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The Impact of the Enlargement of the European Union on Central European Party Systems

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SEI Working Paper No 71
EPERN Working Paper No 14

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First published in November 2003
by the **Sussex European Institute**
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Abstract

Membership of the European Union, due to take place in 2004, will undoubtedly have a major effect on the course of political developments in the countries of central Europe, although it is difficult to predict any particular consequences for or direct impact on the party systems of the region. Analysis of party system development in the already established members of the European Union has in fact suggested that this form of Europeanisation has had remarkably little direct impact on national systems. The indirect impact of EU membership may have been considerably stronger, but precise definition and measurement of this influence has so far been highly problematic. The position of party systems in central Europe is likely to be different those in Western Europe due to their being more fluid and less consolidated, as well as having been the object of wide-ranging EU support and influence throughout the 1990s. On this basis a number of exploratory hypothesis and tentative principles concerning CE party system change are advanced. Parliamentary elections have been held in six of the eight countries studied here, and an initial survey of their results suggests that the direct impact of enlargement issues has indeed been limited so far, with Poland constituting the sole exception to this generalisation. By 2001 the range of party attitudes towards Europe in Poland had become considerably more critical than they had been at the time of the previous elections in 1997, although the salience of enlargement issues in the 2001 campaign was not high. Referendums on EU membership were also held in all prospective member countries during 2003, and it became apparent at an early stage that any problems in this area concerned less the levels of support for and opposition to EU membership than the reluctance of many voters to participate in the ballot at all. Established views on the EU had little predictive value in this context, and various national factors were more likely to affect turnout. Early observations lend weight to the view that the influence of enlargement on CE party politics is likely to strengthen, but its impact on party systems may indeed be more indirect than direct in nature.

THE IMPACT OF THE ENLARGEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION ON CENTRAL EUROPEAN PARTY SYSTEMS¹

The enlargement of the European Union (EU), due to take place in 2004, will have far-reaching effects on the course of political development in post-communist countries of central Europe (CE). Their achievements in developing electorally competitive parties and relatively stable party systems since 1989 have played a major part in producing the political situation that makes these countries viable candidates for EU membership, while the broad principle of Europeanisation has been a guiding light for the transformation that has taken place during this period. But just how much closer engagement with the political and economic processes of an enlarged, pan-European Union will affect the party systems that have developed in central Europe and the level of consolidation they have so far achieved, remains a matter of some conjecture. It can hardly fail to have *some* impact on these major features of the post-communist system, although distinguishing the precise effects of enlargement from the changes that would have been likely to take place anyway will not be easy to achieve.

It is, of course, too early at present to essay any precise conclusion about the impact of EU enlargement in this area for the simple reason that the process has yet to be completed. The idea of enlargement, and the partial steps taken towards bringing it about, have been factors in post-communist CE politics since the early days. But it was only at the Copenhagen EU summit of December 2002 that final agreement on the conditions of enlargement was reached and a date fixed for the accession of eight CE members (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia), subject to the successful result of referendums in the countries concerned. It was in the run-up to this decision and during the course of preparations for the national referendums of 2003 that clearer signs of the impact of the enlargement process on central European politics and its party systems have begun to appear. This has been a period, too, of relatively intense electoral activity in the region, which generally favours the clearer definition of party positions and has a direct effect on the development of party systems. Parliamentary elections were thus held in Lithuania and Slovenia in 2000, Poland in 2001, in Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Latvia (following the order of their being held) in 2002, and in Estonia in March 2003.

¹ This paper was prepared (under original title) for 19th Congress of the International Political Science Association held in Durban from 29 June to 4 July, submitted within Research Committee 3: European Unification.

The EU's eastward enlargement will represent an unprecedented expansion of the association in terms of both population and territory. It involves countries considerably poorer than other members at the time of their accession, with relatively young democratic systems whose level of consolidation remains open to some question, and which show clear traces of their communist past in economic and social terms. This enlargement will have few resemblances to previous phases of EU expansion, and it is difficult to locate much relevant analysis that can serve as a basis for comparative study or methodological guidance. It is only recently, moreover, that political scientists have begun to focus on the influence of EU structures and processes on the national politics of member states. An early collection of studies in this area was published in 2000, while a more wide-ranging and explicit analysis of the Europeanisation of national parties did not appear until 2002.² The impact of enlargement on CE party systems thus represents a relatively uncharted area whose final shape is difficult to predict, while exploration of the issue of political Europeanisation has also been limited and analysis of domestic party change in the broad EU context itself is only exploratory.

EU impact on west European party systems

Early analysis in fact suggested that the impact of Europe on national party systems in the EU has been minimal. 'Of the many areas of domestic politics that may have experienced an impact from Europe', Peter Mair has argued, 'party systems have perhaps proved to be most impervious to change'.³ The measures of Europeanisation in this case were two, relating to the *format* of the systems – that is, the number of relevant parties in contention in the national electoral arena – and to their *mechanics* in terms of the way in which parties interact with one another. Between 1960 and 1998, for example, in the twelve members of an early, and more exclusive European Union, more than 140 new parties emerged to contest elections but only three of these could be directly linked to the issue of European integration. On this basis, it was concluded, 'Europe has had virtually no direct or even demonstrable effect on the format of the national party systems'. The effect of Europeanisation on the mechanics of party

² In particular, K. H. Goetz and S. Hix (eds), *Europeanised Politics? European Integration and National Political Systems*, *West European Politics* vol. 23, 4 (2000); and R. Ladrech (ed), *The Europeanization of Party Politics*, *Party Politics* vol. 8, 4 (2002). Some specific arenas of change are explored in T. Risse, M. Cowles and J. Caporaso (eds), *Transforming Europe: Europeanization and Domestic Change*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press (2001), and different approaches identified by C. Knill and D. Lehmkuhl in 'How Europe matters. Different mechanisms of Europeanization', *European Integration online Papers* vol. 3, 7 (1999), <http://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/1999-007a.htm>.

systems was measured by reference to a wide-ranging study of party positions on the issue of European integration. Only 17 percent of parties were judged to be anti-European in this sense and they received – at 8 percent – an even smaller proportion of national votes. In this sense too, then, Europeanisation as such did not seem to have had a ‘significant direct impact’ on the mechanics of the party systems of the member states’. Another analysis has also found that the core features of the democratic polity across Europe have proved to be strikingly resilient to the transformational effects of integration.⁴

What implications does this conclusion have for an attempt to assess the impact of enlargement on the countries of central Europe? On the face of things, perhaps not a great deal. The party systems of the first 12 EU members are relatively solid and well established, with considerable powers of survival and resilience to the impact of ‘Europe’ and processes of European integration. The situation in central Europe is certainly different in that respect, and its precise features will be examined a little further on. To begin with though, some general methodological questions should be raised. Mair’s analysis is notably restrictive, even from the starting point of a question directed to establishing whether party systems have been *directly* influenced in ways that change their format or mechanics of operation. In terms of format, for example, the impact of Europe is measured by the establishment of new parties ‘with the explicit and primary intention of mobilising support for or against the EU’.⁵ Yet most parties – and perhaps all true political parties – are not single-issue organisations but are coalitions that combine in their platforms a range of objectives and present a synthesis of policies capable of appealing to a broad section of the electorate. Pro- and anti-European sentiments mostly occur with greater or lesser degrees of strength in established parties rather than newly founded ones.

In view of the solid pro-Europe, pro-Western consensus of early post-communist central Europe, the expression of anti-EU sentiments in the countries of the region is yet more likely to manifest itself in terms of scepticism and the moderation of pro-Europeanism rather than outright opposition. The structural disincentives to the emergence of anti-EU parties will be even stronger in central Europe than they have been within the EU as it has been constituted

³ P. Mair, ‘The limited impact of Europe on national party systems’, in Goetz and Hix (2000), p. 28.

⁴ J. Anderson, ‘Europeanization and the transformation of the democratic polity, 1945-2000’, *Journal of Common Market Studies* vol. 40, 5 (2002), pp. 793-822.

⁵ *ibid*, p. 30. Ladrech seems to think that Mair extends his exclusion of new party formation in the European Parliament as relevant to the national level. Mair’s framework, however, is not quite that restrictive. See R. Ladrech, ‘Europeanization and political parties: towards a framework for analysis’, in Ladrech (ed), p. 394.

so far. This factor is also relevant to measures of the impact of Europe on the mechanisms of party systems. In relation to the survey of party positions on European integration it is suggested, for example, that 'what matters more here is the group that is strongly opposed' to the process. It is through the division between this group and all other parties that evidence of Europeanisation is best gathered.⁶ The impact of Europe is thus rather partially conceived in terms of the opposition it produces rather than the support it engenders, and yet further restriction is therefore placed on the way that European influence as a whole is gauged.

On the other hand, this form of analysis does give us a clear idea of the impact of Europe (or its absence) and it is difficult not to sympathise with Mair's view that to focus on the indirect impact of Europeanisation on party systems is 'to open a Pandora's box in which it becomes increasingly difficult to specify the particular factors at play'. Unfortunately, though, it is in that Pandora's box that some of the most interesting and important questions about the impact of Europe and the enlargement process on party systems reside. One interesting study has already charted how the different European party families have coped with integration issues and examines the ways in which the response of parties has been 'filtered by historical predispositions' rooted in the social cleavages that structure competition in west European systems.⁷ The impact of Europe in this sense has been pervasive and complex, but by no means direct. More interesting in terms of political impact is precisely the *indirect* effect of European governance outcomes on domestic political institutions and input processes in domestic political systems.⁸ Moving on from the specific question of devising clear operational measures of the degree of influence, a broader approach identifies five areas of potential investigation of the impact of Europeanisation on parties and their activity in broader perspective. They are the areas of: (1) policy and programmatic content; (2) organisation; (3) patterns of party competition; (4) party-government relations; and (5) relations beyond the national party system.⁹ It may well be difficult to devise unambiguous measures of the impact of Europe on party change, but consideration of broader and less direct influences must nevertheless be regarded as an important part of the analysis of party development and party system change in the process of enlargement.

⁶ Mair, 'Limited impact', p. 33.

⁷ G. Marks and C. 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 (2000), p. 433.

⁸ S. Hix and K. H. Goetz, 'European integration and national political systems', *Introduction to Europeanised Politics?*, p. 10.

Party systems in central Europe

Apart from general issues relating to the complex relation between EU structures and processes, on the one hand, and the party systems of existing and potential member countries on the other, further questions arise about the nature of the existing party systems of central Europe. In view of the short time that has elapsed since 1989 and the wide-ranging nature of the transformation that has occurred since then, CE party systems are, understandably, less consolidated and not so well defined as is the case with existing EU member states. Comparison of the impact of Europe on the party systems of the EU's more established member countries with those of the current enlargement candidates involves major differences in context and variation in the key variables concerned.

In the case of central Europe it is, firstly and most obviously, clear that we are not dealing with long established party systems although the contrasts with western Europe should not be exaggerated. The first broad study of this topic to appear concluded that 'many features of the East European party systems resemble attributes of established Western democracies...we find a great deal of structure and only limited randomness in the patterns of representation and governance'.¹⁰ It was argued in a later work that 'the party systems of East-Central Europe resemble those of Western Europe much more now, in the beginning of the new millenium, than they did in the early 1990' – and points to the likely effects of the centrifugal and unifying forces of the process of European integration in bringing the region's party systems yet closer to the 'European standard'.¹¹ Another study suggests that differences between west European systems and those of central and eastern Europe are quantitative rather than qualitative in nature – and that comparison between west European party systems and those of central and eastern Europe is indeed valid, with most now falling into the category of moderate pluralism.¹²

A more sceptical view has directed attention to the continuing fluidity of east European political life in this respect and to the problems of identifying party systems where formal

⁹ Ladrech, 'Europeanization', p. 396.

¹⁰ H. Kitschelt, Z. Mansfeldova, R. Markowski and G. Tóka, *Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation, and Inter-Party Cooperation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1999), pp. 402, 403.

¹¹ T. Kostelecký, *Political Parties After Communism: Developments in East-Central Europe*, Washington and Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Centre/Johns Hopkins University (2002), p. 177.

conditions of systemness – in terms of party instability and problems of institutional survival – do not really exist.¹³ A further study directs attention to the present fragmentation of east European party systems and to the general expectation that they will consolidate over time, an outcome to which a game-theoretic analysis of the effects of social cleavages lends some support. In an explicit reference to EU accession, the debates about membership are seen as relating to critical but ‘one-shot’ decisions that may or may not map themselves on to underlying social cleavages and which involve exogenous shocks that only ‘temporarily perturb the political system’.¹⁴ This is a view that may well repay further attention.

Despite some doubts about political consolidation in central Europe and the level of party system development, there is, therefore, broad agreement that existing EU member states and the central European accession countries are comparable in this respect. Post-communist party systems are, however, significantly more fragmented and have a higher number of political actors than in established European democracies and also in other regions during earlier periods of democratic transition. The average effective number of electoral parties during equivalent periods of change in western Europe, southern Europe and Latin America was 3.8, while averages in the different areas of post-communist Europe range from 4.3 to 6.7, producing a distinctly more fractured political scene with less institutionalised party systems than in other cases.¹⁵ In terms of parliamentary representation the core countries of central Europe, nevertheless, showed a degree of stabilisation for much of the post-communist period. Hungary and the Czech Republic had only one or no new parliamentary entrant in the second and third parliaments elected after the end of communist rule. Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia generally had two new entrants during this period.¹⁶ This situation changed in some countries following the fourth elections (2001-2), though, when four new, or previously unrepresented, parties entered the parliaments both of Poland and Slovakia.

It is therefore possible – and even likely – that the effects of enlargement may be quite different in central Europe from the impact of Europe on longer established EU members. In

¹² P. Taggart and A. Szczerbiak, ‘Europeanisation, Euroscepticism and party systems: party-based Euroscepticism in the candidate states of central and eastern Europe’, *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* vol. 3, 1 (2002), pp. 32-3.

¹³ P. Lewis, *Political Parties in Post-Communist Eastern Europe*, London: Routledge (2000), p. 125.

¹⁴ J. Zielinski, ‘Translating social cleavages into party systems: the significance of new democracies’, *World Politics* vol. 54, 2 (2002), p. 188.

¹⁵ J. Bielasiak, ‘The institutionalization of electoral and party systems in postcommunist states’, *Comparative Politics*, vol. 34, 2 (2002), pp. 202-3.

terms of the indicators of direct European impact on party systems used by Mair there seems so far to have been little direct influence on national structures and processes in central Europe. Nevertheless, the great majority of observers have generally argued from an early date or just assumed that Europeanisation and EU enlargement exercise a major influence on central Europe by fostering political stability and party system development.¹⁷ In broad, if indirect, terms the influence of European integration and the prospect of EU enlargement has been pervasive and so strong that it is virtually impossible to disentangle it from the fundamental processes of democratisation that have dominated much of the political agenda in the region since 1989. The fact that the EU is, and has consistently been, promoting a complex set of changes in CE institutions, policies and political processes in the context of a simultaneous transformation of domestic political structures distinguishes the present enlargement from all previous ones.¹⁸ Though perhaps not directly apparent in relation to the precise format and mechanics of CE party systems, the influence of European institutions and political models in terms of such factors as integration with international and EU-based party groupings, the careful tailoring of electoral mechanisms to regional norms, and the development of parliamentary procedures according to international practice has been so strong that it is indeed difficult to classify it as just indirect.

Whatever the particular problems involved in analysing the impact of enlargement on CE party systems and identifying its precise consequences, then, it is hardly possible to deny that EU influence has already been extensive in this area.¹⁹ In domestic terms, even if European issues did not impinge directly on party policies and alignments, and generally failed to emerge as a major factor in national elections, the question of enlargement and EU membership throughout the 1990s in central Europe, was the subject of an overwhelming consensus among the main political parties, groupings and elites. There may well have been different emphases in national parties and differing positions taken by individual politicians, as well as shifts in public opinion (generally towards a lower level of Euro-enthusiasm), but there was nevertheless a strongly dominant mood in favour of enlargement and a degree of

¹⁶ P. G. Lewis, 'Political parties', in *Developments in Central and East European Politics 3* (ed. S. White, J. Batt and P. G. Lewis), London: Palgrave (2003), pp. 159.

¹⁷ G. Pridham, 'EU enlargement and consolidating democracy in post-communist states – formality and reality', *Journal of Common Market Studies* vol. 40, 3 (2002), pp. 953-54.

¹⁸ See C. Puzey, 'The effects of the European Union's Policy of conditionality in Central and Eastern Europe: towards an alternative framework for analysis', paper prepared for PSA Specialist Group on Communist and Post-Communist Politics, London (2002).

¹⁹ D. Dakowska, 'Beyond conditionality: EU enlargement, European party federations and the transnational activity of German political foundations', *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* vol. 3, 2 (2002), p. 277.

commitment to EU membership throughout the 1990s that verged on the willing acceptance of its inevitability. This contingent acceptance of EU integration reinforced and built on the deep-rooted attachment to Europe as a symbol of community. It would, though, have been surprising if signs of change had not appeared in this area as eastward enlargement changed from being a broad prospect and medium-term promise and became a practical proposition with clear disadvantages as well as major benefits.

An overview of the relatively brief history of party growth and development in the post-communist period has also shown it to be an uneven and sometimes turbulent process. Processes of EU enlargement may well, therefore, generate further pressures that impinge on party systems in direct terms with greater strength than during comparable periods in western Europe – possibly to the extent of destabilising the partially formed existing systems and even endangering the level of post-communist democracy achieved so far. From this point of view, as one study has already concluded, the demands of enlargement ‘have both constrained responsive and accountable party competition and...encouraged populists and demagogues’.²⁰

There is certainly some existing empirical evidence that throws light on possible developments in this area, although it is not particularly positive in its implications for the impact of enlargement on CE party systems. There are, for example, generally higher levels of support for Eurosceptic parties in the central and east European countries than in existing EU member states, while parties articulating soft Eurosceptic sentiments occupy a more central place in their party systems than those in existing member states.²¹ This may well be a function of the restricted area of political contestation in transition countries already strongly committed to a ‘European’ future, which gives any party with a claim to government little freedom to manoeuvre in this area. Formal commitment to enlargement is largely inevitable in this context but any broad-based political force will also find it difficult to avoid the emergence of some Eurosceptic tendencies within its own ranks (as the major British parties have also found on more than one occasion). Euroscepticism has also tended to be stronger in countries that were closer to EU membership than those with more distant prospects, these being virtually non-existent for example in Bulgaria.²² This suggests that enlargement may

²⁰ A. Grzymala-Busse and A. Innes, ‘Great expectations: the EU and domestic political competition in East Central Europe’, *East European Politics and Societies* vol. 17, 1 (2003), p. 64.

²¹ P. Taggart and A. Szczerbiak, ‘The party politics of Euroscepticism in EU member and candidate states’, *Opposing Europe Research Network Working Paper no. 6* (2002), p. 16.

²² Taggart and Szczerbiak, ‘Europeanisation’.

well have a stronger impact on CE party orientations and – quite possibly – the nature of party systems than many have anticipated.

At this stage some simple principles and exploratory hypotheses may be advanced to structure analysis of these and further developments:

- CE party systems are both more fluid than those in western Europe and contain more components in terms of individual parties; there is to this extent *greater scope* for enlargement to make a direct impact (in Mair's terms) on CE party systems in terms of the number of actors and a *stronger incentives* for parties to form and make their bid for influence on this basis;
- but party organisations at EU level and federations based on the European Parliament have not just exerted major influence on party development in the post-communist democracies, they also played a major constitutive role in their formation; parties shaped in this way therefore are likely to be *resilient to anti-enlargement positions* and will *favour further elements of Europeanisation*;
- CE party system development has been part of an overall combined process of liberal democratisation and integration with European and global markets; parties that formed the governments which have overseen and participated in this process – and will compete to do so in the future with some prospect of success – are *unlikely to develop anti-integration policies* and anti-Europe platforms will continue to be *located on the margins of the party system*.

The major implications of enlargement for party system developments therefore point in two quite different directions: while there may well be considerable scope for anti-Europe activity in party systems overall there are no strong prospects of it taking root in parties close to the political centre or in those with reasonable chances of taking part in government. Anti-EU activity is likely to be even less centrally positioned than in western Europe. But this does not mean that enlargement will necessarily promote democratic stability in all cases or serve to consolidate existing party systems. It will, quite obviously, inject new elements of conflict and potential instability into the political system. The question is how these might impact on the CE party systems in ways other than those of the relatively peripheral nature outlined

above. Here we can suggest that a clear distinction should be drawn between direct and indirect effects of enlargement:

- the *direct* impact of enlargement on CE party systems may, as in west European cases, be quite small and not exert a great deal of influence on the format of existing systems, shift the position of the major governing parties or greatly change the mechanisms by which party systems operate;
- but enlargement may have significantly greater *indirect* effects by increasing the already considerable political distance between party elites and masses, a relatively weak aspect of the existing political system in terms of weak party structures and the low number of party members. Views of CE party systems beyond a ‘horizontal’ manifestation at the elite level of government and parliamentary interaction that take account of a ‘vertical’ dimension in terms of social implantation and organisational support should therefore give a fuller and more complex picture.

The European dimension in recent CE elections

A survey of key electoral developments in this area will help provide an introductory view of the early impact of EU enlargement and associated questions. Recent elections cast light on the current state of CE party system development and the role played in it by European issues and groups with a strong interest in questions of enlargement. Amidst a broad regional consensus about Europeanisation and the goal of EU membership, it was in Poland that more conflict and disagreement between the parties over EU issues could be detected than in the other countries of the region.²³

By 1999 it was, indeed, possible to identify a Polish party (Polish Accord) that had been founded explicitly to contest membership of the European Union and which, therefore, carried at least the possibility of changing the format of the party system. The low level of support – at 0.8 percent – its leader Jan Lopuszanski gained in the presidential elections the following year suggested, however, that there was little prospect of party system change coming from

²³ H. Grabbe and K. Hughes, ‘Central and east European views on EU enlargement: political debates and public opinion’, in K. Henderson (ed), *Back to Europe: Central and Eastern Europe and the European Union*, London: UCL Press (1999), p. 193.

this quarter. Strong anti-EU sentiments could also be heard from the leader of the Peasant Self-Defence movement, Andrzej Lepper (who gained 3 percent of votes), and more moderated scepticism from Peasant Party leader Kalinowski (who received 6 percent of votes). In both these cases, though, their prime concern was to appeal to the interests of the peasant constituency and not primarily to militate generally against Polish membership of the EU.

A similar tone could also be detected in the two parliamentary elections that were held in central Europe during 2000. Liberal Democrats and Social Democrats topped the poll in *Slovenia*, but all mainstream parties were agreed on the central goal of joining the EU.²⁴ Hard Euroscepticism was identified only with the New Party (which gained a scant 0.59 percent of votes), and a softer variety with the Slovenian National Party (4.4 percent of votes, up from 3.2 percent in 1996).²⁵ The convoluted voting system of *Lithuania* and the need to form a broad alliance brought the small Peasant Party into play (with 4.1 percent of the vote) within a New Policy coalition, a move that was recognised as being likely to introduce some elements of friction into the country's negotiations with the EU and possibly place its prospects of membership under some kind of threat.²⁶ The only other (soft) Eurosceptic force was represented by the Centre Union, with 2.9 percent of votes (a marked decline from the 8.2 percent it achieved in 1996).²⁷

More radical changes were seen in the *Polish* parliamentary elections of 2001, when major shifts in parliamentary representation took place and parties showing not just sceptical attitudes towards the European Union but voicing outright opposition to Poland's membership won places in parliament. The two parties which had formed a government coalition during the former parliament did not gain any parliamentary representation at all, and four new groups gained seats. For the first time a party that clearly stated its anti-EU credentials in its manifesto, the League of Polish Families, won seats with 7.9 percent of the popular vote. As their electoral programme unambiguously put it: 'As regards accession to the European Union, we shall organise a national referendum and say "no" to a programme of resignation from the sovereignty of the Polish State'.²⁸ Another major force in this area was Self-Defence (which had dropped its 'Peasant' affiliation and successfully broadened its appeal to voters just

²⁴ *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newslines* vol. 4, 200 (2000).

²⁵ Taggart and Szczerbiak, 'Party politics', p. 14.

²⁶ *Central Europe Review* vol. 2, 36 (2000).

²⁷ Taggart and Szczerbiak, 'Party politics', p. 14.

²⁸ <http://www.lpr.pl>.

before the election). Self-Defence was not according to its election literature unequivocally opposed, like the League, to Polish accession but declared itself in favour of a referendum and stated, interestingly enough on behalf of the Agricultural Trade Union Self-Defence, that it was ‘against integration with the European Union in its present form’.²⁹ It came out of the election with 10.2 percent of the vote.

The most clearly Eurosceptic party in the parliament elected in 1997 had been the Peasant Party, but in 2001 it faced stronger competition from forces like the League and Self-Defence movement. During this period the potential electorates of most parties showed declining levels of support for Polish membership of the EU but – with a drop from 51 to 35 percent between January 1999 and September 2000 – the fall amongst potential Peasant Party voters was more pronounced.³⁰ In a likely reflection of this trend, its share of the vote only rose moderately from 7.3 to 9 percent between 1997 and 2001 and the electoral performance both of the LPF and Self-Defence was considerably more striking. Another apparently Eurosceptic force that gained parliamentary representation was the Law and Justice party (9.5 percent). The Polish election of 2001 was, therefore, the first among the countries of central Europe to show a striking rise in the parliamentary representation of Eurosceptic forces.

The European dimension was, on the other hand, largely absent from the *Hungarian* election of April 2002. EU issues hardly figured in the campaign (all major parties were in favour of membership – although FIDESZ has also been seen as having Eurosceptic tendencies) and the extreme right Justice and Life Party (whose strong nationalism was indeed associated with hard Euroscepticism) lost the parliamentary representation it had previously received.³¹ The softer Eurosceptic Smallholders’ Party vote collapsed from 13.2 percent in 1998 to 0.8 percent, while the increasingly nationalist FIDEDZ/ Civic Party lost its parliamentary pre-eminence but, in association with the Democratic Forum, actually increased its share of the vote from 32.2 percent to 41.1 percent. The harder Eurosceptic Workers’ (communist) Party saw its share of the vote fall from 4.1 to 2.8 percent.

²⁹ <http://www.samobrona.org.pl/program/unia.htm>.

³⁰ P. Lewis, ‘Joining Europe: Polish parties and the European Union’, in M. Pittaway (ed), *The Fluid Borders of Europe*, Milton Keynes: The Open University (2003), p. 259.

³¹ A. Batory, ‘Europe and the April 2002 Hungarian parliamentary elections’, *Opposing Europe Research Network Election Briefing No. 1*.

The *Czech* election, held in June 2002, showed a different pattern of results. Mainstream, pro-European parties retained their overall supremacy but elements of Euroscepticism were also prominent and generally increased their level of representation. It was due to the continuing electoral recovery of the largely unreconstructed communist party that the representation of pro-Europe forces fell overall.³² The CP share of the vote rose from 11 in 1998 to 18.5 percent in 2002. Those of the Eurosceptic Republican forces, which had split since the 1998 elections, fell from 3.9 to 1 percent however. There were also shifts in the position of some of the parties. Having lost office in 1997, for example, the Civic Democratic Party ‘developed a more strident euroscepticism’ but continued to favour Czech EU entry. The Communist Party remained critical of such a move but its position was vague and ambiguous, and it reserved a final decision for the referendum on Czech entry that would take place in 2003.³³ On 22 March of that year it recommended its supporters to vote against membership, not as a matter of principle but because of what it saw as poorly negotiated accession conditions. In April it came out more strongly and urged its supporters to vote ‘no’ because of the country’s lack of preparedness to join the EU.³⁴

In *Slovakia* on the other hand, where elections were held in September 2002, pro-enlargement forces were generally strengthened. The vicious circle that had emerged during the 1990s whereby coalitions led by the nationalist Vladimír Mečiar alternated with more centrist, Europe-oriented groupings, was broken with the return to power of a broad coalition led by Mikuláš Dzurinda that linked left- and right-wing forces. The Slovak Christian and Democratic Union, which was Dzurinda’s main base, was strengthened by the general desire of the country not to be excluded from the enlargement process, while the electoral position of Mečiar’s Eurosceptic Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (as well as that of Fico’s new Smer party) was correspondingly weakened by it.³⁵ The MDS share of the vote thus fell from 27 percent in 1998 to 19.5 percent in 2002, while that of the Eurosceptic Slovak National Party fell yet more sharply from 9.1 to 3.3 percent. All parliamentary parties united just before the referendum in May 2003 to urge voters to support EU membership.³⁶

³² S. Hanley, ‘Europe and the Czech parliamentary elections of June 2002’, Oposing Europe Research Network Election Briefing No. 5.

³³ *ibid*, pp. 5-6.

³⁴ *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newslines* vol. 7, 79 (2003).

³⁵ K. Henderson, ‘Europe and the Slovak parliamentary election of September 2002’, Oposing Europe Research Network Election Briefing No 7.

³⁶ *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newslines* vol. 7, 90 (2003).

The *Latvian* election that took place the following month followed a similar pattern in this respect, and leaders of the four main parties signed a joint declaration affirming their commitment to a range of policies, amongst them that of full EU membership.³⁷ Both the parties identified as Eurosceptic in the election of 1998, the Social Democratic Alliance and the Conservative Union for Fatherland and Freedom, lost a lot of their support and ended up with less than half the share of the vote they had previously gained. Around the same time it was, however, it was noted that public support for the EU in Latvia was notably soft and that there was a general absence of serious decision about enlargement issues.³⁸ This was a combination that suggested some thoroughgoing political preparation was needed before the country got much further into the enlargement process if it was to succeed. Such observations showed that the early shallowness of the pro-enlargement consensus in central Europe continued to survive in the region. The nationalist Fatherland and Freedom party, which formed part of the governing coalition after the election, later moderated its Eurosceptic stance and came out in favour of Latvian membership of the EU on 29 March 2003.³⁹ Similarly ambiguous tendencies could be seen in the run-up to the *Estonian* election that took place in March 2003. ‘Grudging support’ of enlargement was expressed in all major parties at the end of 2002.⁴⁰ The results of the election nevertheless reflected a shift in patterns of representation. 28 of the 101 deputies elected to the Estonian parliament belonged to the Res Publica party – 27 of them elected for the first time.⁴¹ The anti-EU Estonian Independence Party gained only 0.55 of votes, and the rather strong anti-EU sentiments of the Estonian population received little direct expression. The outcome of the election in fact reflected a general shift back towards a broadly pro-EU consensus.⁴² Most prominent members of the leading Centre Party declared in favour of EU membership during May.⁴³

This brief survey of electoral outcomes in central Europe thus suggests that the *direct* impact of enlargement on party systems in the region has indeed been limited so far. Only in the Polish case, with the formation of the League of Polish Families and the transformation of Self-Defence into a parliamentary force, might it be said that party system format has been

³⁷ *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newslines* vol. 6, 210 (2002).

³⁸ C. Walker, ‘Latvia’s road to the west: next stop EU’, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newslines* vol. 6, 231 (2002).

³⁹ *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newslines* vol. 7, 61 (2003).

⁴⁰ *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newslines* vol. 6, 233 (2002).

⁴¹ *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newslines* vol. 7, 41 (2003).

⁴² E. Mikkel, ‘Europe and the Estonian parliamentary (Riigikogu) elections of 2 March 2003, Opposing Europe Research Network Election Briefing No. 10., p. 6.

⁴³ *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newslines* vol. 7, 97 (2003).

obviously changed with the emergence of parties that either stood on an anti-integration platform or clearly articulated anti-EU

Table 1: Votes for Eurosceptic parties 2000-2003 and the shift towards electoral Euroscepticism

	2000	2001	2002	2003	Combined Shift
Poland	(/ 7.30)	18.07/18.48			+ 29.25
Czech Republic	(11.00/31.60)		18.5/25.5		+ 2.60
Hungary	(9.60/42.00)		7.2/41.9		- 2.50
Estonia	(2.43/30.68)			0.55/28.4	- 4.16
Latvia	(/27.10)		/ 9.4		- 7.70
Slovakia	(/36.10)		/26.95		- 9.15
Lithuania	/ 6.94				
Slovenia	0.59/ 4.38				

Note: The identification of Eurosceptic parties is derived from the expert opinions reported in Taggart and Szczerbiak, 'Party politics', pp. 29-30. The proportion of votes for hard Eurosceptic parties is given first, votes for soft Eurosceptic parties follows the '/'. Results of elections held prior to 2000 are given in that column and placed in brackets. Column 6 shows the increase or decrease in the vote for all Eurosceptic parties seen in the last two elections. No elections have been held in Lithuania and Slovenia since 2000, so no shift is recorded for those countries.

sentiments. In another case, that of the Czech Communists, a party with a major enlargement dimension and strong Eurosceptic component considerably strengthened its electoral showing. The Slovak party, SMER, contested an election for the first time with considerable success and appeared on occasion as the source of views about the re-negotiation of accession conditions that showed some Eurosceptic inclinations, but it hardly seems reasonable to place it firmly in that camp. In general terms, then, the direct impact of enlargement on the format of CE party systems so far has been low and, to the extent that a direct impact can be identified, focused primarily on the Polish case. In electoral terms, the changing format of the Polish party system was reflected in a sharp rise in votes for Eurosceptic parties, a far greater shift (in either positive or negative terms) than that seen in any other CE accession country. Most other countries showed a decline in the vote for Eurosceptic parties (Table 1). It is,

however, a ranking quite different from the cumulative share of Eurosceptic votes seen in the original survey.

Recent developments may also be summed up in terms of the tentative hypotheses outlined above:

- the changes in the format of the party system can be tentatively linked with *higher levels of party system fragmentation* in Poland. The effective number of electoral parties in Poland has been higher than in all other CE accession countries and stood at 9.6 compared with 7.5 in Latvia, 7.2 in Estonia, and 6.6 in Slovenia.⁴⁴
- Eurosceptic tendencies have continued to be more prominent on the *margins of the party system* in parties that are non-coalitionable.⁴⁵ They have been less apparent in the leading political forces of the political centre that have realistic chances of forming a government or playing a major part in a governing coalition. The main Polish Eurosceptic parties (LPF and Self-Defence) were on the margins of the party system, and only the Peasant Party was regarded as a viable coalition partner by the Union of the Democratic Left. The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, although now more prominent, was still hardly a viable coalition partner.
- There was more *regional differentiation* as other Eurosceptic parties lost ground. As one of the main poles, and former centre, of the Slovak party system the Eurosceptic MDS certainly became less influential. The situation was more ambiguous in Hungary and the Czech Republic, where the mainstream parties with some Eurosceptic features either lost power (FIDESZ) or failed to regain it (the Czech Civic Democratic Party), although FIDESZ actually increased its share of the vote in 2002. In the latter cases, too, it should be noted that the rejection of or antagonism towards EU accession was less pronounced than in the case of the new Polish parties.

⁴⁴ Bielasiak, 'Institutionalization', p. 203.

⁴⁵ G. Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: a framework for analysis*, Cambridge University Press (1976), pp. 122-23.

The European issue in Polish politics

Poland therefore emerges as the CE country where EU issues had the greatest, or indeed, only direct influence on party systems in terms of their format. The apparent impact of enlargement, whether positive or negative, seemed to be far more moderate in all other countries where elections were held after 2000. Comparing policy platforms and the manifestos of parliamentary parties electorally successful in Poland from 1997 to 2001, too, a clear shift in the range of policies can be seen as well as signs of a definite – if *indirect* – impact of enlargement and integration issues on the party system. The pattern of parliamentary support for accession changed significantly. The party that showed most enthusiasm for Polish entry, the Freedom Union, did not receive enough votes to overcome the threshold and lost all parliamentary representation, while parties with Eurosceptic views either entered parliament for the first time or strengthened their line on the issue of Polish accession.

In 1997 the Polish Peasant Party had been regarded as the party with the strongest doubts about Polish entry to the EU, although this was expressed in terms that were as critical of the government as of the EU itself, the overall success of the integration project being regarded as totally dependent on the strong determination and unyielding approach that should be adopted by negotiators in order to secure the most advantageous position for Poland.⁴⁶ Four years later its judgement on this performance was not positive: ‘Unfortunately, the government’s activities in the last four year’s have lead to a clear asymmetry to Poland’s disadvantage in relations with the countries of the European Union’.⁴⁷ There was no clear reference to an accession referendum or to the party’s approach to it, but the tone was not just Eurocritical but decidedly more so than it had been four years earlier. The tone of another new party’s approach in this area was also subject to some qualification. The Law and Justice party regarded the decision on a definite date for Polish accession as being of prime importance, in which the decisive defence of national interests was a critical factor. Thus, ‘the basic condition for our presence in an integrated Europe must be the preservation of the nation state’ and its development as a strong, unitary entity.⁴⁸ In broad terms, the position of Law and Justice could quite easily have been classified at the outset as one of measured

⁴⁶ J. Kucharczyk, “‘Za, a nawet przeciw’”: partie polityczne wobec perspektywy integracji europejskiej w wyborach ‘97’, in L. Kolarska-Bobinska (ed), *Polska Eurodebata*, Warsaw: Instytut Spraw Publicznych, p. 220.

⁴⁷ <http://www.psl.org.pl/program>.

Euroscepticism, but subsequently it has generally been described as one broadly supportive of Polish membership.⁴⁹

The range of party positions towards Europe was nevertheless decidedly more critical in Poland during 2001 than it had been four years earlier, the closer prospect of EU enlargement and the imminence of a Polish decision having a clear, if indirect, influence on patterns of party competition. The relative balance of opinion between the parties on Polish accession persisted, in terms of the opinions of party supporters, and become more differentiated as the enlargement process advanced and the date for a national referendum was fixed. In 2001, at the time of the election, those most in favour of EU membership were to be found amongst supporters of Civic Platform and the Democratic Left and the fewest amongst potential League of Polish Families voters. After the agreement on Poland’s conditions of membership at the Copenhagen summit, support levels for Polish accession were generally higher and more differentiated. In early 2003 membership was still strongly supported by UDL and Civic Platform voters, and was also high for Law and Justice supporters. At 18 percent, however, it was strikingly low amongst those of the League of Polish Families (Table 2).

The *saliency* of European issues and the relative *importance* of enlargement across the range of policy priorities were, however, other things. EU-related issues may well have been related to the striking

Table 2: Support for Polish membership of the EU among supporters of political parties.

	Union of Democratic Left	Civic Platform	Law and Justice	Peasant Party	Self-Defence	League of Polish Families
2001	60	66	44	32	33	24
2003	88	83	72	58	37	18

Sources: Szczerbiak, ‘After the election’, Table 4; *Donosy* 3463 (2003).

changes in the party composition of the Polish Sejm that took place in 2001 and the transformation of the country’s party system, but they were not necessarily prominent in the

⁴⁸ <http://www.pis.org.pl/program>.

⁴⁹ Szczerbiak, ‘After the election, nearing the endgame: the Polish Euro-debate in the run up to the 2003 EU accession referendum’, p. 8.

hierarchy of issues identified as important by voters. Before the election between 4 and 7 percent of voters identified EU membership as a key determinant of party choice. In terms of issue ranking it came tenth out of seventeen, or seven out of seven in another survey.⁵⁰ Shortly after the 2001 elections a survey showed that few Polish voters defined Polish membership of the EU as a development that was not just desirable but also important. Only 15 percent took this view, compared with 84 percent who saw unemployment and inflation as important and 55 percent who thought crime should be treated more severely. The highest correlation coefficient for those in favour of EU membership was one of 13 percent for supporters of Civic Platform. Negative correlations were highest for Self-Defence supporters – at 22 – and 16 for Peasant Party voters. The level of EU rejection amongst League supporters was somewhat lower at 14 percent. They were far more concerned with maintaining the influence of the Church in national life, scoring a high level of correlation of 32 for this value.⁵¹

These findings tend to support the view that much of the impact of EU membership and issues of enlargement even in Poland have been not just indirect but also exerted an influence that was at best a moderate one in these dimensions of the Polish party system. The League of Polish Families may indeed be the party with the most distinctive anti-EU views, but this was less of a value-commitment in its own right than an aspect of a stronger and more inclusive commitment to the national role of the Catholic Church. Anti-EU sentiments were actually stronger amongst Self-Defence and Peasant Party supporters, but these parties' overall view of EU enlargement was more nuanced and linked with other aspects of national development.⁵² All this suggests that any comprehensive assessment of the impact of EU enlargement will be remarkably difficult to arrive at. The 'direct' measures proposed by Mair are quite restrictive, and even then difficult to operationalise. In terms of party manifestos the League of Polish Families would seem to be the only new element in the overall format of CE party systems that reflects the direct impact of Europe – but in relation to other characteristics like features of party identity articulated in past behaviour, election campaigns and subsequent parliamentary behaviour it is also appropriate to put Self-Defence in the hard Eurosceptic category. This deeper conception of party identity and a clearer understanding of

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 10.

⁵¹ C. McManus-Czubinska, W. Miller, R. Markowski and J. Wasilewski, 'Poland the political challenges of "Europe"', G. Blazyca (ed), *Poland on the Eve of EU Membership*, Paper of the Paisley Centre for Contemporary European Studies (2003), p. 40.

⁵² *ibid.*

the party's stance on EU enlargement was presumably something shared by the supporters of Self-Defence whose sympathy for it was strongly correlated with anti-EU sentiments.

The electorate is, of course, also differentiated in many ways apart from its support for different political parties and its propensity to vote for them. Apart from standard categories like sex, age, occupation, place of residence, etc. a recent study directs attention to a division in Polish society in terms of national identity. This distinguishes between those who feel only Polish and not European ('exclusive identifiers') and others who feel both Polish and European, or more European than Polish ('dual identifiers').⁵³ The distinction is also associated with wealth, age, rural origin and broad traditional vs. modern attitudes. It also bears on party sympathies and is, not surprisingly, reflected in the strong dislike of dual identifiers for Self-Defence and the League of Polish Families (negative views of 70 and 74 percent respectively). 'Exclusive identifiers' are less antagonistic to such parties: only 47 percent dislike Self-Defence (48 percent the Peasant Party) and 56 percent the League.

But just as striking is the general lack of articulateness of exclusive identifiers and the weakness of their opinion holding – relevant in this context, of course, because we are here talking of one of the constituencies likely to be most opposed to enlargement and Polish membership of the EU. In term of anti-EU protest they belong more to 'the Trappist Tendency rather than the Militant Tendency', their attitudes to the EU characterised more by weak opposition and grudging acceptance rather than robust rejection.⁵⁴ To the extent that party systems will also be affected by voter perceptions of their social and international environment, which in turn will influence electoral behaviour, the impact of enlargement may well be a highly indirect one evoking limited but also unpredictable political responses. The impact of enlargement may well have been limited and EU issues well down the list of voter priorities in the Polish electoral context, but they are certainly factors of some significance that may be rapidly mobilised in a situation where the party system is still in flux and voting outcomes highly uncertain.

If the success of new post-communist parties in developing reasonably clear programmatic identities has been as one sign of party system development⁵⁵, the impact of enlargement and

⁵³ C. McManus-Czubinska, W. Miller, R. Markowski and J. Wasilewski, 'Understanding dual identities in Poland', *Political Studies* vol. 51, 1 (2003), p. 124.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 134.

⁵⁵ Kitschelt et al., *Party Systems*, p. 193; Kostelecky, *Political Parties*, p. 177.

associated European issues may thus have different consequences. Centre parties with aspirations to government, whether oriented to left or right, have little choice but to follow the European path. The appeal of anti-EU parties may be equally ambiguous in their left-right appeal, as widespread confusion over the identity of Self-Defence already shows.⁵⁶ To the extent that Self-Defence can convincingly be identified as a left-wing force, albeit one with limited democratic credentials,⁵⁷ this only serves to further weaken the identity and undermine the left-wing credentials of the governing Union of the Democratic Left. By the end of the first quarter of 2003 three new left-wing parties had already been formed in response to a growing perception that the UDL was a force more of the centre-right than centre-left.⁵⁸ If European integration has, in terms of indirect impact, encouraged the ‘hollowing out of competition’ between parties – particularly those with real prospects of electoral success and a capacity for government formation – and contributed to ‘the notion of irrelevance of conventional politics’ in western Europe, such effects can only be more pronounced in the CE accession countries.⁵⁹ The scope of enlargement for ‘creating disillusionment when democratic attitudes have not fully taken root’ may well, therefore, be quite considerable.⁶⁰

Referendums in the CE accession countries

The weak engagement of the CE electorate in enlargement processes soon became evident as the referendums on national accession were being prepared. According to Eurobarometer surveys carried out in September and October 2002, low turnout was more likely to threaten a pro-accession outcome than sentiments of EU scepticism.⁶¹ The referendum first to be held was that in Slovenia (March 2003), followed by Hungary (April), Lithuania and Slovakia (May), and Poland (June). Most of the early referendums showed a vote in favour of accession of around 90 percent; the main problem for those concerned with securing a ‘yes’ vote lay in getting voters to the ballot box in the first place.

⁵⁶ The difficulties involved in associating levels of support for the EU with a distinct left- or right-wing affiliation are emphasised in the Slovak context by Tim Haughton. See ‘Assessing the impact of EU accession on party development in Slovakia’, paper prepared for the conference of the Political Studies Association (2003), p. 17.

⁵⁷ ‘The new Polish ‘Right?’

⁵⁸ *Polityka* 19 April 2003.

⁵⁹ Mair, ‘Limited impact’, pp. 48-49.

⁶⁰ Pridham, ‘EU enlargement’, p. 954.

⁶¹ *Candidate Countries Eurobarometer Report Number 2002.2*, http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion, p.4.

Survey responses to questions about turnout were remarkably unhelpful in predicting actual behaviour, while prior estimates about levels of national support for EU accession provided no greater guidance either (Table 3). The turnout in Lithuania (May 10-11) dispelled all the fears of those hoping for an

Table 3: Referendum results and Eurobarometer forecasts

	Turnout	% voting yes	‘Would vote yes in referendum tomorrow’	‘Likely to participate in EU referendum’	Overall support for EU membership
Lithuania	63	91	53	27	48
Slovenia	60	90	62	49	43
Slovakia	52	92	69	39	58
Hungary	46	84	77	52	67
Poland	59	77	61	27	52
Czech R.	55	77	50	28	43

Sources: national election returns (columns 2 and 3), Candidate Countries Eurobarometer 2002.2 (columns 4 – 6).

endorsement of the country’s accession plans, and was way above all Eurobarometer forecasts of turnout and support made some months earlier. Precisely why this was so was not clear, although some thought that the bargains offered by the largest supermarket chain to all those who could show that they had already voted might have played a part.⁶² Slovenian turnout (March 23) was slightly lower but broadly in line with Eurobarometer responses to the ‘Would you vote yes in a referendum tomorrow?’ question asked in 2002. Slovakian turnout was yet lower and some 20 points below the ‘Would you vote yes tomorrow?’ question asked the previous year. Interestingly enough, opinion polls conducted just before the referendum were still very much in line with the Eurobarometer forecasts of participation which turned out to be unduly pessimistic.⁶³ Turnout in Hungary (April 12) was also low and the source of considerable surprise. High levels of public support for Hungarian accession had been one

⁶² *Transitions Online* 6-12 May 2003, <http://www.tol.cz/look/TOLnew/article.tpl>.
⁶³ *European Voice* 15-21 May 2003.

reason why the referendum had been held there before those of most other countries of the region, but hopes of any such demonstration effect proved to be quite illusory. Hungarian turnout was nevertheless not far off the level suggested by responses to the question about the likelihood of participation in the referendum. Rather strangely, then, Eurobarometer responses to different questions seemed at least partly to predict referendum behaviour in different countries. Turnout levels in the first four referendums – and the proportion of those empowered to vote who endorsed accession to the EU – stood as a whole in *inverse relation* to support for membership and declared intentions to vote for it.

Neither is it easy to detect any common links between referendum behaviour and political party affiliation. The high level of those endorsing EU membership amongst voters in Slovenia was little different – at 82 percent – amongst supporters of the supposedly Eurosceptic National Party than it was for adherents of pro-EU organisations.⁶⁴ Contrasts in referendum behaviour between adherents to different parties appeared to be stronger in Hungary. Following the defeat of the right in the general election of 2002 their supporters were less inclined to vote in the referendum in order not to express any support for the socialist government or its policies. Thus 40 percent of FIDESZ adherents said they had not voted in contrast to 20 percent of socialist supporters.⁶⁵ The idea that major political issues had been decided in the general election held the previous year and that EU membership was largely inevitable seemed to underlay the high rate of abstention in Hungary. In Lithuania and Slovenia, by way of contrast, no general election had been held since 2000 and the referendum decision may well have seemed more pressing. A general election had, indeed, been held in Slovakia in 2002 as well but it would not be difficult to argue that the Dzurinda victory and his government's firmer pro-EU policy was understood to need reinforcement and continuing support after the lengthy period of Meciar's dominance and ambiguous attitude to European enlargement. Apart from a general tendency of low turnout, then, national experience and conditions seem likely to have played a decisive part in the referendum outcomes.

⁶⁴ D. Lajh and A. Krašovec, 'The Slovenian EU (and NATO) accession referendum(s) 23 March 2003', Oposing Europe Research Network Referendum Briefing No 3, p.7.

⁶⁵ B. Fowler, 'The Hungarian EU accession referendum 12 April 2003', Oposing Europe Research Network Referendum Briefing No 4, p.9.

General observations

This discussion and brief introductory survey suggests that enlargement and issues of European integration impact on CE party systems and political processes more generally in quite diverse ways. They seem to be closely dependent on national conditions whose influence is further enhanced by the indirect way in which questions of EU integration impinge on domestic politics. It can be argued that the impact of enlargement has been most pronounced in Poland – although prospects for any comprehensive assessment of its influence are weakened by the fact that the Polish party system is one of the least consolidated in Central Europe and that EU issues have a low salience in voter preferences.

Much of the discussion in this paper has been cast in terms of party systems viewed from the perspective of electoral outcomes and the national referendum results. But Polish experience suggests that electoral preferences and the anti-EU sentiments now seen in several organisations in that country impact on party systems and relations between parties in a variety of different ways. Such developments can certainly be related to the mechanisms of party systems discussed by Mair, but again they often relate only indirectly to specific questions of EU enlargement. A prime case is that of coalition dynamics and recent developments in the pattern of party-government relations in Poland. In February 2003, for example, members of the Peasant Party voted against a government project to introduce motorway charges. As the Peasants formed part of the governing coalition, this gave the Democratic Left prime minister reason to dismiss the two Peasant Party ministers from the government and put an end to the coalition.

There were obviously a number of factors involved in the collapse of the coalition, but the issue of road charges was only a very minor one among them and it was not a question in which the Peasant Party had any real practical or principled interest at all. This was certainly not the case where EU issues were concerned. Particularly important as a background condition was the long-time decline in the Peasant Party vote (from 15 percent in 1993, to 7 percent in 1997, and up only to 9 percent in 2001), and the dramatic expansion in support for Self-Defence, from 0.1 percent of votes in 1997 to 10.2 percent in 2001. The relatively high levels of anti-enlargement sentiments found among Peasant Party and Self-Defence supporters have been noted above. While, too, it remains remarkably difficult to link CE voting patterns with socio-occupational status across much of the party spectrum there are far

clearer patterns so far as the agricultural population is concerned. Out of the eight main parties Self-Defence and the Peasant Party gathered 62 percent of the farming vote in 2001, rather more going to the Peasant Party than to Self-Defence (the LPF vote was no stronger amongst farmers than any other occupational group).⁶⁶

Across several dimensions, then, it is apparent that Self-Defence and the Peasant Party have been in direct competition for the agricultural vote, and that the Peasants have understandably seen Self-Defence as a direct threat.⁶⁷ Peasant Party deputies' behaviour had been particularly radicalised by recent farmer protests organised by Self-Defence and the imminence of the referendum on Polish membership of the European Union. The vote against motorway charges had virtually nothing to do with Peasant Party–Self-Defence relations, though, and was more relevant to the position of the Peasant Party as a subordinate partner in the coalition with the Union of the Democratic Left and other policy priorities it was pursuing. The Peasant Party deputies had judged, erroneously as it turned out, that they could flex their parliamentary muscle with relative impunity under the sensitive political conditions that were emerging in the run-up to the referendum on EU membership. Enlargement issues were by no means all that was involved in the dissolution of the coalition, therefore, but they certainly played a major part in creating the situation that led to the undermining of the coalition's viability. The enlargement factor has thus played a significant part in party system dynamics, though by no means in a direct fashion and in ways strongly conditioned by domestic factors and national political relations.

⁶⁶ A. Szczerbiak, 'Poland's unexpected political earthquake: the September 2001 parliamentary election', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* vol. 18, 3 (2002), p. 52.

⁶⁷ J. Paradowska, 'Mniejszy rząd – mniejszy zło', *Polityka* 8 March 2003.

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