greater Romania hopes to rehabilitate the reputation of the inter-war leader Marshal Ion Antonescu, who formed an alliance with Nazi Germany. In a similar vein, the leader of the Slovak National Party shocked the Czech side of the Czechoslovak Federal Parliament in 1990 when he claimed that the legacy of Tiso should be re-evaluated. Like Antonescu, Tiso, the president of WWII Slovakia, allied himself with Nazi Germany.

Given the strong anti-communist leaning of most extreme-right parties, it is not surprising that they take a strong position against the involvement of communist party members in public life. For example, in Hungary the parties are aligned according to their

positions on anti-communism and their opposition to issues such as abortion and homosexuality (Figure 1). The extremist MIÉP occupies the upper-right corner of the Voronoi diagram, which means that the party is extremely anti-communist and culturally conservative.

Governance and Corruption

If evaluation of the pre-communist and post-communist periods is a significant factor in extreme-right support, it is useful to know how Eastern Europeans perceive the communist period. After a decade of reforms, views of the present situation are disheartening (see Figure 2). The Czech Republic is the only case where the respondents view the communist economic system with a gloomy eye. Latvia, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Romania, Slovakia and Bulgaria think of the current economic system as worse than

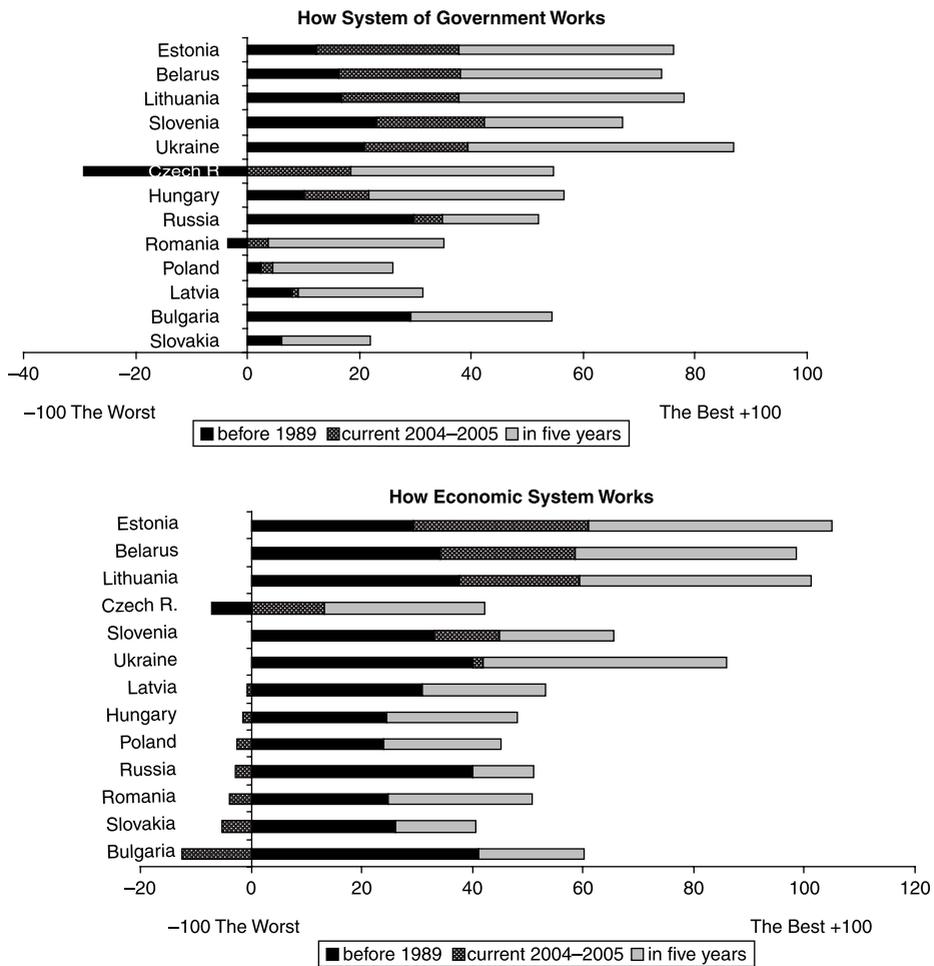


Figure 1. Evaluation of the system of government and economy (Source: NEB).

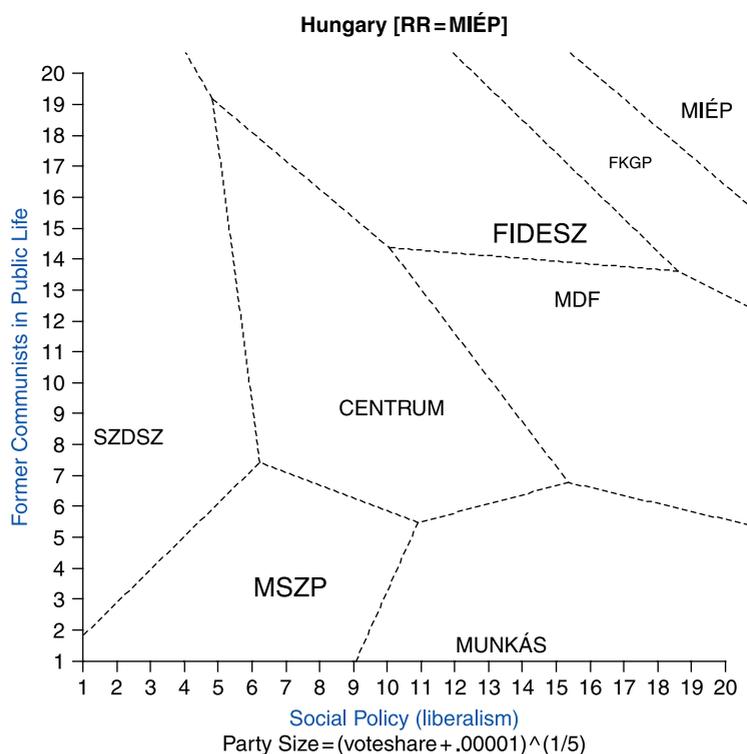


Figure 2. Positions of political parties' ties on two issue dimensions: social policy (abortions, gay rights) and former communists in public life, Hungary. Note this figure shows a division of the space into regions occupied by parties in Hungary. The size of the party label is proportional to the vote share of parties (using elections from 2001 to 2004). The graph was created using 'deldir' package in R. (Source: Expert Survey [Benoit & Laver, 2006].)

communist economic arrangements before 1989. The evaluation of the system of government is slightly more positive, but in many instances the communist and post-communist systems of government are viewed as a par (Rose, 2007).

Extreme-right voters think that corruption and the bribing of public officials is very prevalent. Compared to other voters, extreme-right voters have a low level of trust in the courts, in parties and in public officials. Regular elections, extreme-right voters believe, would not make politicians more accountable. This evidence suggests that support for the extreme right is associated with the non-accountability of political leaders and corruption (NEB). For example, 'the Great Romania Party gained impressive electoral results (28.4 per cent) in the 2000 parliamentary elections, campaigning against government corruption' (Anastasakis, 2001, p. 21).

Overall, support for the extreme right is strongly associated with the scale that measures the quality of democracy. Cross-national variation in the support for the extreme right cannot be explained by differential economic performance, immigration, unemployment, size of minorities and other such variables. However, national variations on the World Bank's Indicators of Governance show a correlation with extreme-right voting of -0.5 to -0.7 (WB, 2007). High shares of votes for the extreme right, in the period 2003–2006,

are associated with poor governance and weak rule of law. Figure 3 shows the relationship between the vote shares for the extreme right and the rule of law in individual countries.

The association between vote shares for extremists and the rule of law is stronger in the EU accession countries. Voters are more sensitive to changes in corruption levels and quality of governance in competitive democracies where politicians can be held accountable, which is the case in the EU accession countries. How does the rule of law relate to accession? Figure 4 shows the quality of governance in the EU member countries from 1996–2006. Most of the countries show improvement until 2003 (that is, until the first wave of enlargement in 2004). After 2003, there is no or limited improvement in the quality of government. It is harder to improve once countries attain respectable levels of governance, but the plateau is also due to the fact the EU lost effective leverage over these countries.

Indicators from other surveys even point to a deterioration of governance after enlargement. The Freedom House survey shows that there has been no improvement in corruption indicators for the new EU member states since 2000/2001, and that some countries are even sliding back (Freedom House, 2007). In 2008, Latvia was in crisis due to a series of corruption scandals (Financial Times, 2008). In January 2008, the OSCE pressured Fico’s government in Slovakia over the draft Press Act that curbs

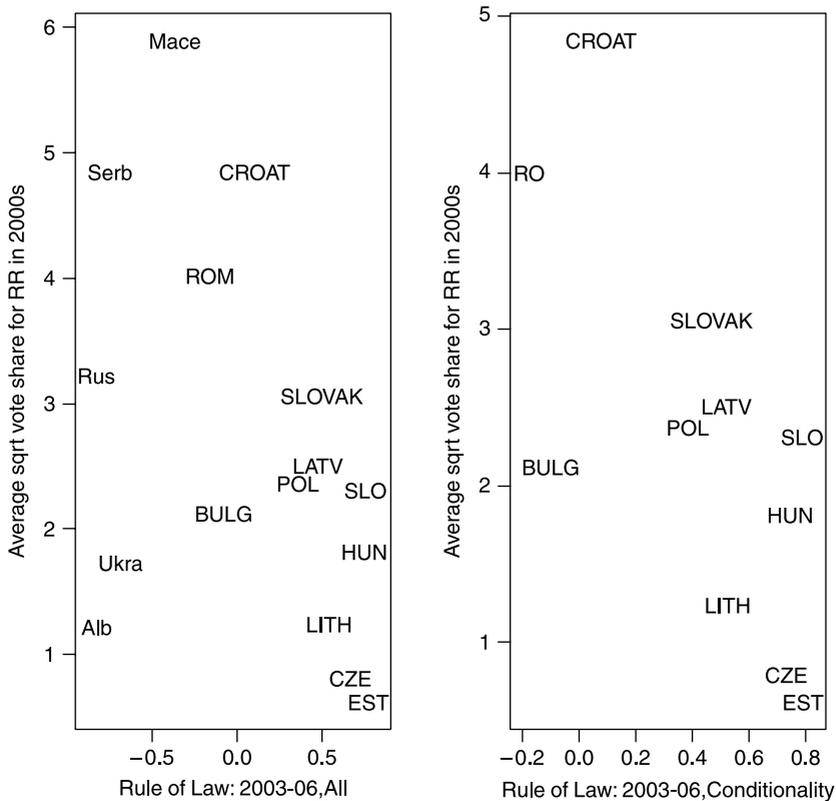


Figure 3. Votes for extreme right (RR) and the rule of law. (Source: Rule of law is from the World Bank Governance Indicators).

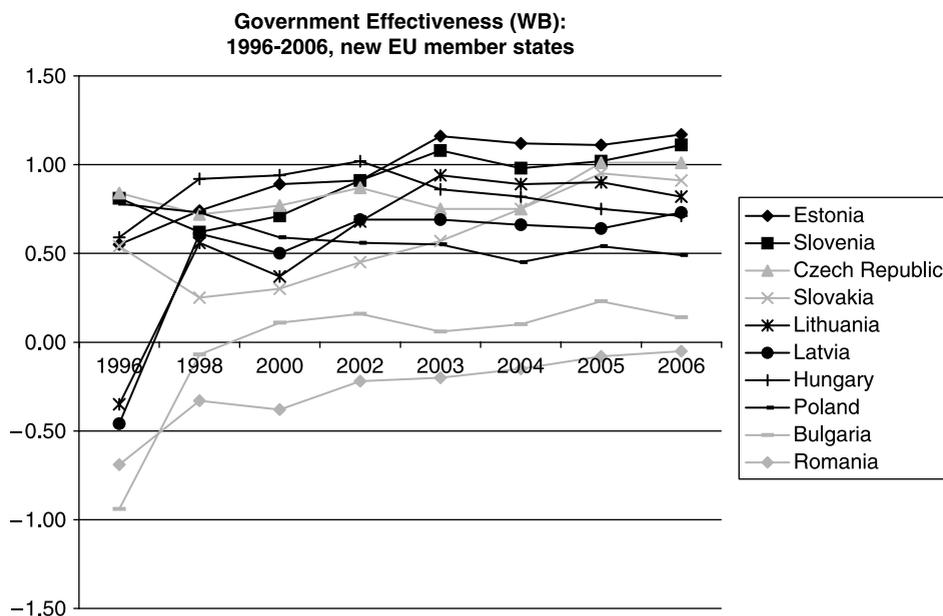


Figure 4. Quality of governance in the new EU member countries over time.

editorial autonomy of the media and asked the government to withdraw it (OSCE, 2008). A recent BTI country report highlighted the decline of political culture as one of the major problems of the Czech political leadership (Mansfeldova *et al.*, 2007). Reduction of economic crime was a precondition of Bulgaria's membership of the EU. One year after the accession not much has changed, and 'three streams of EU funding have been suspended because of apparent fraud' (BBC, 2008). One hundred days after Romania joined the EU, the parliament voted to impeach President Basescu. This was a 'payback for Mr. Basescu's unremitting fight against corruption' (Tismaneanu & Aligica, 2007).

What ties the accession process to support for the extreme right? The EU enlargement process has been very bureaucratic, and has homogenised the policy-making process because the national parliaments had to adopt the *acquis communautaires*. This diminished programmatic-oriented domestic party competition and constrained differentiation of parties on policy issues. Theories of spatial competition suggest that convergence of the two largest mainstream moderate parties on major domestic issues opens up space for the rise of extreme-right parties: 'extremist parties are likely to make a breakthrough when mainstream parties cluster around the center, and fail to pick up issues which are of growing voter appeal' (Eatwell, 2003, pp. 58–60). The political opportunity structure argument suggests that when the mainstream parties' programmes converge, then the political institutions are 'open' to rising parties.

The convergence of mainstream parties on major and important issues of political competition has taken place twice during the post-communist era. The convergence occurred first in the domain of economic reforms, and second in the domain of the EU accession process. Convergence on the core features of the liberal economy programme was

accomplished within the first five to ten years after transition (Kitschelt, 2006). The first ‘vacuum effect’ that shrunk the space for competition based on economic policies can be linked to the choice of developmental strategies after 1989. Policies of the Washington Consensus introducing free markets were adopted by all EU accession countries at a very fast pace. Benefits of policy certainty and predictability of economic strategies were translated into growth (Frye, 2002) and countries debated the distributive consequences and fairness of market reforms (Vanhuysse, 2006), yet at the same time the room for manoeuvre of political parties when it came to economic choices was constrained.

The European Union

The second convergence occurred on the issue of joining the European Union. According to the Benoit & Laver survey the issue of joining the EU was the single most important and salient issue of party competition in the region. During the accession process, policies were presented as necessary and ‘liberal elites left their societies with no acceptable way to protest or express dissatisfaction’ (Krastev, 2007, p. 58).

In order to probe into the mechanism of convergence, I looked at the policy positions towards the EU of the two non-extremist parties with the largest electoral share

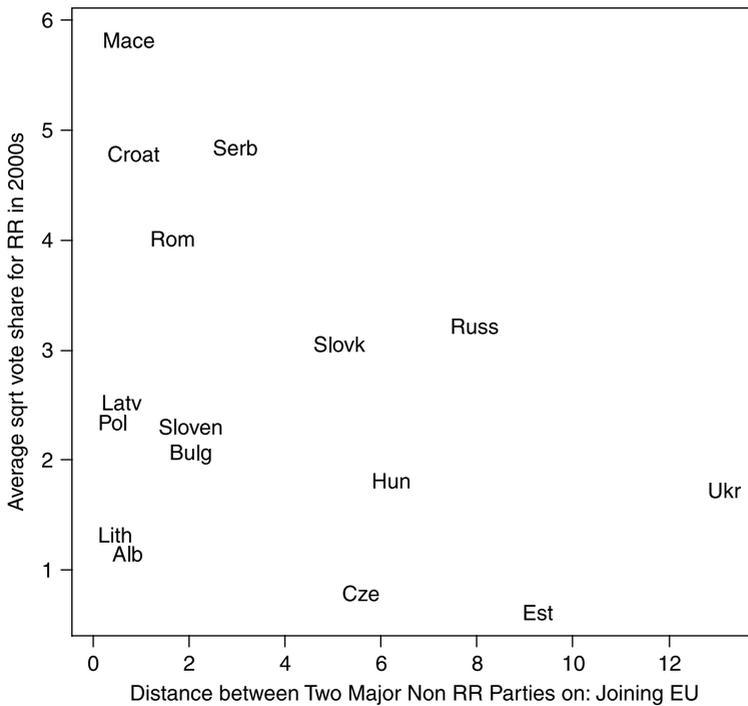


Figure 5. Votes for the extreme right and distance between two major non-extreme-right parties (non-RR) on the issue of joining the EU. Note that in Russia the policy question was asked about the ‘Relationship with the West.’ The vote shares and policy position for Albania were jittered slightly for clarity. The cases where the first or the second party was an extremist party (RR) and thus the third party position was used are: Croatia, Macedonia, Romania and Serbia.

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in a given country. Then I calculated the policy distance of these two major parties on the issue of joining the EU. The policy distance was correlated with the square root of the share of the vote for extremist parties in Eastern Europe.

Figure 5 demonstrates that the convergence of the two major moderate parties on the issue of joining the European Union correlates with the share of the vote obtained by extreme-right parties in Eastern Europe. Only votes in the years since 2000 were included, since policy convergence preceded voting for the extremists. Policy convergence of major non-extreme parties is associated with voting for the extreme right due to the 'vacuum' effect of accession.

Ukraine deserves special attention since it does not fit the pattern well. This can be attributed to two issues. First, Ukraine is a politically polarised country and the prospects of EU accession are so far murky. Second, the pro-Western 'orange bloc' parties already siphoned off a great deal of nationalistic rhetoric, which prevents a single extreme-right party from succeeding.

This is not to blame 'the EU' for the electoral success of the extreme right in Eastern Europe but the inevitable process of policy homogenisation that accompanied the accession. The EU had contributed to the improvement of minority protection in the Baltics (Kelley, 2004). In 'border' cases, such as Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria, the accession process facilitated improvements in political institutions and reform strategies (Vachudova, 2005). But unrealistic expectations about enlargement (Grzymala-Busse & Ines, 2003), and the end of conditionality leverage over the reduction of political corruption, in conjunction with the technocratic approach to the accession, led to the perception that there was a 'lack of alternatives.' The extreme right in Eastern Europe thrives if major mainstream political parties are indistinguishable and deliver packaged 'one size fits all' policies. Limited domestic, economic and foreign policy alternatives cultivate anti-establishment attitudes and politicians are viewed as being 'all the same.'

In this respect, the process of EU accession acted as a 'suction mechanism' that vacuumed the policy options of political parties in relation to enlargement. This made party competition on non-identity-based issues obsolete. The extreme-right parties focused on the alternative dimension of party competition based on ethnicity, cultural conservatism, moralistic and puritan anti-communist rhetoric bundled up with anti-corruption invective. The technocratic and bureaucratic process of EU accession, which has been accompanied by declining improvements in the quality of governance, contributed to a 'vacuum' effect in the policy space and led to party competition based on identity-based appeals such as ethnic hatred.

Conclusion

This paper had two goals. The first was to examine the classification of extreme-right parties in Eastern Europe based on an expert survey of parties. The result of the analysis was a congruent pattern of policy positions that characterises the extreme right: nationalism, cultural conservatism and anti-communism. Second, the cross-national analysis of party success suggests that research on the extreme right in the West that links the strength of extreme-right parties to anti-establishment attitudes and the convergence of parties on programmatic issues is a fruitful avenue for the study of the extreme right in the East as well. Crude measures of the size of ethnic minorities, inequality, unemployment,

levels of development and the structure of the economy cannot account for variation in the success of the extreme right in the East at the cross-national level. Eastern Europe has not experienced significant migration inflows since the end of World War II, so ethnic tensions are mostly expressed in historic terms, especially the inter-war period. Relatedly, anti-Semitism without Jews is a common phenomenon. The nascent literature on the extreme right in Eastern Europe suggests that efforts to identify a clear-cut socio-economic base for the extreme right may be futile.

The combination of non-accountable politicians in poorly governed, yet competitive, democracies, with the convergence of the major moderate parties on key issues, creates an environment conducive for the success of the extreme right. Convergence was facilitated by the 'vacuum effect' of EU accession, which homogenised policy positions. Other large-scale events may also produce the same 'suction effect,' diminishing differences among party policy positions on major issues. The current unrest in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia and Romania, and the recent resignation of the Hungarian and Czech prime ministers due to the economic crisis signal difficult times. IMF conditionality aimed at overcoming global economic challenges may generate the same 'vacuum' effect on policy-making in the future, producing another window of opportunity for the extreme right in Eastern Europe.

Acknowledgements

An earlier version of this paper was presented at Duke University, 2007 ('Frontiers of Comparative Politics'); at the Institute of Sociology, Prague, 2007 ('Missing Links? Citizenship, Civil Society & Political Parties in European Constitutional Politics'); at the ISA Conference 2008; and the ASN Conference 2008. I wish to thank the participants of the conferences. I wish to thank, for comments along the way: Mariya Chelova, Cristina Cordoneanu-Huci, Grzegorz Ekiert, Barbara Franz, Anna Grzymala-Busse, Miroslav Mares, Zdenka Mansfeldova, Judith Kelley, Herbert Kitschelt, Zdislaw Krasnodebski, David Ost, Petra Rakusanova, Sonia Alonso, Michael Shafir, David Siroky, Philippe Schmitter, John Stevens, Milada Vachudova, Eric Weaver and two anonymous reviewers.

Notes

- ¹ Pop-Eleches (2004) finds that extremists and nationalists benefit where mainstream parties avoid nationalism, since the extremists move to the open issue space
- ² The quest for new purity radicalised the right in Poland and led to the 'resurrection of the former communist parties in Lithuania, Romania and Bulgaria' (Tismaneau, 2007, p. 38).
- ³ In the 'secret' speech of spring 2006, the Prime Minister of Hungary Gyurcsány admitted that his government had no maneuvering space in economic policy-making.
- ⁴ The list of parties can be found at: <http://web.duke.edu/~lbs11/research/appendixJCES.pdf>
- ⁵ The extreme-right parties were often members of the umbrella anti-communist movements or alliances of parties, which could have reduced their tractable vote share.
- ⁶ The extreme-right parties are often Eurosceptic (or Eurorealist) and they have often opposed the enlargement (Minkenberg & Perrineau, 2007; see also: Kopecky & Mudde, 2002, 2003; Markowski & Tucker, 2006; Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2004).
- ⁷ Interview with Rafael Rataj, SNS headquarters, Bratislava, Slovakia, summer of 2007.

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