Introduction

The focus of this paper is domestic political attitudes to the European Union in the Slovak Republic, with special reference to party political stances. However, it will approach the topic from a somewhat unaccustomed perspective. Rather than viewing Slovakia as, politically, a somewhat exceptional case among the ten post-communist candidates for EU membership, it will instead use the Slovak Republic to illustrate some general points about party politics and EU accession in the post-communist world.

The concept of Slovak exceptionalism derives largely from the European Commission's July 1997 *avis* (opinions) on the applications from Central and East European countries (CEECs) for membership of the European Union. It was here that the Commission, in its *Agenda 2000: For a stronger and wider Union*, expressed the damning view that 'only one applicant State – Slovakia – does not satisfy the political conditions laid down by the European Council in Copenhagen'.[1] This judgement entailed severe short to medium term disadvantage for Slovakia, since the Commission simultaneously established the principle that the political criteria for membership had to be satisfied *before* accession negotiations commenced, while it was sufficient if states were in a position to satisfy the remaining conditions in the medium term (normally understood to mean between one and five years).[2] However, Slovakia's exclusion from accession negotiations was always liable to be a temporary affair, since Vladimír Mečiar's third government (1994-1998) was highly unlikely to survive the September 1998 parliamentary elections. The country's failure to 'pass' the EU's democratic test in 1997 was, in fact, largely a matter of unfortunate timing: Romania and Bulgaria had only scraped through (with an extremely tentative wording stating that they were 'on the way' to satisfying the political criteria) because they were fortunate enough to have had elections replacing their anti-reform governments in late 1996 and early 1997 respectively. Once a more reform-minded government came to power in Slovakia in October 1998, the way was clear to its starting accession negotiations in February 2000, and the EU's increasing emphasis on the principle of 'differentiation' (i.e. judging each candidate country according to the actual progress it was making) from late 1999 onwards also provided Slovakia with the chance still to accede to the EU in the first wave of eastern enlargement.

With Mečiar's departure from government, Slovakia therefore ceased to be an exceptional case, and obtained the status of a leading candidate in the second group to start negotiations, which might or might not catch up with the first group, largely depending on when eastern enlargement actually took place. This fact enables us to view Slovakia from the point of view of some general propositions regarding post-communist party politics and the struggle for EU membership. In many respects, its midway position in the 'regatta', hot on the tail of countries such as the Czech Republic, make it an extremely good illustration of such ideas.

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[1] European Commission, 'Agenda 2000: For a stronger and wider Union', *Bulletin of the European Union*, Supplement 5/97, p. 42

[2] *Ibid.,* p. 57.

The propositions which will be examined are the following:

1. In post-communist states, attitudes towards the EU correlate with general cleavages within the party system to a greater extent than in Western Europe. Reservations about EU membership are a reflection of general resistance to modernisation and post-communist economic reform. They are more prevalent among demographic groups which can be defined as 'transition losers': the older, the less educated, the more rural and the more conservative.

2. Pro-EU attitudes reflect a symbolic adherence to the notion of a 'return to Europe' which assumes that the demands of EU membership are merely a blueprint for returning countries to the position they would have been in if they had not been subjected to communist rule, rather than entailing the external imposition from the west of alien norms. Opposition to EU membership is hence most prevalent among citizens who have alternative images of what their country would have been like had it been able to follow an indigenously determined path in the second half of the twentieth century.

3. As the EU accession process develops, it is increasingly possible to differentiate between 'hard' and 'soft' euroscepticism. In East Central Europe, the former encompasses parties or party factions hostile to the EU, while the latter embraces politicians who outwardly subscribe to the goal of EU membership, while subordinating this to pragmatic domestic political considerations.

While examination of these general propositions, illustrated by the Slovak case, will raise a wide range of interesting issues, it will also tend towards one rather awkward conclusion for the 'Opposing Europe' project: namely, that the fundamentally different symbolic and practical significance of the European Union as a political phenomenon in post-communist candidate states profoundly affects the comparative party politics of euroscepticism to the point where it is hard to establish any meaningful propositions valid for both the western and more eastern parts of Europe. This does not, however, of itself invalidate the exercise. The value of comparative research is less any intrinsic ability to define common features, and more its utility in generating frameworks for understanding difference.

Furthermore, understanding difference is of crucial importance in the study of European integration. A second conclusion which emerges from various considerations in this paper is that the role of potential – and, in due course, actual - EU membership in post-communist party systems is dynamic and prone to more rapid change than in other European states. This is fairly easily explained by the fact that Europe's new democracies aspire to join the EU at a time when their party systems (and, indeed, many other aspects of their social and economic transition) are still in a state of flux. This has not been the case either with existing members, or with the remaining potential members (which range from highly advanced and prosperous states such as Norway and Switzerland, to far less stable polities such as Cyprus and Turkey). As a consequence of this, mapping the 'special effect' of the EU issue in post-communist states at the present

point in time will enable us also to monitor any progression in converging with 'normal' patterns of party politics.

1. The 'EU cleavage' in post-communist party politics

Understanding the importance of the EU in domestic politics

The first proposition is that 'Europe', as embodied by the European Union, has a different function in the CEECs and in western Europe both qualitatively and quantitatively. By 'qualitative function', I understand the symbolic importance of EU membership in the domestic politics of post-communist states. Here, the CEECs are *subjects,* who react, both rationally and emotively, to the vision provided by the member states of the European Union. By 'quantitative function', I understand the actual influence which the demands (policies) of the EU member states have on political actors within the CEECs. Here, the CEECs are clearly *objects*, whose behaviour is modified by the exigencies of the EU accession process. My central argument is that in the stage of applying for EU membership, and in the very early stages of the actual accession process, the qualitative influence of the EU has corresponded to the major party political cleavage in the Slovak Republic. In more advanced stages of the accession process, as will be examined in Section 3 of this paper, the quantitative dimension of EU influence begins to affect the behaviour of party political actors, and their own political self-definition.

In understanding the qualitative influence of the European Union on the CEECs, the centrality of the EU accession issue to their politics must first be understood. For new democracies, it embodies a different set of symbols than in states that were consolidated democracies when they joined (or, in the case of Greece, Portugal and Spain, democracies that were confidently consolidating, but at least had established market economies). The notion of a 'return to Europe' – which was, in Czechoslovakia, a powerful election slogan in the free elections of 1990 – is for post-communist states a package which rejects communist legacies in the political, economic and social fields. Czechoslovakia signed its Europe Agreement in December 1991, and the EU was influential as an embodiment of 'Europe' in early Slovak discourse on independence. When the Christian Democrat leader Ján Čarnogurský, who served as Slovak prime minister from April 1991 to June 1992, wrote of the European Community in October 1990, he stated famously that

> When we hear from everyone that there is only one chair waiting for the Republic (*Czechoslovakia – K.H.*) in the European Union, then the Christian Democratic Movement's answer is that we want to gain for the Republic two chairs, and on the European flag two stars, so that Slovakia has its own chair and its own star.[3]

It is perhaps significant that Čarnogurský in this period had such a sketchy understanding of the European Community that he had assumed that its flag's twelve stars represented the (then twelve) member states. Yet it is far more important that he also assumed that it embodied the 'Europe' to which his people aspired to return. Joining the European

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[3] Ján Čarnogurský, 'O národnej línii'*, Slovenský denník,* 12 October 1990, reprinted in Ján Čarnogurský, *Videné od Dunaja* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 1997), p. 224.

Union was not perceived as entailing adaptation to externally imposed norms, nor, primarily, as bringing the material advantages of acceding to the most powerful organisation in Europe. It was generally viewed rather romantically as the country's return to a natural condition, which had, implicitly been stolen from it by Soviet-imposed communist rule.[4] It was, quite simply, the future, into which Slovakia had been projected as an independent actor. The EU was a safe framework where little Slovakia might for the first time in its history become secure and viable independent.

One consequence of the perception of EU membership as a return to normality is that when EU candidates discuss the EU, they tend to discuss themselves. EU issues - at least initially – are viewed as relating solely to enlargement, and academic literature tends to concentrate in the candidate state's 'achievements' in preparing for membership. As negotiations proceed, however, writing in the CEECs begins to concentrate more heavily on analysing the complexity of EU institutions and decision-making procedures, while enlargement-based research begins serious analysis of the minutiae of contentious issues relating to transition periods.[5] The candidate countries cease to be subjects marching back to Europe, and become more clearly objects of existing member states' demands, justified concerns, neuroses and domestic political power games. Once they are members themselves, they will settle down as regular players in team games in which conflicting interests are contested and negotiated. However, we can only at this stage speculate on the effects this final membership phase will have on party attitudes to the European Union in the CEECs.

Issue dimensions and EU membership

It is a feature of many EU member states – such as the United Kingdom - that the EU issue is a cross-cutting cleavage, which divides, for example, parties of both left and right. Taggart and Szczerbiak have indeed presented the proposition that 'a party's position on the left-right spectrum is not correlated with whether it is Eurosceptical or not'.[6] The left-right dimension of party politics therefore serves as a starting point for analysing the difference of post-communist party systems. One consequence of the centrality of EU membership to the aspirations of the CEECs is that attitudes to the EU correlate with party allegiance to a far greater extent than in most other countries. Tables 1 and 2 show that this can be illustrated by the Slovak party system, where supporters of the parties which formed the third Mečiar government were consistently more eurosceptic than those of the government coalition which assumed power in October 1998.[7]   (In reading these tables, it should be noted that, while general support for EU

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[4] This is somewhat reminiscent of the Czech author Milan Kundera's notion of the 'captured west'.

[5] For example, in the Czech Republic, which began negotiations in spring 1999, a journal dedicated to EU issues entitled *Integrace* was published from the beginning of 2000, and the monthly *Mezinárodní politika* features a supplement on the EU, republishing original documents.

[6] Paul Taggart & Aleks Szczerbiak, 'Parties, Positions and Europe': Euroscepticism in the EU Candidate States of Central and Eastern Europe', paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Political Studies Association, Manchester, April 10-12 2001.

[7] The statistics in the tables below, which come from surveys conducted by FOCUS agency (1996) and the Institute for Public Affairs (2000), do not differ substantially from those collated by the Slovak Statistical Office on the basis of a March 1999 survey (*Názory,* Vol. 10, No. 1, 1999, p. 18). The major difference is

membership in Slovakia has increased over the last five years, the precise question posed in 2000 is generally more likely to obtain a positive response than that asked in 1996.)

Table 1

November 1996: how respondents would vote in a referendum on EU membership if it were held next weekend, according to declared party preference (in per cent)

Party preference	'Yes'	'No'
Parties of October 1998 govt.		
Parties of the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK) in 1998 elections		
Democratic Party (DS)	*84*	*3*
Democratic Union (DU)	*79*	*0*
Christian Democratic Movement (KDH)	*76*	*7*
Hungarian Coalition (MK)	66	2
Party of the Democratic Left (SDĽ)	60	11
Parties of December 1994 govt.		
Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS)	49	26
Workers' Association of Slovakia (ZRS)	45	15
Slovak National Party (SNS)	40	26
Others		
Non-voters/undecided	46	8
Average for Slovakia	**57**	**11**

N.B. 32 per cent of respondents overall said that they would not participate in such a referendum, or did not know how they would vote.

Source: Politická scéna na Slovensku November 1996 (Bratislava: FOCUS, 1996), p. 8.

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that the latter data shows lower levels of support for supporters of SNS and HZDS. However, it should be noted that IPA statistics from June 1999 show similar, lower levels of support among the opposition parties' adherents.

Table 2

August 2000: whether respondents support Slovakia's entry into the European Union, according to declared party preference (in per cent)

Party preference	'Yes or probably yes'	'No or probably no'
Parties of October 1998 govt.		
Parties of the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK) in 1998 elections		
Slovak Democratic Coalition/Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKU)	*96*	*4*
Christian Democratic Movement (KDH)	*79*	*11*
Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK)	88	5
Party of Civic Understanding (SOP)	83	3
Party of the Democratic Left (SDĽ)	81	5
Parties of December 1994 govt.		
Slovak National Party (SNS)	73	23
Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS)	52	40
Others		
Direction (Smer)	80	14
Average for Slovakia	**72**	**19**

N.B. Only 9 per cent of respondents said they did not know.

Source:Zora Bútorová, Oľga Gyárfášová, Marián Velšic, 'Verejná mienka', in Miroslav Kollár & Grigorij Mesežnikov, Slovensko 2000: Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti (Bratislava: Inštitút pre verejné otázky, 2000), p. 315.

In presenting these tables, party supporters have been arranged according to the government in which the relevant parties participated. This has been done in order to remove some of the confusion occasioned by the fact that the Slovak party system is still in flux. However, although parties have fractured, merged, and made strategic decisions about which parties would stand together as coalitions on a single list of candidates in

Slovakia's PR-based parliamentary elections, in the post-1994 period it was highly unusual even for individual politicians – let alone parties - to cross the divide between government and opposition around which Slovak society had polarised.[8] Consequently, the fact that in both 1996 and 2000 there is a clear pattern whereby all parties of the third Mečiar government were consistently supported by more eurosceptic voters than those of the post-1998 Dzurinda government is highly significant.   However, it must be emphasised that what is being suggested by these tables is not that EU membership is a defining issue in determining party support in Slovakia, but rather that it correlates with other factors which underlie voting choices.

This may logically be explained by examining the literature on party cleavages in post-communist Europe, most notably with regard to confusion about the meaning of the terms 'left' and 'right'.   Herbert Kitschelt, in a seminal article on 'The Formation of Party Systems in East Central Europe' published in 1992, presented the expectation that

> Unlike West European party systems, all East European party systems will be centred around a promarket/libertarian versus antimarket/authoritarian axis. In contrast, West European party systems in the late twentieth century tend to be oriented toward an antimarket/libertarian versus promarket/authoritarian axis.[9]

Although, in the course of almost a decade, this initial hypothesis has been tested by substantial empirical analysis of party cleavages in the post-communist world,[10] it still serves, in its initial, simplified, form, to explain many underlying attitudes to the EU in the CEECs.

The terms 'left' and 'right' do not, in the new democracies, encompass the same set of values as in western Europe.[11]   In the EU candidate states, they tend to be used in a narrow, economic sense.   However, 'right-wing' support for marketisation of the economy is here a reformist stance which tends to correlate with tolerant, liberal views on inclusive citizenship and individual rights.   'Left-wing' support of the collective, egalitarian economic *status quo* inherited from the communist past is, on the other hand, a fundamentally conservative trait, which generally correlates with a simplistic, authoritarian outlook that also aspires to collective adherence to a single definition of national identity and social norms.

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[8] This contrasts notably with the period immediately following independence in 1993 and 1994. See Karen Henderson, 'The Slovak Republic', in Bogdan Szajkowski, *Political Parties of Eastern Europe, Russia and the Successor States* (Harlow: Longman, 1994), pp. 525-55.

[9] Herbert Kitschelt, 'The Formation of Party Systems in East Central Europe', in *Politics and Society,* Vol. 20, No. 1, 1992, p. 20.

[10] See, for example, Herbert Kitschelt, Zdenka Mansfeldova, Radoslaw Markowski, Gábor Toká, *Post-Communist Party Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Geoffrey Evans and Stephen Whitefield, 'The Structuring of Political Cleavages in Post-Communist Societies: the Case of the Czech Republic and Slovakia', *Political Studies,* Vol. 46, No. 1, 1998, pp. 115-39.

[11] For more discussion of this point, see Radoslaw Markowski, 'Political Parties and Ideological Spaces in East Central Europe', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies,* Vol. 30, No. 3, 1997, pp. 221-54.

This dichotomy of attitudes in the post-communist states coincides rather neatly with the EU's Copenhagen criteria, against which these countries have been systematically judged both in the European Commission's 1997 *avis* and in its subsequent progress reports in the autumns of 1998, 1999 and 2000. These criteria are therefore worth reciting precisely:

> Membership requires that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union. Membership presupposes the candidate's ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.[12]

The first, political, Copenhagen criterion demands precisely those libertarian attitudes which ensure human rights and protection of minorities and counter the conservative and authoritarian assumption of social homogeneity. The second, economic, Copenhagen criterion emphasises the need to accelerate the reform of old communist structures that do not respond to the market and the need for competition. The ability to assume the obligations of membership, which is the third Copenhagen criterion, represents the demand that candidate states should not only harmonise their legislation to that of the EU, but also implement their new legislation. This ability is, in essence, a logical consequence of capacity to respect the rule of law (in all the complexity this entails, including institutionalised respect for individual rights), combined with legal competence in rapidly driving forward the massive transformation of economic relations necessary to make a clean break with the communist past, where central control of the economy was a crucial element of monolithic state power.

What is important here is that the EU makes demands of candidate states which coincide with the aims of parties at the 'pro-market/libertarian' end of the axis around which Kitschelt predicted that East European party systems would centre. Likewise, the EU is measuring the progress of the CEECs according to criteria inherently likely to provoke some resistance from parties clustered around the 'anti-market/authoritarian' end of the same axis. This begins to account for the clear difference of attitude towards the EU shown by the supporters of the various Slovak political parties.

The primacy of economics in the EU debate

In addition, post-communist societies have tended not only to reduce their understanding of left and right to the purely economic dimension of politics; they also tend to view EU membership primarily in economic terms. The European Commission's *Eurobarometer* data indicates that, in the candidate countries as a whole, 'private business' is the group thought most likely to gain as ties with the EU become closer, while low income groups, farmers, manual workers and state enterprises are considered least likely to gain and most

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[12] Council of the European Union, *Presidency Conclusions: Copenhagen European Council* (Brussels, 1993).

likely to lose out.[13] In 1998, Slovak responses did not diverge significantly from the CEEC average, with 61 per cent of respondents believing private enterprise would gain, but only 32 per cent that low income groups would benefit.[14]

Domestic Slovak polls conducted by the Slovak Statistical Office confirm these findings. When asked in February 2000 about the advantages of Slovak membership of the EU, four of the five most commonly mentioned advantages related to economic factors: 'overall gain for Slovakia's economic development' – 41 per cent; 'financial aid for Slovakia from EU countries' – 23 per cent; 'strengthening of Slovakia's international position' – 23 per cent; 'new employment opportunities in Slovakia' – 22 per cent; 'higher standard of living for the Slovak population' - 21 per cent.[15] When compared with survey data from June 1995, it was notable that the belief in the economic advantages had increased substantially, while the only non-economic benefit frequently cited – strengthening Slovakia's international position – had been mentioned by more respondents (32 per cent) in 1995. This suggests that, as the symbolic importance of EU membership declines, the economic benefits are even more in the forefront of the public's perceptions.

Economic considerations also prevailed when Slovaks were asked in the same survey about the disadvantages of EU membership. 'Further price rises' were mentioned by 29 per cent of respondents; 'increased financial demands on Slovakia's budget' by 28 per cent; and 'ownership of economically important Slovak enterprises by foreign businesspeople' by 21 per cent. In comparison, 23 per cent mentioned 'the need for subordination to the EU's legal system', and 20 per cent 'a certain limitation of state sovereignty'.[16]

In terms of correlation between party political support and the perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of EU membership, the picture from the Slovak Statistical Office's survey is less clear. One might expect supporters of the post-1998 government to be more strongly convinced of the economic advantages of the EU than those of the third Mečiar government.   Interestingly, however, HZDS supporters appear less convinced of the general advantages for Slovakia of EU membership, but equally likely to mention factors contributing to personal economic advantage, such as 'new employment possibilities' and 'opportunities for our citizens to work in an EU country'.[17] Also, many of the possible economic disadvantages of EU membership are actually mentioned more often by supporters of the post-1998 government. It may tentatively be suggested that demographic factors play a role here. HZDS supporters, while politically reserved about EU, generally feel more threatened by the risk of unemployment; and supporters of the post-1998 government, being generally more highly educated, have a more complex ability to analyse possible negative consequences of membership.

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[13] 62 per cent of respondents thought private business would gain, as opposed to 34 per cent for low income groups, 36 per cent for farmers, 37 per cent for manual workers and 38 per cent for state enterprises. European Commission, *Central and Eastern Eurobarometer No. 8,* March 1998, Annex figure 40.
[14] *Ibid.,* Annex figure 49.
[15] *Názory,* Vol. 11, No. 1, 2000, p. 13.
[16] *Ibid.,* 15.
[17] *Ibid.,* p. 14.

The demography of EU support

This leads on to the final reason why attitudes to EU membership correlate with voting intentions in post-communist states. It is possible to construct general profiles of 'transition winners' and 'transition losers' in post-communist society: the changes tend to have benefited the younger and more highly educated, and to have disadvantaged rural dwellers and women. EU membership is particularly attractive for the 'transition winners' who look to the future, while there are greater reservations among 'transition losers' who are nostalgic about the past. The last *Eurobarometer* statistics from 1998 showed that if a referendum on EU membership were to be held 'tomorrow', 77 per cent of those with higher education would vote in favour, as opposed to 45 per cent of those with elementary education (more of whom simply had no view on the matter).[18] This is entirely in line with Slovak surveys about support for EU membership. For example, an Institute for Public Affairs survey from March 2000 showed that membership was supported by 58 per cent of respondents with basic education, but 89 per cent of those with higher education; by 79 per cent of those in the age group 18-24, but only 55 per cent of those aged 60 and above; and by 74 per cent of men, but only 66 per cent of women.[19]

What is of import here is that a similar demographic profile appears to underlie electoral choice in Slovakia. In 1998, the more rural,[20] older and less educated voters[21] were more likely to opt for HZDS, as opposed to the supporters of the post-1998 government. Similar findings also emerged at the time of the 1994 parliamentary elections.[22]

The pattern which is emerging of EU support and its correlation with electoral choices and demographic characteristics is radically different from that found in existing member states. Marks and Wilson, in their analysis of responses to European integration in the current states of the EU, noted that 'it is not obvious to most citizens where their economic interests lie on the issue of European integration', and that 'the social bases of support and opposition to European integration are indistinct'.[23] The same is not true either within the candidate states as a whole, or within Slovakia. In the post-communist world, party allegiance, economic interests and demographic profiles show a much neater 'fit'. Furthermore, political parties are less likely to be placed in the dilemma experienced by west European parties who have different views on economic integration and on political integration. This is because the EU is perceived in this part of Europe to be largely of economic import, and also because EU-compatible views on questions of economic and political reform tend to be found as a pair in the CEECs.

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[18] European Commission (1998), *op. cit.,* Annex figure 88.

[19] www.ivo.sk/showvyskum.asp?Id=66

[20] Vladimír Krivý, Čo prezrádujú volebné výsledky: Parlamentné voľby 1992-1998 (Bratislava: Inštitút pre verejné otázky, 1999).

[21] Oľga Gyárfášová & Miroslav Kúska. 'The Development of Voting Preferences and Voting Behaviour', in Martin Bútora, Grigorij Mesežnikov, Zora Bútorová, Sharon Fisher (eds*.), The 1998 Parliamentary Elections and Democratic Rebirth in Slovakia* (Bratislava: Institute for Public Affairs, 1999), pp. 221-32.

[22] *Názory,* Vol. 5, No. 4, 1994, pp. 6-7.

[23] Gary Marks & Carol J. Wilson, 'The Past in the Present: A Cleavage Theory of Party Response to European Integration', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 30, pp. 433-59.

However, this situation is inherently unlikely to continue long-term after actual accession. Indeed, even the complexities of the later stages of accession negotiations can derail the link between the general thrust of economic reform in a post-communist society and attitudes to the EU, as politicians – and, in time, also publics – begin more intensively to address specific issues of national economic self-interest.

2. Euroscepticism or Europhobia?

The second proposition is that in the CEECs, pro-EU attitudes reflect an underlying assumption that the process of acquiring EU membership represents a return to the position they would have been in if they had not been subjected to communist rule, so that the EU's conditions are not viewed as the external imposition of alien norms. Opposition to EU membership is therefore most likely among those who believe their states would somehow have been different from western Europe if they had been able to determine their own fate in the second half of the twentieth century. It is also likely among citizens who do not distance themselves from the legacy of the communist period, and who consequently also do not implicitly accept the western model.

The argument here is that what we are dealing with is not so much 'euroscepticism' of the type found in current EU member states, but rather a form of 'europhobia' specific to post-communist societies. It relates primarily to western Europe in general, for which the EU is regarded as a symbol, but not specifically to the institutions of the European Union. The word 'phobia' has been chosen as it represents a fear of the unknown. In identifying the underlying causes of reservations towards the EU, a crucial distinction between parties is not whether they are left or right, but rather whether their visions are forward-looking or backward-looking. Three elements can be distinguished among these competing visions.

Nationalism and national identity

Examining 'europhobic' elements in opposition to EU membership is complicated by the fact that half of the CEECs are new states who have embarked on the task of establishing their own statehood at the same time as discarding the communist political and economic system. Grabbe and Hughes noted that levels of support for EU membership appeared lower in newly established states, which might reflect the experience of having recently left a federation.[24] However, it should be noted that they were commenting on data from the 1997 *Eurobarometer*, while in the 1998 *Eurobarometer*, the correlation was far less

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[24] Heather Grabbe & Kirsty Hughes, 'Central and east European views on EU enlargement: political debates and public opinion', in Karen Henderson, *Back to Europe: Central and Eastern Europe and the European Union* (London: UCL Press, 1999), pp. 185-202. See also discussion of this point in Taggart & Szczerbiak (2001), *op. cit.*

clear.[25]   It seems more likely that communist and post-communist experiences correlate with attitudes to the EU in a more complex fashion. Public opinion in Romania and Poland have been most unreservedly pro-EU, but this primarily reflects their particularly negative views of pre-1989 experiences (Ceauşescu and Russian domination respectively), and little similarity can be found in the actual attitudes to the post-communist reform process among party elites of the two countries. The three Baltic states show least support for the EU because of a high level of indecision. The Czech Republic appears little better than the Baltic states, but here it is notable that some – like Václav Klaus and his party colleagues – may be deemed truly eurosceptic, since they possess reservations about the EU as such which display neither phobic doubts about the country's belonging to western Europe, nor nostalgia for communism.[26] In addition, the Czech Republic – as the only 'new state' among the CEECs which was the dominant element in a federation – has had less overt need to establish its own statehood on discarding its federal partner, and was therefore excluded above from the 'half' – i.e. five – EU candidates who have been confronted with this task.[27]

In examining europhobia in Slovakia, a particular consideration must be borne in mind when examining the influence of Slovakia's independence, which was gained only at the beginning of 1993. It differs markedly from Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania because the struggle for independence did not take place simultaneously with the transition from communist rule. Nationalism and rejection of communism did not, therefore, go hand in hand. Consequently, the party constellation of europhobia in Slovakia embraces elements which will be found in different combinations throughout the CEECs. Its party system in some respects bears most resemblance to that of Bulgaria and Romania, since their 1995 applications to join the EU were all submitted by governments led by 'soft eurosceptic' parties (see below) which had in common the fact that they were by far the largest single parties in their country (HZDS, Bulgarian Socialist Party, Party of Social Democracy of Romania); that they had nationalist undertones; and that they contained large numbers of ex-communists. The major difference between Slovakia on the one hand and Bulgaria and Romania on the other was in the strength and the level of sophistication of the opposition, which in Slovakia – with its higher standard of living and greater proximity to the west – proved far more able to 'catch up' in the race for EU membership when it gained power in a subsequent election.   It has been suggested by some authors that Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania have similarities in contemporary politics because all contain ethnic minorities of around ten per cent.[28]

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[25] In 1997, the 10 CEECs were placed in the following order (with strongest support for EU membership first): Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia. (European Commission, *Central and Eastern Eurobarometer No. 7,* March 1987, p. 36). In 1998, the order had changed slightly, but significantly for the conclusion on attitudes for new states: Romania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia. (European Commission (1998), *op. cit.,* Annex Figure 32.

[26] See, for example, *Manifest českého eurorealismu (dokument k ideové konferenci ODS)*, April 2001, www.ods.cz

[27] It is, however, increasingly being argued that the Czechs have problems with an ethnically exclusive concept of citizenship now that they are living in a state with a high degree of ethnic homogeneity.

[28] See, for example, Michael Carpenter, 'Slovakia and the Triumph of National Populism', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 205-20; Milada Vachudova & Tim Snyder, 'Are Transitions

However, in terms of elite development it may be more significant that the minorities concerned are former imperial rulers.

Nation-building is a particularly important influence in Slovak politics, since its party system throughout most of the 1990s appeared to be divided according to a nationalist cleavage, whereby two left-right party spectra were 'mirror images' of each other. This was best illustrated by looking at party links to the west. In the mid-1990s, many influential Slovak political scientists attempted to analyse the party system by use of the terms 'non-standard' and 'standard' parties.[29] The parties of the third Mečiar government – the dominant HZDS, the Slovak National Party, and the far-left Workers' Association of Slovakia – were deemed 'non-standard', whereas the opposition comprised 'standard' parties. Attempts to define what was meant by these terms tended to boil down to the fact that the opposition parties were members of international party organisations such as the European Democratic Union, the Socialist International or the Liberal International, while the 'non-standard' parties did not have partners in the west.[30] It was pointed out at the time in the Slovak press that the Slovak National Party and the Workers' Association of Slovakia were merely extremist parties, which did in fact have (albeit marginalized) equivalents in western Europe.[31] The use of the 'standard' and 'non-standard' terminology declined in the late 1990s, as political scientists realised that this was, in fact, 'non-standard' terminology which failed to correspond with the mainstream analysis of political cleavages used elsewhere.[32] However, it succeeded in producing a sensitivity to the issue of foreign links among the then governing parties, which was not always positive, as in the case of the Slovak National Party inviting Le Pen to visit Bratislava.

More importantly, this largely discarded attempt to explain the Slovak party system highlights the centrality of the issue of Slovakia's 'belonging' in the international community in political discourse, which is of relevance to discussion of views of the European Union. The internationalism of one part of the political spectrum inevitably emphasises the nationalism of the other part. Slovak nationalism frequently appears aggressive, particularly with regard to the Hungarian and Roma minorities. Arguably, however, it is largely defensive in nature, being a reaction against a history of external suppression.[33] Slovakia has had no 'golden age' in its history to which it can look back, and this affects national self-confidence. In dealings with the EU, Slovaks – unlike the Poles, Czechs and Hungarians – never attempt to suggest that they have virtues from

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Transitory? Two types of political change in Eastern Europe since 1989', *East European Politics and Society*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1997, pp. 1-35.

[29] See, for examples, many contributions in Soňa Szomolányi, Grigorij Mesežnikov (eds), *Slovakia Parliamentary Elections 1994* (Bratislava: Slovak Political Science Association, 1995).

[30] Grigorij Mesežnikov, 'The Parliamentary Elections: A confirmation of the split of the party system in Slovakia', *ibid.,* p. 106.

[31] Ondrej Dostal, 'O neštandardnosti a extrémisme', *Sme*, 11 January 1995, p. 4.

[32] See, for example, Marek Rybář, 'Strany a stranícke systémy v reflexii slovenskej politológie' in Dagmar Horná & Ľudmila Malíková (eds), *Demokracia a právny štát v kontexte rozvoja politickej vedy* (Bratislava: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2001), pp. 20-26.

[33] A similar conclusion is reached by Owen V. Johnson in his work on the interwar period in Slovakia, *Slovakia 1918-1938* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1985).

which current member states might learn, but rather react sensitively to suggestions that they might somehow be inferior.

It may be suggested that this Slovak lack of self-confidence stems from inexperience in dealing with the west, which derives from the fact that it was the smaller, less economically advanced and geographically more distant part of a federation. This affects part of both the public and the political elites. It is notable that all three governing parties between 1994 and 1998 had leaders – Vladimír Mečiar, Ján Slota and Ján Ľuptak – who could not speak English.[34] This differentiated them from the major opposition parties (with the exception of the post-communist Party of the Democratic Left, whose Chair, Józef Migaš, did not speak English). Perhaps more crucially, Mečiar had studied in the Soviet Union, and therefore spoke fluent Russian. The cultural milieu of the governing parties which claimed to be seeking EU membership naturally distanced them from the awareness of international opinion necessary for realising this ambition. What is unknown seems threatening.

Attitudes to the communist past

The second element in europhobia relates to attitudes to the communist past. Attempts to define the major cleavages in post-communist states by use of terms such as 'left' and 'right', or 'libertarian' and 'authoritarian' often founder on the fact that identifying policy stances on specific issues can be less effective in differentiating parties than asking whether their sense of vision is stuck in the past or looking forward to the future. Many multinational surveys, such as the *New Democracies Barometer*, show astonishing levels of nostalgia for an imagined communist political or economic past which was better than the present.[35] This is no different in Slovakia, but what is notable is the strong correlation between party supporters' views on EU membership and their views on the past order. For example, in October 1999 – a year after Mečiar left the premiership for the third time – an Institute for Public Affairs survey asked Slovaks whether the political regime in Slovakia before 1989 had needed change, and whether the Slovak economy before 1989 had needed change. 42 per cent of respondents felt that fundamental political changes had been necessary; 42 per cent that only smaller changes were necessary; and 9 per cent that no changes were necessary. When it came to economic changes – and, of course, it is in economic terms that the issue of EU accession is primarily viewed – only 28 per cent declared that fundamental changes were necessary, 46 per cent that only smaller changes were necessary, and 17 per cent that no changes at all were necessary.

Table 3 shows the Institute for Public Affairs findings when the percentages of citizens who felt fundamental changes in the pre-1989 order had been necessary were correlated with party preferences. Enthusiasm for post-1989 change – particularly in the economy – is generally lower than for the EU as a whole.

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[34] Slota did, however speak French, which may explain the unfortunate Le Pen incident.
[35] See, for example, Richard Rose and Christian Haerpfer, *New Democracies Barometer V, Studies in Public Policy No. 306* (Glasgow: University of Strathclyde, 1998).

Table 3

Percentages of party supporters believing that fundamental changes were necessary in the pre-1989 political regime and economy

Party preference	Political regime in Slovakia	Slovak economy
Slovak Democratic Coalition	75	58
Party of Civic Understanding	55	42
Party of the Democratic Left	47	28
Party of the Hungarian Coalition	44	38
Slovak National Party	43	22
Undecided	43	27
Non-voters	27	17
Movement for a Democratic Slovakia	27	17
Average for Slovakia	**42**	**28**

Source: www.ivo.sk

The radical difference in views between the Slovak Democratic Coalition supporters and those of HZDS are noticeable. The findings on two other parties who joined the post-1998 government are also interesting. As on the issue of EU membership, the post-communist Party of the Democratic Left has supporters who are in the middle of the political spectrum. This is indicative of a fundamental ambivalence within the party, which is divided between more western-oriented social democrats and more conservative figures influenced by their backgrounds in the *apparat* of the Communist Party of Slovakia. Although the party has never formally been in government with Mečiar and has twice joined ranks with his opponents (March – December 1994, October 1998-), its supporters clearly have very mixed images of the sort of Slovakia they would like.

It is also notable that one party – the Party of the Hungarian Coalition – combines high level of support for the EU with a markedly lower level of support for fundamental changes in Slovakia. This is explained in three ways by the fact that this party's supporters combine a large majority of the 11 per cent Hungarian minority in Slovakia. Firstly, demographic factors generally correlate with views on EU membership, and in the case of attitudes to the need for fundamental change, educational level is a very strong

indicator.[36] Hungarians, being an ethnically defined group, represent a cross section of society on all other demographic counts, albeit with a slightly lower level of education, economic prosperity, and urban location. There is consequently no demographic underpinning for pro-reform attitudes. Secondly, their levels of support for EU membership are higher than average, in spite of their demographic profile, because of the expectation that it will benefit them as a minority, particularly given that neighbouring Hungary will also be a EU member. Secondly, in the case of their views on the need for fundamental systemic changes, the Hungarians' muted attitude to the need for change is also attributable to the fact that they remain partially unconvinced that the changes which took place (notably Slovak independence, but the privatisation of the agricultural sector, where many Hungarians work) have benefited them as a community.

Conservative social values

The final element in Slovak europhobia relates not to specifically post-communist issues such as nation-building or economic transformation, but to value orientations which pre-date the communist system. These touch on issues which are present in debates in the current member states, but which have also been subtly influenced by the communist experience.

The first is a concern about national sovereignty in the broader sense. Whereas the europhobic nationalism of Mečiar's HZDS in the mid-1990s reflected a general reluctance to subordinate domestic political interests in pursuing a power struggle at home to the exigencies of the expressed desire to join the EU, the Slovak National Party was far more prone to discuss the sovereignty issue in terms more familiar from western political debates.

The second is a concern for preserving the religious values indigenous in the country. In the interwar period, the major cleavage in Slovak politics ran between those Slovak parties which collaborated in the Czechoslovak governments formed in Prague, and those – most notably Hlinka's Slovak People's Party – which strove for a greater degree of Slovak autonomy. Both Andrej Hlinka, and his successor (later executed for his role in the wartime independent Slovak state) Jozef Tiso, were Catholic priests. There was a clear rationale behind this, since one major Slovak reservation towards the Czechoslovak state related to the fact that the Prague Czechs were secular in outlook, whereas rural Slovakia was far more solidly Catholic in outlook.   In contemporary Slovak politics, three parties strive for mantle of protecting Catholic interests. One is HZDS, whose support derives territorially from a similar base to that of Hlinka's party.[37] The second is the Slovak National Party, which – ironically – claims to be the oldest Slovak party because it has adopted the name of the party formed in 1871,[38] which was actually a

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[36] 29 per cent of those with only basic education supported fundamental change in the political system, compared to 74 per cent of those with higher education. In the case of fundamental changes in the economy, the figures are 18 per cent and 53 per cent.

[37] See Vladimír Krivý, Viera Feglová, Daniel Balko, *Slovensko a jeho regióny: Sociokultúrne súvislosti volebného správania* (Bratislava: Nádacia Médiá, 1996).

[38] Ľubomír Lipták (ed.), *Politické strany na Slovensku 1860-1989* (Bratislava: Archa, 1992).

protestant party. As the only Slovak party which openly espoused Slovak independence at the beginning of the 1990s, it was left without a cause at the beginning of 1993, and has therefore gradually tried to reframe itself as a party embodying traditional Slovak beliefs, which is not entirely in accord to its voter profile, which is still somewhat influenced by common right-wing nationalist tendency to attract younger, predominantly male, urban voters. The third party in this sphere is the Christian Democratic Movement, which for most of the 1990s differed from the other two in being forward rather than backward-looking: it supported the continuation of the federation in 1992, and was part of the Slovak Democratic Coalition in 1998.

All three parties demonstrate a tendency to adhere to an alternative image of what Slovakia would have been like if it had never been communist which reject the west European model. Marks and Wilson have pointed out that, in western Europe 'Christian democratic parties have been more closely associated with the founding of the European Union than any other party family', which they link with 'affinity with a supranational church and the long-standing rejection of nationalism that emerged in historic battles with state-builders'.[39] While the Slovak rejection of Czech secularism would seem to fit in with the latter proposition, the nationalist values held by those who achieved Slovak independence in the post-communist period at the beginning of 1993 pull in the opposite direction. The Slovak Christian democratic affinity to ideas of European unity has also been undermined by the communist experience because this weakened the religiosity of the republic as a whole. While the 1991 Czechoslovak census showed a higher percentage of religious believers in the Slovak Republic than in the Czech Lands, atheism had, nonetheless, become a more accepted confession than in non-communist states.[40] Catholicism had been driven into a rural niche no longer capable of providing the driving force for the country's integration into Europe.   As such, it is less of a catch-all party than many of its west European counterparts, and was more prone to being coopted into backward-looking thinking which suggested the possibility of an autonomous path that rejected the Godless, cosmopolitan, consumerist mentality of mainstream Europe. In this respect, it bore some resemblance to the rejection of the EU present among sectors of Polish catholic opinion.

The confluence of communist and conservative beliefs in post-communist societies, and the fact the economic problems of post-communism led many secularised rural voters and elites to retain their allegiance to the post-communist party, affected the positioning of conservative interests in the debate on EU membership at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This has led to some dynamic movements in the Slovak party system as Slovakia's chances of European interests have improved. These will provide one of the focuses of the third section in the paper.

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[39] Marks & Wilson (2000), *op. cit.,* p. 451.
[40] *Statistická ročenka České republiky 93* (Prague: Český statistický uřád/Český spisovatel, 1993), p. 413.

3. 'Hard' and 'soft' euroscepticism

The final proposition is that as the EU accession process develops, it is increasingly possible to differentiate between 'hard' and 'soft' euroscepticism. The former entails a rejection of EU membership in any form which it is realistically possible to achieve, whereas the latter does not reject membership *per se,* but embraces a rhetoric which articulates substantial criticism of aspects of the accession process or of the implications of membership.

When discussing Slovakia's chances of joining the EU in the mid-1990s, at a time when the third Mečiar government first appeared to be jeopardising the country's chances of accession, it was possible to advance the proposition that Slovakia might, in the end, find it *easier* to join the EU under Mečiar's leadership. The logic behind this somewhat unusual hypothesis was that Mečiar's government, which – as per its January 1995 government programme - submitted Slovakia's formal application to join the EU, was motivated to achieve accession in order to prove that its newly-founded state was fully accepted by the international community, and also to prove its own competence as a government. Since citizens with 'europhobic' inclinations voted, in the main, for HZDS and its coalition partners, the government had a vested interest in keeping their europhobia in check. Also, many older citizens would feel less fearful of European integration, and be less likely to object to it, if it were negotiated by the charismatic leader they trusted. Once in opposition, however, Mečiar would be free to whip up anti-EU sentiment in a fashion which might endanger accession.

However, this proposition appeared questionable when, by early 1996 it was becoming increasingly obvious that Mečiar's government would prove incapable of meeting even the EU's minimum demands of democratic conditionality. In spite of successive *démarches* from the EU, the government was unwilling to subordinate its declared foreign policy goals to its domestic aims of power consolidation[41]. More important, however, for understanding party-based euroscepticism in the CEECs as a whole, the hypothesis overlooked the fluidity of party behaviour in post-communist democracies. Two factors are important here.

Firstly, since accession is being negotiated by states without 'frozen' party systems, both parties and party factions can realign themselves with relative ease according to the pragmatic demands of individual policy questions. The definition and significance of political cleavages in society, and how they affect electoral support, is only gradually being understood both by political scientists and by politicians, and by citizens themselves. The role of political leadership and the extent to which party elites lead, or follow, public opinion is also subject to variation. This is a particularly important question in Slovakia, where the failure of politically inexperienced elites is increasingly being blamed in academic literature for the country's difficult path through the political storms of the 1990s.[42]

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[41] See Karen Henderson, 'Slovakia and the democratic criteria for EU accession', in Henderson (1999), *op. cit.,* pp. 221-40.

[42] Soňa Szomolányi, *Kľukatá cesta Slovenska k demokracii* (Bratislava: Stimul, 1999).

Secondly, the difference between 'soft' and 'hard' euroscepticism becomes more crucial as EU membership loses its symbolic significance and becomes a question of real political negotiation. Once accession negotiations commence, the parameters of a government's available political options move inward, and democratic consolidation generally narrows the limits of the behaviour that is acceptable both domestically and to the international community. The Slovak example, and to an even greater extent that of Romania after the 2000 elections, suggest that one of the propositions suggested by Taggart and Szczerbiak – namely, that 'the positions of parties in their party systems is related to the expression of Euroscepticism' – is likely to prove valid for the CEECs. They note that 'parties at the "core" of their party systems… have high costs associated with expression any sort of Euroscepticism', whereas, for peripheral parties (that is, those unlikely to enter government) 'Euroscepticism is a relatively costless stance'.[43] Smaller, more extreme nationalist parties become unacceptable coalition parties for governments negotiating EU accession, which frees them up to take 'hard' eurosceptic positions. Core parties, like HZDS or the Romanian PDSR, must therefore rule alone or make themselves acceptable to other political parties. However, these parties may eventually not even find a 'soft' eurosceptic position tenable as their parties modernise and the option of 'sitting on the fence' (that is, declaring a desire to join the EU while behaving in a manner which makes it impossible) disappears as a result of accession negotiations and regular European Commission progress reports.

These points can be illustrated in the Slovak case by a brief look at the position since the 1998 elections of the six political parties whose electorates contain some europhobic elements.

First of all, two of these parties are marginal: the Workers' Party of Slovakia, which was part of the third Mečiar government, but largely disappeared after obtaining 1.3 per cent of the vote in September 1998; and the unreformed Communist Party of Slovakia, which has never managed to enter parliament in a free election, but which retains (unusually for a non-parliamentary party) a steady 2 to 3 per cent of the vote. Both are far left, have no constraints in the conspiracy theories they can expound about the motives of the EU, and are largely irrelevant.

The post-communist Party of the Democratic Left is in the opposite position. It supports EU membership and joins coalitions with parties which are like-minded on this issue. It is the most coalitionable of all Slovak parties, and is consistently viewed as the desired coalition partner even by those parties which it itself rejects. It stands in the middle of the political spectrum, but therefore carries the heavy burden of needing to pull along a substantial mass of eurosceptic voters with a backward-looking attitude to the post-communist reform process (see Tables 1-3 above). It is possibly only an anchored sense of old-fashioned party discipline which has enabled it to withstand the centrifugal forces of the divergent strands of political thinking which it embraces. What is most interesting about its position, however, is the fact that the fluidity of post-communist society means that its attitudes towards the EU are hard to map against those of parties belonging to the

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[43] Taggart & Szcerbiak (2000), *op. cit.*

social democratic family in EU member states. Just as Slovakia embarked on seeking EU membership without a frozen party system, so it also embarked on the path without an entrenched structure of social and trade union rights which might, or might not, be endangered by EU legislation. Party leaders and voters bemoan the social effects and rising unemployment occasioned (allegedly) by the policies of the Dzurinda government, of which it is a member, but in doing so, they are looking back at a lost past. They generally fail to look forward to advantages which might be brought by EU membership – a project which is, as discussed earlier, popularly conceived as benefiting 'transition winners'. However, since the party already possessed a leadership more committed to EU membership than its voters, it has been little affected by the realities of negotiating EU membership.

It is on the right of the party spectrum that one sees the greatest realignment as EU membership nears. The Slovak National Party, verging increasingly on hard euroscepticism, occupies a position possibly most nearly comparable to the far right of the British Conservative Party. Formally, it raises concerns about national sovereignty, while underlining that its Christian value orientation means that it naturally belongs to Europe without needing to belong to the EU. It wishes to join the EU only when its economy is strong enough to be an equal partner, but – like some Polish parties – it overlooks the fact that its economy is highly unlikely to converge with that of the EU member states unless it joins first. Its programmatic stance must be paired with the frequently xenophobic statements of its leaders, and its tendency to fraternise with the least acceptable parties in eastern and western Europe. While its departure from government has freed it from a need to support EU membership (as well allowing it unambiguously to espouse military neutrality), it does not reject EU membership as such, but rather membership of the EU in any form which will ever realistically be on offer.

HZDS is the largest, and hence most important, of all Slovak parties, upon whose fate the ultimate shape of the Slovak party system will depend. Although it polled more votes than any other party in September 1998, it was quite unable to remain in government, since no party but the Slovak Nationalists (together with whom it held less than 40 per cent of parliamentary seats) was willing to entertain the idea of joining it in coalition. Since it has never had a parliamentary majority on its own, its return to power depends on it becoming coalitionable. It has found it hard to adapt to opposition politics, with its leader, Mečiar, truculently abandoning his parliamentary seat together with the premiership, and its long-standing refusal to accept the chair of any parliamentary committees. Its stance on the EU ranges from comments openly scathing of the EU as an organisation, combined, schizophrenically, with exaggerated criticism of the current government's supposedly meagre progress in negotiating membership. This reflects both its electorates' euroscepticism, and also the leadership's realisation that, actually, there is no alternative to membership. Since its election defeat it has formally changed itself from a movement to a party, and finally decided (after earlier, unsuccessful attempts to join most major international party organisations) that it is a traditional, right-wing populist party. While this corresponds reasonably with its electorate's general value orientations, its economic policy remains a distinctly eastern post-communist mixture of left-wing criticism of the social effects of the new government's economic policy, plus a

record in government of promoting corrupt privatisation that benefited the few. Crucial to its future, however, will be its fate of Mečiar, and the reactions of its electorate after his final departure. For the mean time, however, its stance on the EU can generally be regarded as one of a soft euroscepticism, influenced less by engagement with the real issues of economic and political integration than by residual europhobia.

The final eurosceptic party is the Christian Democratic Movement. A constant on the centre-right, reformist side of the political spectrum during the 1990s, one of the earliest Slovak parties to develop strong links with an international party organisation, and the lead party in the Slovak Democratic Coalition which swept Mečiar from power in 1998, it ended up proving a destabilising element in the government coalition once EU membership appeared a reality at the end of the millennium. Since its founder and leader, the Catholic ex-dissident Čarnogurský, was personally too unpopular to lead the Slovak Democratic Coalition, the Slovak premiership was taken by a party vice chair, Mikuláš Dzurinda. This led ultimately to a split in the Christian Democratic Movement, with Dzurinda remaining loyal to the Slovak Democratic Coalition and joining, together with the Coalition's second largest party, to form the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union, while the Christian Democratic Movement continued to exist, albeit with a new leader. The latter bears far less resemblance to the catch-all Christian Democratic parties in the EU member states, and veers towards not only a Catholic fundamentalism, but also a euroscepticism born of an alternative vision of the Slovakia which might have existed if there had not been the unfortunate communist interlude. While it is not a peripheral party, and remains coalitionable, it is nonetheless bringing elements of soft euroscepticism into the governing coalition.

One final concluding remark needs to be made about the influence of the European Union on the Slovak party system. The EU has acted since the end of 1998 as an integrative force driving forward the policies of the governing coalition, which is a complex and often unwieldy coalition of coalitions. However, although the party system is still in need of substantial consolidation, it is unlikely to be the EU issue of itself which brings this change about.

Conclusion

The central argument of this paper has been that the issue of EU membership interacts with the party systems of the CEECs in a way that is fundamentally different from patterns familiar in the current member states. This derives primarily from the fact that membership became a reality in a time of dynamic change. Both the symbolic, and the real, importance of EU membership are far greater than in west European states who have established market economies, and citizens with a clear notion of their own social and economic location. Furthermore, the constellations of political and economic interests are fundamentally different in the new democracies, and concepts of 'left' and 'right' have less significance than the distinction between the nostalgia of the 'transition losers' – who are defined by age as much as by class – and the 'transition winners', who look to the future, in which the EU will be an integral part of political and economic life.

Some of the propositions made in this paper will have a general validity for most of the CEECs. In other respects, the Slovak illustrations used may be judged as too idiosyncratic to be of wider relevance, given the state's particularly turbulent trajectory throughout the 1990s. What is important, however, is that by mapping attitudes to the EU in the applicant states, it is possible to understand more about what makes them different, as political and social systems, from the current member states. This throws light on the pitfalls which will be encountered both in the later stages of the accession negotiations, and when these states are represented as fully-fledged members of the EU's institutions. Such an understanding can facilitate the overcoming of problems deriving from divergent interests and expectations. It will also enable us to follow through the extent to which European integration operates at the level of domestic party politics in what is still the most rapidly changing part of Europe.

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