



Explaining the Success of Centre-Right Parties in Post-Communist East Central Europe: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

This paper attempts to explain varying patterns of centre-right success in three post-communist states, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic. Success is understood as the ability to construct broad and durable parties. Macro-institutional explanations that focus on executive structures and electoral system design have limited explanatory power and it is often difficult to separate out analytically the processes of cause and effect. Although historical-structural explanations that focus on regime legacies can explain the ideological positioning of different centre-right formations in our three cases, they do little to explain their relative success. The application of a path dependent/critical junctures framework that stresses the role of political crafting and choices made in the immediate post-transition period and the aftermath of defeat by communist successor parties in the Hungarian and Polish cases adds some insight, but there is some doubt as to whether the success in founding broad centre-right party-type formations in these periods 'locks in' through self-reinforcing mechanisms and a logic of 'increasing returns'. Other explanations that stress the importance of elite characteristics and capacity are needed to supplement the shortcomings of these approaches, in particular: (a) the presence of cohesive elites able to act as the nucleus of new centre-right formations; and (b) the ability of such elites to craft broad integrative ideological narratives that can transcend diverse ideological positions and unite broad swathes of centre-right and right-wing activists and voters.

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Despite their importance in contemporary European politics, parties of the centre-right remain a strikingly under-researched area in both West European and post-communist Eastern European comparative politics. Compared with the voluminous literature on the left-wing communist successor parties and the extreme right, relatively little has been written on post-communist centre-right formations in terms of either empirical case studies or attempts to develop explanatory frameworks. This paper considers why centre-right parties have been more organizationally and electorally 'successful' in some post-communist states than in others. It does so by examining three countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) in which the centre-right has enjoyed contrasting fortunes: Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland. In doing so, we pay particular attention to the three most successful post-1989 centre-right party groupings in these countries: Hungary's Fidesz, the Czech Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) in Poland.

In focusing on these three academically well known East-Central European states, we are not suggesting that they are in any sense 'typical' of post-communist Europe or a benchmark of 'normal' development. As the work of Vachudova¹ suggests, they are in many ways a rather small and atypical subset in which the patterns of post-communist party politics may differ substantially from those encountered in new nation-states breaking away from disintegrating multi-national communist federations such as those examined by Haughton and Fisher.² However, we have chosen to focus on them because, since 1989, they have experienced clear and relatively well-established programmatic competition and offer variance on our dependent variable of centre-right 'success', which we define below in terms of the formations' breadth, stability and durability. Our selection of national cases also offers us a clear strategy for testing and extending approaches to party development in CEE formulated on the basis of comparison of other party types such as, for example, communist successor parties. Our analysis also raises some broader comparative issues regarding the durability and cohesion of the centre-right that go beyond the context of post-communist Europe.

¹ See: Milada A. Vachudova, 'Right-Wing Parties and Political Outcomes in Eastern Europe,' Paper presented at the American Political Science Association annual meeting, San Francisco, 2001; and Milada A. Vachudova 'Integration, Security and Immigration: The European Agendas of Eastern Europe's Right Wing Parties,' paper presented at the Council for European Studies Biennial Conference of Europeanists, Chicago, 2002.

² See: Tim Haughton and Sharon Fisher, 'From the Politics of State-building to Programmatic politics: The Post-Federal Experience and the Development of Party Politics in Croatia and Slovakia', *Party Politics*, forthcoming. Although a major constituent of the Czechoslovak federation, patterns of party competition in the Czech Republic were not fundamentally shaped by the dynamics of federal disintegration. On the whole Czech parties and politicians sought to react to, and manage, Slovak demands for greater national autonomy, which were initially quite unexpected to them. See: Eric Stein *Czecho/Slovakia: Ethnic Conflict, Constitutional Fissure, Negotiated Breakup* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1997); and Kevin Deegan Krause, *Elected Affinities: Democracy and Party Competition in Slovakia and the Czech Republic* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

The paper begins by explaining why we believe that broad and durable party formations are optimal outcomes for the actors concerned and why party fragmentation is, all other things being equal, less preferable. In section two, we move on to explain how we operationalise the dependent variable of a broad and durable party and how, on this basis, we rank Hungary and the Czech Republic as the most successful cases and Poland as the least successful. We then move on to examine possible explanations for these patterns of variation that might be derived from the existing literature on post-communist party development, specifically: (i) macro-institutional explanations that focus on executive structures and electoral systems; (ii) historical-structural ones that focus on regime legacies; and (iii) path dependent/critical juncture frameworks that focus on the choices made in the immediate post-transition period and in the aftermath of defeat by communist successor parties. Having reviewed the shortcomings of these approaches, we then proceed to posit supplementary explanations for centre-right ‘success’ that stress the importance of elite characteristics and capacities, particularly: (a) the presence of cohesive leadership elites able to act as the nucleus of new centre-right formations and (b) the ability of such elites to craft broad integrative narratives that can transcend diverse ideological positions and unite broad swathes of centre-right activists and voters. The objective of this paper is, therefore, both to test the applicability of existing theoretical explanations and to begin to develop (inductively) new theories that can help to account for the success of centre-right formations in post-communist states.

1. Why broad and durable party formations?

The concept of ‘party success’ is a problematic one. It is conventionally thought of as a combination of office-holding, political longevity, vote maximisation and the implementation of policy goals.³ However, for the purposes of this paper we reject office-holding and policy- or performance-based measures of success. Policy outcomes are determined by a complex array of economic, political, social and institutional factors. As such they are too multi-form to link to incumbent parties. This is particularly true in post-communist CEE where most administrations have been coalition governments making policy through inter-party bargaining and international conditionality has, at times, been a powerful influence on national policy.⁴ For similar reasons, we also reject office-holding as a measure of party success. Not only is retention of office partly conditioned by policy performance and inter-party negotiation, but the relatively short period during which CEE party systems have existed makes it difficult to identify and aggregate out electoral cycles. Moreover, because of the exigencies of post-communist reform and European integration and the limited range of policy choices often available there has been a tendency among electorates in the region to reject incumbent parties of all political shades after one

³ See: Herbert Kitschelt, *The Logics of Party Formation: Ecological Politics in Belgium and West Germany* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989); and Hebert Kitschelt, *The Transformation of European Social Democracy* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Wolfgang C. Muller and Kaare Strom, *Policy, Office or Votes? How Political Parties in Western Europe Make Hard Decisions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁴ See: Wade A. Jacoby, *The Enlargement of the EU and NATO: Ordering from the Menu in Central Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Milada A. Vachudova, *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage and Integration After Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

term in office.⁵ This leaves measures based on electoral support. However, although not uninformative, crude measures such as vote share or absolute numbers of votes received are, in our view, too crude a measure of party success even if averaged across a decade and a half of party competition. As well as overlooking the possible impact of varying institutional arrangements, they overlook the very different nature of a large, and perhaps transitory, centre-right vote fragmented between many parties and a concentrated and sustained centre-right vote, which could be assumed to be a more established and enduring feature of national party politics. Raw measures of centre-right parliamentary representation, although again relevant, suffer from similar flaws.

For the purposes of this paper we therefore choose a definition of party ‘success’ based on two elements: (a) ‘breadth’, by which we mean the ability to construct an inclusive electoral entity that encompasses a socially and ideologically broad range of voters and sub-groups; and (b) ‘durability’, which we take to mean the ability of such an entity to remain united and cohesive and endure over a period of years.⁶ This second category overlaps with the notion of party institutionalisation that has been developed elsewhere in the parties literature.⁷ However, we choose to avoid this term in order not to become embroiled in specific controversies concerning, for example, the nature, process and empirical yardsticks of party institutionalisation.

Why do we argue that broad and durable centre-right parties and formations represent an optimal outcome for the actors concerned? Although, as noted above, we do not seek explicitly to explain electoral and office-seeking success, we maintain that organizational success is an important component in shaping electoral success and would argue that broad and durable party-type formations are more likely to be electorally successful. Where they operate within a majoritarian electoral systems there are psychological and mechanical factors that will usually favour larger parties: under-representation and even exclusion of minor parties is usually intrinsic to such systems because only first-placed candidates win seats, and this is exacerbated by the fact that, when voters understand the ‘mechanical’ effect, they often decline to ‘waste’ their vote by favouring minor party candidates. But even under the list based electoral systems of proportional representation that predominate in CEE these effects operate where there are, for example: registration requirements that favour larger parties, minimum thresholds for securing parliamentary representation; *de facto* thresholds caused by a large number of electoral districts electing small numbers of deputies; counting systems for translating votes into seats that discriminate in favour of larger

⁵ See Kieran Williams, ‘Proportional Representation in Post-Communist Eastern Europe: The First Decade,’ *Representation*, Vol 40 No 1 (2003), pp.44-54.

⁶ In focusing on breadth, we do not however, endorse the view of that bi-polar party competition and alternation of rival blocs in office offers greater ‘democratic quality’. See: Vachudova, ‘Right-Wing Parties and Political Outcomes in Eastern Europe’; and Vachudova, ‘Integration, Security and Immigration: The European Agendas of Eastern Europe’s Right Wing Parties.’ On this, see also: Mitchell Orenstein, *Out of the Red: Building Capitalism and Democracy in Postcommunist Europe* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2001); and Anna Gryzmala-Busse, ‘Encouraging Effective Democratic Competition’, *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol 21 No 2 (2007), pp.91-110. In our view, further research needs to be undertaken to test such claims.

⁷ See: Angelo Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organisation and Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and Jonathan Hopkin, *Party Formation and Democratic Transition in Spain: The Creation and Collapse of the Union of the Democratic Centre* (Basingstoke: Macmillan/St Martin's Press, 1999).

parties; and ‘top-up’ lists of reserved seats for parties securing a particular share of the vote. While a wider range of parties might be able to target and appeal to specific ideological or socio-economic segments more effectively than can one right-wing ‘catch all’ electoral strategy, broad and inclusive parties can receive a ‘premium for unity’ whereby voters reward organisational consolidation by parties and leaders who are seen to overcome personal ambitions and ideological divisions and present a ‘united front’.

Broad and inclusive party-type formations also reduce information costs for voters who might have to invest considerable cognitive resources to choose from a wide and regularly changing range of parties, programmes and positions. For the parties themselves, once formed, they reduce or eliminate the transaction costs involved in having to negotiate and maintain pre-electoral alliances and post-election coalition government agreements, costs that may increase as the number of parties increases.⁸ Although some such as Vachudova⁹ question how desirable ‘stable’ party government is for democratic quality and effective policy-making, broad and durable parties are more likely to resolve political disputes through intra-party bargaining, encouraging government stability and duration. Durable party formations also avoid the repeated start-up costs associated with the programmatic and organizational development of new parties and are more likely to attract talented elites interested in joining electorally successful, office-holding parties with long-term prospects.

2. Overview of cases

Defining the right and centre-right (or left for that matter) in contemporary Europe is fraught with difficulty.¹⁰ As has been widely noted, although always historically and culturally contingent, the terms ‘left’ and ‘right’, have become increasingly fluid and ill-defined since the collapse of communism.¹¹ Unsurprisingly perhaps, nowhere have they proved more elusive than in the newer democracies of CEE. Not only was the label ‘conservative’ widely used to describe the hardline communist factions before 1989, in some post-communist democracies it has been the ‘left’ which has enacted policies such as radical macro-economic stabilization and the ‘right’ which has

⁸ We do, however, recognise the existence of trade-offs between larger parties’ strategies of vote maximization and their short-term electoral interest, in some contexts, in the survival of smaller parties as potential coalition partners. For example, some have argued that the weak performance in the 2006 parliamentary election of the Hungarian far right, which failed to enter parliament, deprived Fidesz of a valuable ally. Similarly, in the 2006 Czech parliamentary elections in 2006, as the largest party the Civic Democrats benefited from the increase in disproportionality caused by the introduction of the smaller electoral districts in 2002. However, their two smaller allies were more significantly under-represented than they would have been before 2002, leaving the Civic Democrats unable to form a majority centre-right administration. See: Seán Hanley, ‘Europe and the Czech Parliamentary Elections of 2-3 June 2006’, *European Parties Elections and Referendums Network Election Briefing No 27* (2006) available at http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/epern_no_27.pdf (Viewed on 1 October 2006).

⁹ See: Vachudova, *Europe Undivided*.

¹⁰ See, for example: Seán Hanley, ‘Getting the Right Right: Redefining the Centre-Right in Post-Communist Europe’, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol 20 No 3 (2004), pp.9-27.

¹¹ See: Vincent Cable, *The World’s New Fissures* (London: Demos, 1993); Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994); Alain de Benoist, ‘End of the Left-Right Dichotomy: The French Case’, *Telos*, Vol 102 (1995), pp.73-90; and Norberto Bobbio, *Left and Right: the Significance of a Political Distinction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

championed state provision. Such paradoxes have frequently bedeviled efforts at defining the ‘right’ in a Central and East European context.¹² Moreover, as the emergence of an organized political right after 1989 largely *preceded* the re-emergence of propertied groups through ‘transition to capitalism’, traditional class and cleavage-based definitions are also problematic. Not surprisingly, therefore, comparative party scholarship has thus tended to focus on groupings with readily identifiable shared origins, such as communist successor parties,¹³ or niche parties with well-defined common constituencies.¹⁴

We believe that meaningful and workable definitions of the CEE centre-right can be formulated, at least provisionally, and have attempted to do so elsewhere.¹⁵ However, for the purposes of this paper, rather than set out rigid *a priori* definitions of ‘right’ and ‘centre-right’ and then attempt to apply them to our three country cases, we adopt a more contextual-inductive approach to identify the party formations that can be viewed as right-wing or centre-right in the contexts of their national party systems. We have therefore taken into account a mix of factors including: parties’ self-identification; local understandings of ‘rightness’; established patterns of coalition preference within national party systems; and membership of transnational centre-right groupings such as the European People’s Party or the European Democrats.

We then use a series of measures, set out in Tables 1-3, to consider the breadth and durability of the main centre-right or right-wing formation in each of our countries. For all national parliamentary elections since 1989 in which political parties or well defined party blocs were the main actors,¹⁶ we measure: (i) the proportion of the vote for centre-right and right-wing parties taken by the largest centre-right or right-wing

¹² See: Kenneth Ka Lok Chan, ‘Strands of Conservative Politics in Post-Communist Transition: Adapting to Europeanization and Democratization,’ in Paul G. Lewis (ed.), *Party Development and Democratic Change in Post-Communist Europe*, (London: Frank Cass, 2001), pp.152-178; Vachudova, ‘Right-Wing Parties and Political Outcomes in Eastern Europe’; and Vachudova, ‘Integration, Security and Immigration’.

¹³ See: Andras Bozóki and John T. Ishiyama (eds.), *The Communist Successor Parties of Central and Eastern Europe* (Armonk, NY: M E Sharpe, 2002); and Anna Grzymała-Busse, *Redeeming the Communist Past: The Regeneration of Communist Parties in East-Central Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁴ See: John T. Ishiyama, ‘Ethnopolitical Parties and Democratic Consolidation in Post-Communist Eastern Europe’ *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol 7 No 3 (2001), pp.25–45; and John T. Ishiyama, ‘Women’s Parties in Post-Communist Politics’, *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol 17 No 2 (2003), pp.266-304; and Nick Sitter and Agnes Batory, ‘Cleavages, competition, and coalition-building: Agrarian parties and the European question in Western and Eastern Europe’, *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol 43 No 4 (2004), pp.523-46.

¹⁵ See: Aleks Szczerbiak and Seán Hanley, ‘Introduction: Understanding the Politics of the Right in Contemporary East-Central Europe’, in Aleks Szczerbiak and Seán Hanley (eds) *Centre-Right Parties in Post-Communist East-Central Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.1-8. Hanley, for example, argues that parties of the centre-right in CEE can be defined as groupings that identify with core West European centre-right traditions and seek to “reconcile liberal-capitalist modernization with traditional moral values and specific local and national identities”. In many, but not all, cases CEE centre-right formations are also the ‘successor parties’ to opposition movements, giving them a shared ideological inclination to anti-communism and a common hostility to communist successor parties of all shades. See: Hanley, ‘Getting the Right Right’, p.16.

¹⁶ We, therefore, exclude the Czech and Czechoslovak parliamentary elections in the Czech Republic in June 1990, which were dominated by Civic Forum, an umbrella grouping uniting a range of opposition forces.

grouping;¹⁷ (ii) the share of the centre-right and right-wing vote won by the largest centre-right or right-wing party divided by the number of right-wing parliamentary parties (the centre-right aggregation index); (iii) the proportion of parliamentary seats won by the center-right and right taken by the largest centre-right or right-wing grouping; and (iv) the level of fractionalization of centre-right and right-wing forces in parliament as measured by the application of the Rae index to parties on the centre-right or right.¹⁸

For the purposes of this paper, therefore, the concept of breadth and durability of centre-right party-type formations is determined with reference to a continuum, with an ideal typical broad and durable CEE centre-right party formations being one that has been able to secure 100% of the total centre-right and right-wing vote in every post-1989 election. In practice, therefore, breadth and durability are conceptualized as *the ability to garner a substantial proportion of the votes cast for all centre-right and right-wing party formations over a sustained period of time*. This definition does not specify any particular organizational form that a centre-right party-type grouping should take. The party-type formations under consideration here include: traditional member-based party organizations, movement-type organizations, coalitions of parties and/or other hybrid formations. The essential characteristic of the dependent variable - a 'successful' centre-right party-type formation - is its ability to garner a substantial proportion of the right-wing vote over a sustained period of time. Applying this to our three cases, clear variations in levels of success on the CEE centre-right can be identified.

¹⁷ For states with bi-cameral legislatures, Poland and the (after 1996) Czech Republic, we consider elections to the lower house of parliament. For parliamentary elections held in the Czech Republic in June 1992, when it was still a constituent part of Czechoslovakia, we use voting figures for elections to the Czech national parliament, the Czech National Council (CNC), rather than Czech seats in the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly, as the lower house of the parliament in the independent Czech Republic is the direct successor of the CNC. In Hungary, which uses a mixed list- and single-member constituency system, we take the list vote as our measure, as this both better enables comparison with the other countries under consideration and represents the purer measure of party vote. We generally exclude minor parties polling less than one percent of the vote from our calculations as both statistically insignificant and often difficult to categorize with certainty.

¹⁸ Although measures of fractionalization such as the Rae index are usually applied as a measure of party system fragmentation, there is, in principle, no reason why they cannot be applied to a bloc or *tendance* within a national party system. Our use of this measure, naturally, does not capture the cohesion of centre-right formations' parliamentary groups once elected.

Table 1: Centre-right breadth/inclusivity and cohesiveness/durability in post-communist Hungary

		1990	1994	1998	2002	2006
Votes	Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF)	24.73 %	11.74 %	2.80%	- **	5.04%
	Fidesz	*	7.02 %	29.48 %	41.07 %**	42.03 %
	Total right vote (centre-right + extreme right)	42.92 % (i)	36.20% (ii)	54.55% (iii)	45.44 % (iv)	49.27 % (v)
Seats	Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF)	164	38	17	24	11
	Fidesz	*	20	148	164	164
	Total seats won by right	229 (vi)	106 (vii)	227 (viii)	188** (ix)	175 (x)
Measures of breadth/inclusivity	largest centre-right party's share of the total vote for the right	0.58	0.32	0.54	0.90	0.85
	Centre-right aggregation index	19.3	6.4	9.0	45.0	21.01
	Proportion of seats won by right held by the largest centre-right party	0.72	0.36	0.65	0.87	0.94
	Fractionalization of the right	0.48	0.87	0.58	0.24	0.12

NB:

Fractionalization of the right index:

$$F = 1 - \sum p_i^2$$

Pi = proportion of seats held by party i, where i is the largest centre-right party

Aggregation index:

$$\frac{\text{The share of the right-wing vote (\%) won by the largest centre-right party}}{\text{The number of right-wing parties}}$$

* Fidesz not classified as a centre-right party until 1994. See text

** There was a joint Fidesz-MDF list in 2002 although they remained two parties. The parties negotiated the placing and positioning of candidates on the joint lists.

- (i) Votes cast for Hungarian Democratic Forum (24.73%), Independent Smallholders Party (11.73%), Christian Democratic People's Party (6.46%).
- (ii) Votes cast for Hungarian Democratic Forum (11.74%), Independent Smallholders Party (8.82%), Christian Democratic People's Party (7.03%), Fidesz (7.02%), Party of Hungarian Justice and Life (1.59%)
- (iii) Votes cast for Fidesz (29.48%), Independent Smallholders Party (13.15%), Hungarian Justice and Life (5.47%), Hungarian Democratic Forum (2.80%), Christian Democratic People's Party (2.31%), Hungarian Democratic People's Party (1.34%)

- (iv) Votes cast for Fidesz-MDF joint list (41.07%), Hungarian Justice and Life (4.37%)
- (v) Votes cast for Fidesz (42.03%), Hungarian Democratic Forum (5.04%) and Hungarian Justice and Life (2.2%)
- (vi) Seats won by Hungarian Democratic Forum (164), Independent Smallholders Party (44), Christian Democratic People's Party (21)
- (vii) Seats won by Hungarian Democratic Forum (38), Independent Smallholders Party (26), Christian Democratic People's Party (22), Fidesz (20), Hungarian Justice and Life (0)
- (viii) Seats won by Fidesz (148), Independent Smallholders Party (48), Hungarian Democratic Forum (17), Hungarian Justice and Life (14), Christian Democratic People's Party (0), Hungarian Democratic People's Party (0)
- (ix) Seats won by Fidesz-MDF joint list (188) Hungarian Justice and Life (0)
- (x) Seats won by Fidesz (164), Hungarian Democratic Forum (11) and Hungarian Justice and Life (0)

2.1 Hungary

As **Table 1** shows, following the fragmentation during the mid-1990s of the first broad formation of the Hungarian right, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), Hungary's Fidesz has been the most successful across our three countries at constructing a broad centre-right grouping, despite suffering narrow electoral defeats to the centre-left in 2002 and 2006. Party origins per se are not an adequate definition of left and right in the Hungarian case. Whilst the communist-successor formation, the Hungarian Socialist Party, is seen, by definition, as being on the left that does not mean that all parties with non-communist origins are on the right. Indeed, in Hungary party origin-based definitions of 'left' and 'right' are overlaid by a pre-communist era understanding of these notions based primarily on attitudes towards the Hungarian nation. On this basis, even though their institutional origins are anti-communist, the liberal parties in post-communist Hungary have neither identified themselves as being on the right, nor formed governing coalitions with other post-opposition parties that defined themselves as right-wing. Instead, the main surviving liberal party, the Free Democrats, formed a coalition with the Socialists in 1994, 2002 and 2006.

Fidesz itself poses some classification problems, in terms of the timing of its inclusion into the right-wing category. When the party was formed in 1988 it defined itself as a youth-based liberal party and was initially a member of the Liberal International. However, by 2002 it had transformed itself into a centre-right, national-conservative party and become a member of the Christian Democrat-led European People's Party (EPP). On the basis of our defining factors of self-identification and coalition choices, we can argue that Fidesz's initial transformation into a centre-right party in Hungarian terms occurred in 1993-1994. In terms of self-definition, the leadership's declaration at the April 1993 party congress that Fidesz was now a 'nationally committed' liberal party signalled clearly the party's shift to the right in the Hungarian context. In terms of coalition choices, at the time of the 1994 parliamentary elections, Fidesz then made clear that it would be willing to go into government with the Hungarian Democratic Forum, but not the Socialists, whereas Fidesz's erstwhile liberal partners, the Free Democrats, made the opposite choice.

As **Table 1** shows, while it was the largest centre-right party in Hungary in the first two post-communist elections, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) was only moderately successful in terms of breadth, garnering 58% of the total centre-right and right-wing vote in 1990 and 32% in 1994. From the mid-1990s, Fidesz eclipsed the

fragmenting Democratic Forum as the main centre-right party in Hungary. Subsequently, Fidesz has not only developed a wide base of electoral support, becoming by 2002 the party of choice for over 40% of the Hungarian electorate. It has also united successfully and consolidated a range of right-wing forces at both mass and elite level garnering respectively 90% and 85% of the total number of votes won by centre-right and right-wing parties in the 2002 and 2006 elections. In effect, the party has incorporated virtually the whole of the Hungarian right with the exception of the far-right Justice and Life party and some other far-right groupings; and the partial exception of the Hungarian Democratic Forum which, having failed to renew its electoral alliance with Fidesz, succeeded unexpectedly in re-entering parliament as an independent party in 2006.

2.2 *Czech Republic*

In the Czech context, unlike in Hungary, it is not meaningful to speak of a single 'right-wing' camp with gradations running from the centre- to the extreme right. Rather there is a large, distinct group of centre-right parties, all closely integrated into mainstream European centre-right groupings that includes: the Civic Democratic Party, the Christian and Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party, the Freedom Union-Democratic Union and between 1992 and 1998 the Civic Democratic Alliance.¹⁹ With the exception of the Christian Democrats, whose embrace of moderate social conservatism and the social market is similar to that of larger sister parties in Germany and Austria, all Czech centre-right groupings are essentially pro-market parties and right-wing politics in the Czech Republic is therefore understood primarily in terms of (neo-)liberal and anti-communist stances at both elite and mass level. The small, racist and economically populist Czech far-right, primarily embodied by the Association for the Republic-Republican Party of Czechoslovakia, was also represented in parliament between 1992 and 1998. However, it never polled more than 8.1% of the national poll and has now declined to a fragmented fringe of extra-parliamentary groupings.

By far the most successful of the Czech centre-right parties has been the Civic Democratic Party (ODS). The Civic Democrats were founded as neo-liberal, pro-market party in 1991 under the leadership of then Czechoslovak Finance Minister Václav Klaus following the break-up of the broad Civic Forum movement, which had piloted Czechoslovakia's transition from communism in 1989-90. As **Table 2** shows, the party has secured 25-35% of the national vote in five free elections since 1992, on each occasion gaining at least 60% of the total vote cast for parties of the centre-right and right. The Civic Democrats have also survived loss of national office in 1997; a powerful electoral challenge from a new liberal-Christian Democratic bloc, the Quad-Coalition, between 1999 and 2002; and the departure of their charismatic founder Klaus as party leader in December 2002.²⁰ After the collapse of the 1992-7 Civic

¹⁹ The Christian and Democratic Union is a full member of the European People's Party (EPP); the Civic Democratic Party is a member of the European Democratic Union (EDU) and the European Democrats (ED) sub-grouping that sits as part of the EPP-ED faction in the European Parliament. MEPs from another minor centre-right grouping, the European Democrats, also sit as part of the EPP group. The Civic Democratic Alliance was an EDU member but following its effective disintegration in 1998 has re-aligned and recently joined the European Liberal Democrat and Reform (ELDR) grouping.

²⁰ See: Seán Hanley, 'Blue Velvet: The Rise and the Decline of the New Czech Right', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol 20 No 3 (2004), pp.28-54; and Seán Hanley, *The New*

Democrat-led centre-right coalition government, the party experienced serious internal splits and successive electoral defeats in 1998 and 2002, but maintained its stability as a broad grouping and won the 2006 parliamentary election with a record vote share of 35%.²¹ The Civic Democrats are thus one of the most consistently successful parties (in electoral terms) of the centre-right in the region and have succeeded increasingly in concentrating right-wing and centre-right forces in the Czech Republic around their party. However, as **Tables 1 and 2** illustrate, they have not been as successful as Fidesz in terms of breadth, never having secured more than 79% of the votes cast for all centre-right and right-wing parties (in 2006) compared with Fidesz's 90% score in 2002; and they have lagged still more markedly behind Fidesz in their ability to concentrate the parliamentary right. The Civic Democrats' more limited electoral support and failure to incorporate other smaller liberal-conservative groups have, therefore, always left them dependent on either ideologically uncommitted coalition allies – including, most recently the Czech Greens - or deals with the centre-left.²² Despite its impressive election victory, in 2006-7 the party again struggled to find parliamentary allies capable of sustaining a majority centre-right coalition.²³

Right in the New Europe: Right-wing Politics and Czech Transformation 1989-2006 (London: Routledge Curzon, forthcoming, 2007).

²¹ See: Hanley, 'Blue Velvet'; and Hanley, 'Europe and the Czech Parliamentary Elections of 2-3 June 2006'.

²² Since entering the Czech parliament in June 2006, the Greens have aligned themselves closely with centre-right parties. However, despite their pro-market stance and recent coalition strategy, we believe the Czech Greens' policy, ideology and European affiliations clearly mark them out as part of a family of ecological/Green parties, rather than as 'right-wing' or 'centre-right' in our sense of the term. If, following Czech journalistic practice, we include the Czech Greens as a 'right-wing' party in our calculations in 2006, the trend would be broadly the same: the most significant difference would be a greater recovery in the overall Czech right-wing vote in 2006 to a level closer to its historical maximum (see **Table 2**).

²³ See: Hanley, 'Europe and the Czech Parliamentary Elections of 2-3 June 2006'.

Table 2: Centre-right breadth/inclusivity and cohesiveness/durability in the post-communist Czech Republic

		1992*	1996	1998	2002	2006
Votes	Civic Democratic Party (ODS)	29.73%	29.62 %	27.74%	24.47%	35.38%
	Total right vote (centre-right + extreme right)	50.41% (i)	54.87% (ii)	50.69% (iii)	39.01% (iv)	44.81% (v)
Seats	Civic Democratic Party (ODS)	76	68	63	58	81
	Total seats won by right	119 (vi)	117 (vii)	102 (viii)	89 (ix)	94** (x)
Measures of breadth/inclusivity	Largest centre-right party's share of the total vote for the right	0.59	0.54	0.55	0.63	0.79
	Centre-right aggregation index	11.8	10.8	11.00	31.5	47.0
	Proportion of seats won by right held by the largest centre-right party	0.64	0.58	0.62	0.65	0.86
	Fractionalization of the centre-right	0.59	0.66	0.62	0.58	0.26

*Figures for 1992 are for elections to the Czech National Council. In June 1992 elections to the two house of the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly also took place in the Czech Republic

** The six deputies elected for the Greens also allied themselves with the right in coalition negotiations, but are not included as right-wing party for the purpose of these calculations. Were the Greens included in the calculation for 2006, there would be a total right-wing vote of 51.1% with ODS taking 69% of right-wing votes and 81% of right wing parliamentary seats. The re-calculated Rae fractionalization score for the Czech right would be 0.34.

- (i) Votes cast for: Civic Democratic Party (29.73%), Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party (6.28%), Rally for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (5.98%), Civic Democratic Alliance (5.93%), Club of Committed Independents (2.69%)
- (ii) Votes cast for: Civic Democratic Party (29.62%), Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party (8.08%), Rally for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovak ia (8.01%); Civic Democratic Alliance (6.36%), Democratic Union (2.8%)
- (iii) Votes cast for: Civic Democratic Party (27.74%), Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party (9.00%), Freedom Union (8.60%), Rally for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (3.90%), Democratic Union (1.45%)
- (iv) Votes cast for: Civic Democratic Party (24.74%), Coalition of Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party and Freedom Union – Democratic Union (14.27%)
- (v) Votes cast for: Civic Democratic Party 35.38%), Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party and Freedom Union (7.22%), European Democrats – Association of Independent Lists (2.08%), Freedom Union-Democratic Union (0.13%)
- (vi) Seats won by: Civic Democratic Party (76), Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party (15), Civic Democratic Alliance (14) Rally for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (14)

- (vii) Seats won by: Civic Democratic Party (68), Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party (18), Rally for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (18), Civic Democratic Alliance (13), Democratic Union (0)
- (viii) Seats won by: Civic Democratic Party (63), Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party (20), Freedom Union (19), Rally for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (0), Democratic Union (0)
- (ix) Seats won by: Civic Democratic Party (58), Coalition of Christian Democratic Union – Czech People's Party and Freedom Union – Democratic Union (31)
- (x) Seats won by: Civic Democratic Party (81), Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party (13), European Democrats – Association of Independent Lists (0), Freedom Union – Democratic Union (0).

2.3 *Poland*

As **Table 3** shows, the centre-right's relative success in Hungary and the Czech Republic contrasts starkly with the position in Poland, where it has been unable to construct an inclusive and durable party-type formation. In terms of classification, in the Polish case the centre-right and right is defined as encompassing those parties that emerged from the Solidarity movement or anti-communist democratic opposition and that explicitly profiled themselves as conservative, Christian Democratic, clerical-nationalist or simply centre-right or right-wing.²⁴ The liberal and agrarian parties were the most difficult to categorise in the Polish case.²⁵ Post-Solidarity liberal parties such as the Democratic Union, Liberal Democratic Congress and Freedom Union are included because in post-1989 Poland party origins were one of the most significant factors in defining whether parties were identified as right or left both by themselves and by voters.²⁶ This is reflected in the fact that post-Solidarity liberal parties have only formed government coalitions with other post-Solidarity centre-right and right-wing parties. For the same reason, the post-Solidarity agrarian parties, such as the Peasant Agreement, are also included in the right.²⁷

²⁴ Thus excluding the small parties with Solidarity/opposition roots of the self-declared centre-left such as Labour Solidarity or the Labour Union.

²⁵ Reflecting this difficulty in categorization, these parties were often referred to as 'centrist' in Polish political discourse.

²⁶ Most voters for post-Solidarity liberal parties placed themselves on the centre-right or right of the spectrum.

²⁷ The instability of Polish parties and the distinct character of Polish Catholic-conservative populism make their European affiliations a less reliable indicator. Civic Platform is a member of the European People's Party, while Law and Justice sits in the European Parliament as part of the Union for a Europe of Nations group, a loose bloc of 'national movements', which includes Eurosceptic French Gaullists, Italy's 'post-fascist' National Alliance and Ireland's main governing party at the time of writing, Fianna Fáil.

Table 3: Centre-right breadth/inclusivity and cohesiveness/durability in post-communist Poland

		1991	1993	1997	2001	2005
Votes	Democratic Union	12.32 %	10.59 %	-	-	-
	Solidarity Electoral Action	-	-	33.83%	-	-
	Civic Platform	-	-	-	12.68%	24.14%
	Law and Justice	-	-	-	9.50%	26.99%
	Total right vote (centre-right + extreme right)	61.01% (i)	49.70% (ii)	56.15% (iii)	38.75% (iv)	64.17% (v)
Seats	Democratic Union	62	74	-	-	-
	Solidarity Electoral Action	-	-	201	-	-
	Civic Platform	-	-	-	65	133
	Law and Justice	-	-	-	44	155
	Total seats won by right	305 (vi)	112 (vii)	267 (viii)	147 (ix)	322 (x)
Measures of breadth/inclusivity	Largest centre-right party's share of the total vote for the right	0.20	0.21	0.60	0.33	0.42
	Centre-right aggregation index	2.0	2.1	12.0	6.6	7.0
	Proportion of seats won by right held by the largest centre-right party	0.20	0.66	0.75	0.44	0.48
	Fractionalization of the centre-right	0.96	0.56	0.44	0.81	0.77

- (i) Votes cast for: the Democratic Union (12.32%), Catholic Electoral Action (8.73%), Civic Centre Agreement (8.71%), Confederation for an Independent Poland (7.50%), Liberal Democratic Congress (7.49%), Peasant Agreement (5.47%), Solidarity trade union (5.05%), Christian Democracy (2.36%), Union of Real Politics (2.26%) and the Party of Christian Democrats (1.12%).
- (ii) Votes cast for: the Democratic Union (10.59%), Fatherland (6.37%), Confederation for an Independent Poland (5.77%), Non-party Bloc for Reforms (5.41%), Solidarity trade union (4.90%), Centre Agreement (4.42%), Liberal Democratic Congress (3.99%), Union of Real Politics (3.18%), Coalition for the Republic (2.70%) and the Peasant Agreement (2.37%).
- (iii) Votes cast for: Solidarity Electoral Action (33.83%), Freedom Union (13.37%), Movement for Poland Reconstruction (5.56%), Union of the Republic Right (2.03%) and the Bloc for Poland (1.36%).
- (iv) Votes cast for: Civic Platform (12.68%), Law and Justice (9.50%), the League of Polish Families (7.87%), Solidarity Electoral Action of the Right (5.60%) and Freedom Union (3.10%).
- (v) Votes cast for: Law and Justice (26.99%), Civic Platform (24.14%), League of Polish Families (7.97%), Democratic Party (2.45%), Janusz Korwin-Mikke Platform (1.57%) and Patriotic Movement (1.05%).
- (vi) Seats won by: the Democratic Union (62), Catholic Electoral Action (49), Civic Centre Agreement (44), Confederation for an Independent Poland (46), Liberal Democratic

- Congress (37), Peasant Agreement (28), Solidarity trade union (27), Christian Democracy (5), Union of Real Politics (3) and the Party of Christian Democrats (4).
- (vii) Seats won by: the Democratic Union (74), Confederation for an Independent Poland (22), Non-party Bloc for Reforms (16), Fatherland (0), Solidarity trade union (0), Centre Agreement (0), Liberal Democratic Congress (0), Union of Real Politics (0), Coalition for the Republic (0) and the Peasant Agreement (0).
 - (viii) Seats won by: Solidarity Electoral Action (201), Freedom Union (60), Movement for Poland Reconstruction (6), Union of the Republic Right (0) and the Bloc for Poland (0).
 - (ix) Seats won by: Civic Platform (65), Law and Justice (44), the League of Polish Families (38), Solidarity Electoral Action of the Right (0) and Freedom Union (0).
 - (x) Seats won by: Law and Justice (155), Civic Platform (133), League of Polish Families (34), Democratic Party (0), Janusz Korwin-Mikke Platform (0) and Patriotic Movement (0).

Applying the same logic, the Polish Peasant Party, the main agrarian party in post-communist Poland, is not included in the right. For sure, the Peasant Party attempted to locate itself within the traditions of the pre-(anti-)communist Polish agrarian movement and, at the trans-national level, even joined the centre-right European People's Party grouping. However, historic agrarian parties, which survive in surprisingly large numbers in both Scandinavia and CEE, can be regarded as a distinct party family standing apart from the traditions of conservatism, Christian Democracy and economic liberalism that underpin the mainstream West European centre-right.²⁸ More significantly, the Polish Peasant Party was the direct organisational successor to the communist satellite United Peasant Party, which, given the logic of identifying left and right in Poland in large part in relation to their origins, makes it difficult to locate them on the right. This is also reflected in the fact that the Peasant Party was (at the time of writing) only able to form government coalitions with the communist successor Democratic Left Alliance. Finally, the agrarian Self-Defence party, which some commentators have categorised as a right-wing or radical right party,²⁹ is also excluded. While there are clearly nationalist-populist elements in Self-Defence's programme and discourse, the party's primary appeal is as an economically left-wing populist one rather than as a right-wing nationalist-populist formation.³⁰

The first fully free Polish parliamentary election held in October 1991 produced a virtually atomized parliament, reflecting in large part the fragmentation of the centre-right and right. As **Table 3** shows, the largest centre-right party in both the 1991 and 1993 elections, the Democratic Union, won only 12.31% and 10.59% of the vote representing only 20% and 21% of the total centre-right and right-wing vote respectively.³¹ Following electoral defeats in the 1993 parliamentary and 1995

²⁸ See: Sitter and Batory, 'Cleavages, competition, and coalition-building.'

²⁹ See, for example: Michael Minkenberg, 'The Radical Right in Postsocialist Central and Eastern Europe: Comparative Observations and Interpretations,' *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol 16 No 2 (2002), pp.335-362 (p.351).

³⁰ In the most recent September 2005 parliamentary election, the party described itself as 'left-wing nationalist'. In fact, most of the party's voters have difficulty in locating themselves on the left-right ideological spectrum, reflecting the fact that it is first and foremost a protest movement and vehicle for its charismatic leader, Andrzej Lepper, who personifies the party for most voters. For more on Self-Defence see: Ania Krok-Paszkowska, 'Samoobrona: the Polish self-defence movement' in Petr Kopecky and Cas Mudde (ed.s), *Uncivil Society? Contentious politics in post-communist Europe*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp.114-133.

³¹ Most centre-right and right-wing parties, representing more than a quarter of the total electorate, were unable to cross the new minimum thresholds for parliamentary representation (5% for single parties, 8% for electoral coalitions) in 1993.

presidential elections, the Polish centre-right appeared to break with this cycle of disunity and incoherence with the emergence of Solidarity Electoral Action, a broad trade union-based movement with a broadly Catholic-conservative orientation. Solidarity Electoral Action won the 1997 parliamentary election securing 33.83% of the vote, representing 60% of the total centre-right and right-wing vote – the high water-mark for the Polish centre-right in terms of developing a broad and inclusive party-type formation. However, Solidarity Electoral Action went on to disintegrate and suffer a catastrophic defeat in the 2001 ‘earthquake’ election when it did not even win enough votes to secure representation in the new parliament. Instead, in addition to the rump Solidarity Electoral Action, three new centre-right and right-wing groupings emerged: the liberal-conservative Civic Platform, the national-social conservative Law and Justice party, and the clerical-nationalist League of Polish Families. In 2001, the largest of these was Civic Platform, winning 12.68% of the vote, only 33% of the total centre-right and right-wing vote. In the most recent 2005 election, the Law and Justice party narrowly defeated Civic Platform winning 26.99% of the votes. Although these two parties largely garnered the expanded centre-right and right-wing electorate, the vote for Law and Justice still represented only a relatively modest 42% of the total vote case for all centre-right and right-wing parties. In Poland, therefore, a different centre-right party type-formation has emerged as the dominant one in four out of the five post-1989 parliamentary elections and none of these, except for Solidarity Electoral Action in one election, has been able to garner more than around 40% of the total centre-right and right-wing vote.

3. The limits of existing approaches

Having established the importance of broad and inclusive centre-right party-type formations we will now seek to account for the pattern of variation in terms of achieving this in our three cases. We begin by drawing upon the most influential comparative frameworks: macro-institutional and historical-structural approaches, both of which, we will argue, have only limited explanatory power.

3.1 Macro-institutional approaches

Although writers stressing regime legacies have downplayed its importance as an independent exogenous variable,³² institutional design is widely considered to be a crucial influence on the formation of parties and party systems in new democracies.³³ Macro-institutional approaches to explaining the relative strength and cohesion of centre-right formations in post-communist CEE tend to focus on two variables: the choice of electoral system, particularly the degree of its proportionality; and the nature of executive structures, particularly the presence or lack of a strong presidency.

3.1.2 Electoral systems

Institutional explanations that focus on the impact of electoral systems centre on the propositions that more majoritarian electoral systems produce strong and cohesive

³² See: Herbert Kitschelt, Zdenka Mansfeldova, Radosław Markowski and Gabor Toka, *Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation, and Inter-Party Cooperation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 35-6, pp.157-96 and pp.218-9.

³³ See: Jon Elster, Claus Offe and Ulrich K. Preuss, *Institutional Design in Post-Communist States: Rebuilding the Ship at Sea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

centre-right parties, while more proportional ones encourage political entrepreneurs who find themselves marginalized within their political formation to pursue a strategy of 'exit' rather than 'voice'.³⁴ These ideas have a long lineage in comparative political science, dating back to Duverger's argument that the 'mechanical' and 'psychological' effects of majoritarian and proportional electoral systems (discussed above) correspond to two-party and multi-party systems respectively.³⁵

However, examination of our three CEE cases reveals that there are problems with this argument at both the empirical and theoretical level. Firstly, for sure, Hungary is the only one of the three cases considered here that has a predominantly majoritarian rather than proportional electoral system and this does indeed offer a superficially plausible account of the relative consolidation and cohesion of its centre-right³⁶ particularly if it is considered in binary comparisons with the Polish and Czech cases. However, while the Czech and Polish electoral systems differ in some respects, and both have undergone significant amendment over the last fifteen years, they are broadly similar in terms of their proportionality.³⁷ Nevertheless, as **Tables 2 and 3** show, they have produced substantially different outcomes with the Czech centre-right considerably more stable and consolidated than the Polish one. The Czech electoral system's relatively low barriers to entry allowed small right-wing parties which had established themselves in 1991-2, such as the Christian Democrats and the Civic Democratic Alliance, to maintain an independent parliamentary existence. It also facilitated the establishment in 1998 of a breakaway party, the Freedom Union, by a group of anti-Klaus politicians within the Civic Democratic Party, who were frustrated with the party's record in office and mishandling of a financing scandal. However, this episode apart, the Czech electoral system did not produce the complex patterns of fragmentation, realignment and re-fragmentation characteristic of the Polish right.³⁸

Secondly, a single electoral system may co-exist with varying patterns of party organisational success in the same country. In the Polish case, for example, the explanatory power of an electoral system-based approach is undermined by the differences between the communist successor left and the centre-right. While both have had to operate with the same set of institutional incentives the former has been able to develop relative organisational coherence and consolidation compared with the latter.

Thirdly, given that it is political and party forming elites that are themselves responsible for drafting electoral laws, it is sometimes difficult in these cases to

³⁴ See: Hopkin, *Party Formation and Democratic Transition in Spain*.

³⁵ See: Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (London: Methuen, 1954), pp.216-228.

³⁶ See, for example: Csaba Nikolenyi, 'From Fragmentation Towards Unity?: The Center-Right in the Hungarian Party System,' Paper presented to the European Consortium of Political Research General Conference, University of Marburg, 2003.

³⁷ Both were list systems based on proportional representation using multi-member districts with 5% thresholds for securing parliamentary representation (8% for electoral coalitions).

³⁸ See: Marek Kamiński, 'The Collective Action Problems of Political Consolidation: Evidence from Poland', Center for the Study of Democracy Working Paper No 03-03, 2003 available at <http://repositories.cdlib.org/csd/03-03> (Viewed on 28 March 2007); and Aleks Szczerbiak, 'The Polish Centre-Right's (Last) Best Hope: The Rise and Fall of Solidarity Electoral Action,' *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol 20 No 3 (2004), pp.55-79.

distinguish cause from effect, as the relevant laws may have simply *reflected* existing divisions among established parties and political groupings rather than *created* or shaped them significantly. For example, while the highly proportional 1991 Polish electoral law may have encouraged the decomposition of the right in that country, it also reflected the fact that the Polish right was already fragmented when the law was framed, resulting from a confused and unpredictable struggle both between political parties and between President and parliament.³⁹ Similarly, Solidarity Electoral Action's decision to support a 2001 amendment to the Polish electoral law to make it more favourable to medium-sized groupings was prompted by the formation's accelerating electoral decline and internal decomposition which, by making the option of 'exit' more attractive to some of its constituent members, the new law merely failed to prevent.⁴⁰

Conversely, the relative stability of the Czech and Hungarian electoral systems arguably reflected better-articulated party interests and slightly clearer and more consistent strategic behaviour. In the Czech Republic, list-based proportional representation was initially chosen by non-party transitional elites in 1990 to promote pluralism and served as an efficacious framework for party (system) consolidation.⁴¹ As Czechoslovakia broke up in late 1992 the use of proportional representation for elections to the lower house of parliament was then entrenched in the Czech Constitution framed by the country's main parliamentary parties. Attempts in 1999-2001 by the Civic Democrats and Czech Social Democrats, the dominant centre-left party, to collaborate and re-engineer the electoral system along more majoritarian lines in order to promote the formation of larger blocs of centre-left and centre-right subsequently foundered on this constitutional provision. Instead, the three then dominant parliamentary groupings agreed a limited revision of the electoral system, slightly reducing its proportionality.⁴² Although negotiated as part of a transitional pact between regime and opposition in 1989, the Hungarian electoral system was also shaped by trade-offs between the strategies and ideologies of relatively well profiled emergent political parties that had existed under late communism, including both the Hungarian Democratic Forum and Fidesz.⁴³ The system of three interlinked majoritarian and proportional tiers agreed in 1989 has since remained largely unchanged both because amendment requires a constitutional (two thirds) majority and because it offers a sufficiently complex mix of incentives and alliance and

³⁹ As in other cases studied here, Polish parties and politicians (re-)designing electoral systems acted both self-interestedly to maximise their own electoral advantage and socio-tropically in seeking to promote wider democratic outcomes such as pluralism, accountability or political stability. Lack of technical understanding, a rapidly changing political environment and the inherent difficulty of anticipating the outcomes of electoral systems made party positions highly changeable and inconsistent. Poland's 1991 electoral law arguably reflected a loose consensus that the political field should be open to a range of parties. See: Sarah Birch, Frances Millard, Marina Popescu and Kieran Williams, *Embodying Democracy: Electoral System Design in post-Communist Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp.28-38.

⁴⁰ See: Birch et al, *Embodying Democracy: Electoral System Design in post-Communist Europe*, pp.41-5.

⁴¹ See: Ibid, pp.68-71.

⁴² See: Ibid, pp.81-83.

⁴³ In 1989 Hungary's independent proto-parties were (sometime uncomfortably) united in a single negotiating bloc, the so-called Opposition Roundtable, to deal with regime negotiators at the roundtable negotiations proper.

campaign strategies to both larger and smaller parties as to make projects of electoral reform an always more costly second best option.⁴⁴

Electoral systems thus appear largely to have *re-inforced* existing patterns of right-wing and centre-right party formation in the cases under review, rather than fundamentally shaped them. Although it did not prevent Polish style fragmentation of the Hungarian right in the mid-1990s, Hungary's electoral system proved largely supportive of the tendency towards party system bi-polarization which was driven by Viktor Orbán's strategy of turning Fidesz into the core of an anti-left alliance and the related decline of liberalism as a distinct third force in Hungarian politics.⁴⁵ Analysis of the Czech election results of June 2006 also suggested that the 2002 reforms to the electoral system benefited large and medium sized parties at the expense of groupings such as the Christian Democrats and Greens with electoral support only slightly above the 5% threshold.⁴⁶ However, here too, the growing bi-polarization of the electorate around the Civic Democrats on the right and the Social Democrats on the left arguably reflected long-term political and organizational difficulties of the liberal centre, the decline of historic parties, and a conscious campaign strategy of polarization chosen by both the largest parties.

Fourthly, electoral system effects do not 'just happen' but crucially depend on parties (and their voters) responding to the incentives facing them. In this respect, Hungarian and Czech centre-right parties seem to have had more accurate expectations of their respective electoral systems and their likely effects in relation to their electoral strengths, in part reflecting the changeability of electoral law and party strengths in Polish politics. Strategic errors such as the decision of Solidarity Electoral Action prior to Poland's 2001 election to register as a coalition, not a party, thereby raising its own electoral threshold from 5% to 8% were not committed by the principal centre-right groupings in Hungary or the Czech Republic.

3.12 *Semi-Presidentialism*

Another influential set of macro-institutional explanations of party development centre on the proposition that a parliamentary regime is more likely to produce strong parties, in this case a cohesive centre-right bloc, than a presidential or semi-presidential system. For example, in a paired comparison of the Czech Republic and Poland, Saxonberg has argued that the presence of a well-institutionalised party on the Czech centre-right derives, in part, from an indirectly elected presidency and concomitant absence of incentives for charismatic leaders to pursue alternatives to party formation.⁴⁷ He further contends that, by contrast, Poland's relatively fragmented centre-right is the result of the incentives facing that country's head of state. Specifically, he suggests that the relatively powerful, directly elected presidency in Poland led a charismatic leader like Lech Wałęsa to avoid founding or consistently

⁴⁴ See: Birch et al, *Embodying Democracy*, pp.63-66.

⁴⁵ See: Brigid Fowler, 'Concentrated orange: Fidesz and the remaking of the Hungarian centre-right, 1994-2002,' *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol 20 No 3 (2004), pp.80-214; and Zsolt Enyedi, 'The Role of Agency in Cleavage Formation', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol 44 No 5 (2005), pp.697-720.

⁴⁶ See: Hanley, 'Europe and the Czech Parliamentary Elections of 2-3 June 2006'.

⁴⁷ See: Steven Saxonberg, 'The Influence of Presidential Systems: Why the Right Is so Weak in Conservative Poland and So Strong in the Egalitarian Czech Republic,' *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol 50 No 5 (2003), pp.2-36.

supporting a party. To counter the argument that these institutional effects should, hypothetically, also operate on the Polish centre-left but do not appear to do so, Saxonberg argues that, unlike communist successor parties, centre-right parties are typically 'new' formations, which will experience early problems of stabilisation and institutionalisation making them particularly susceptible to these effects.

At an aggregate level, there is evidence co-relating weak party structures in new democracies with moderate and strong presidentialism.⁴⁸ Empirically, in terms of the CEE case studies examined in this paper, there is a better 'fit' than for those explanations based on electoral system characteristics. Clearly, at certain points Poland's semi-presidential system did create incentives for Wałęsa to avoid a party-building strategy and these may have fostered fragmentation on the Polish centre-right in the early 1990s. This explanation also appears to fit with the Czech and Hungarian cases, which both have weak, indirectly-elected presidencies and relatively cohesive and consolidated centre-right formations. However, notwithstanding the generalisability or otherwise of Saxonberg's hypothesis beyond these three countries,⁴⁹ detailed analysis of the Czech, Hungarian and Polish cases suggests that such institutional effects may be more apparent than real.

Firstly, as with the choice of electoral systems, a strong parliamentary regime can be regarded as much (if not more) an *effect* of strong political parties as a *cause* and it is difficult to separate these two processes out analytically. Hungary only has an indirectly-elected presidency because of the actions of multiple opposition parties, pursuing their diverse political interests successfully, in forcing and then winning the November 1989 referendum on the issue.⁵⁰ Similarly, given that the Constitution of the Czech Republic was agreed by the major political parties in December 1992, the current weak Czech presidency is clearly the product of strong parties, not vice versa.⁵¹ In Poland, on the other hand, the fact that Wałęsa contested the presidency against rivals from Solidarity, whose proto-parties he proceeded to undermine, speaks of pre-existing problems of cohesiveness within the post-Solidarity bloc, and perhaps also of Wałęsa's personality and anti-party sentiments together with weak norms of 'party-ness' *per se*, rather than the degree of incentive provided by a semi-presidential system.

Secondly, post-communist elites do not always appear to behave rationally in relation to institutions. For example, Saxonberg is undoubtedly correct to argue that, in both Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic, strong parliamentarism and a weak

⁴⁸ See: Matthew S. Shugart, 'The inverse relationship between party strength and executive strength: a theory of constitutional choices,' *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol 28 No 1 (1998), pp.1-29.

⁴⁹ Although, as discussed below, our case studies do not appear to bear this linkage out, we do not rule out that it may operate in some contexts. Our supposition is, however, that it is likely to do so as part of a distinct *configuration* of causes. The inclusion of semi-presidential post-communist states which developed fractious and weakness of pro-reform centre-right blocs in the 1990s, such as Romania and Russia, could allow this supposition to be tested using a methodology such as Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). See: Charles C. Ragin, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies* (Berkeley, CA and London: University of California Press, 1987).

⁵⁰ Strictly speaking, the referendum in Hungary was on the timing, not the mode, of the presidential election, but its proxy character was well understood, at least at elite level.

⁵¹ Even under the Czechoslovak constitution of 1990-2, which accorded the presidency stronger powers, parties were able to check Havel. For example, they easily blocked a package of emergency constitutional and political laws that Havel proposed in late 1991 to resolve the crisis of Czecho-Slovak federalism.

presidency elected by parliament made party-building the only realistic route to executive power for ambitious politicians. However, the implicit assumption that all charismatic leaders were ambitious politicians capable of 'rationally' reading and responding to institutional incentives is flawed. For example, Havel was the dominant political personality in the Czech Lands, having acquired an almost mythic status as a symbol of regime change. If he was responding 'rationally' to institutional incentives then Havel should have become engaged in party politics. However, upon becoming a presidential candidate in December 1989, Havel's distaste for formal political organisation and, in particular, party political organisation, led him to break all contact with the Civic Forum movement he had co-founded and to refuse fully to re-engage with it even in September-October when he accepted that its transformation into a more conventional party-like grouping was necessary and unavoidable. Havel's 'irrational' behaviour in refusing to seek power through involvement with a political party thus opened the way for the 'more rational' Klaus to win power through a party-building strategy. This suggests that more critical factors in explaining successful party development in post-communist states are the cognitive frameworks through which new political elites approach post-transition politics. In other words, not all politicians are the same and their individual predilections and cognitive frameworks need to be taken into account in order to understand the impact of institutional incentives.

Thirdly, semi-presidentialism should perhaps be viewed as offering a complex mix of incentives and can in certain circumstances *favour* the formation of broad parties or party blocs. For example, the November 1995 Polish presidential election developed into a closely fought contest between the incumbent, and former legendary Solidarity leader, Lech Wałęsa and leader of the ex-communist Democratic Left Alliance Aleksander Kwaśniewski; in other words, between the representatives of the two historic formations: 'post-Solidarity' and 'post-communist'. It thereby polarised the Polish political scene in relation to attitudes towards the past. The re-emergence of this 'historic' division provided the Polish centre-right with a clear rallying point around which it could unite its electorate and define itself more clearly: 'anti-communism' and opposition to the Democratic Left Alliance. This, together with the shock of the defeat in the presidential poll, prompted a previously fractured centre-right to consolidate in the Solidarity Electoral Action bloc.

3.2 *Historical-structural explanations*

3.2.1 *Communist regime legacies*

Some influential comparative frameworks have explained variations in patterns of party competition in post-communist Europe as the product of broad historical-structural factors and regime legacies. Such frameworks clearly offer considerable insight into varying orientations of right-wing parties and the nature of left-right divisions across post-communist CEE. The highly influential work of Kitschelt⁵² and

⁵² See: Herbert Kitschelt, 'Formation of Party Cleavages in Post-Communist Democracies: Theoretical Propositions', *Party Politics*, Vol 1 No 4 (1995), pp.447-472; and Herbert Kitschelt, 'Constraints and Opportunities in the Strategic Conduct of Post-Communist Successor Parties - Regime Legacies as Causal Argument', in Andras Bozóki and John T. Ishiyama (eds.), *The Communist Successor Parties of Central and Eastern Europe* (Armonk, NY: M E Sharpe, 2002), pp.14-40.

his co-authors,⁵³ for example, argues that the partial nature of social modernization in pre-communist Hungary and Poland and the coercive nature of subsequent communist modernization led to the conservation of populist, ruralist and conservative traditions as anti-communist counter ideologies. These formed a cultural reservoir for the reconstitution of the right after 1989, but maintained the historical division with liberals committed to free markets and lifestyle pluralism. Lack of social support for communism in such semi-modern societies, Kitschelt argues, created weak 'national-accommodationist' ruling parties, whose successors initiated and embraced economic reform after 1989, blurring the socio-economic dimension of left-right competition. By contrast, the pro-market, liberal-conservative character of the centre-right in the Czech Republic was said to reflect the social modernity of the Czech Lands before communism, which marginalized traditional sectors but produced an authoritarian 'bureaucratic-authoritarian' communist regime averse to market reform and a hard-left communist successor party. Subsequent left-right competition, therefore, centered on marketisation and related issues.⁵⁴ In contrast to Kitschelt, Vachudova⁵⁵ sees both the conservative centre-right in Hungary and Poland and the neo-liberal centre-right in the Czech Republic as a 'moderate right' to be contrasted with the semi-authoritarian populism of dominant communist nationalists and the 'independence right' in other states in the region. However, she too offers an essentially historical-structural explanation of political outcomes on the 'right' of the political spectrum, albeit one with a shallower chain of causation.

Such historical-structural analyses give a broadly convincing account of initial *patterns* of left-right competition in CEE and the early orientations and trajectories of individual parties that helped establish them. However, they have a number of significant limitations. Legacy-inspired approaches have often tended to produce analysis that is too deterministic and broad brush and conclusions that are too static. Recent studies of, for example, the formulation of privatization policies⁵⁶ or 'lustration' strategies in CEE⁵⁷ have demonstrated frequently the relative autonomy and contingency of political dynamics and actors' strategic choices even in the earlier years of post-transition politics. Some legacy theorists have suggested that parties and blocs' electoral and political success was linked to historical legacies and pathways.⁵⁸

⁵³ See: Kitschelt et al, *Post-Communist Party Systems*.

⁵⁴ In Bulgaria and Romania, Kitschelt and his collaborators suggested extremely low levels of pre-communist modernity created clientelistic 'patrimonial communist' ruling parties, able to dominate both the transition from communism in 1989 and the early post-communist period through the use of nationalism and economic populism. Faced with strong ex-communist elites, centre-right groupings in these states fused pro-market stances with militant anti-communism. See: Kitschelt, 'Formation of Party Cleavages in Post-Communist Democracies' (especially pp.453-7 and pp.461-2); Kitschelt, 'Constraints and Opportunities in the Strategic Conduct of Post-Communist Successor Parties' (especially pp.22-24 and pp.31-34); and Kitschelt et al, *Post-Communist Party Systems*, pp.35-39 and pp.74-77.

⁵⁵ See: Vachudova, 'Right-Wing Parties and Political Outcomes in Eastern Europe'.

⁵⁶ See Jurgen Beyer and Jan Wielgohs, 'On the Limits of Path Dependency Approaches for explaining Post-socialist Institution Building: In critical response to David Stark', *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol 15 No 2 (2001), pp.356-388.

⁵⁷ See: Kieran Williams, Aleks Szczerbiak and Brigid Fowler, 'Explaining Lustration in Eastern Europe: A "Post-Communist Politics" Approach', *Democratization*, Vol 12 No 1 (2005), pp.22-43.

⁵⁸ Kitschelt, for example, hypothesises on the basis of historical pathways that communist successor parties in former 'bureaucratic-authoritarian' regimes will enjoy only 'low' electoral support (less than 15%), whereas all others will have 'high' support (25% or more). See: Kitschelt, 'Constraints and Opportunities in the Strategic Conduct of Post-Communist Successor Parties,' pp.32-34. The Czech Communists' 2002 electoral success and the disappearance of the Slovak ex-communists appear to

However, their work does relatively little to address such issues and, comparative examination of national cases suggests, legacy based approaches seem to have surprisingly little purchase in explaining which blocs emerge as strong and stable actors in national party systems. As Fowler⁵⁹ notes, Hungary and Poland had similar levels of historical modernisation, similar ‘national accommodationist’ communist regimes, similarly negotiated exits from communism and similar divisions between Christian-nationalist and secular voters and a marked urban-rural political division after 1989. Both also saw the re-emergence of reformed communist successor parties as strong and credible competitors which regained office in the mid-1990s as a result of their successful transformation by reformist elites, whose political and managerial skills and pragmatism were honed under relatively permissive communist regimes.⁶⁰ However, despite these structural similarities and the similar national-conservative ideology of the right in Hungary and Poland, after a decade and a half of party competition, its political success in the two countries could hardly be more contrasting. Indeed, as discussed above, the success of the Hungarian centre-right seems to parallel more closely that seen in the Czech Republic, whose historical pathway through communism to competitive politics after 1989 was wholly different. Similarly, although it traces the origins of the post-communist ‘right’ to a more proximate cause, specifically the strength of organized opposition under communism, and incorporates additional factors such as the impact of EU conditionalities, Vachudova’s analysis relies upon communist regime type and their legacies as its key explanatory variables and cannot be utilized to explain the varying fortunes of the ‘moderate’ right in our three cases.⁶¹

3.2.2 Path dependency and critical junctures

At first sight, the adoption of notions of ‘path dependence’ appears to offer a solution to the problems inherent in legacy approaches enabling us to reconcile the influence of past legacies with the impact of political choices in the post-1989 period. Theorists of path dependence argue that many durable, established political patterns across national cases are ‘locked in’ by actors’ choices at key formative moments of uncertainty or ‘critical junctures’.⁶² The formation of parties and party systems in new democracies can be seen as just such a path dependent process punctuated by critical

disprove such hypotheses. We do not, in this paper, address legacy theorists’ central claim that initial patterns of post-communist party competition were shaped by historical legacies. The main thrust of our critique here is that this literature focuses too narrowly on explaining the party systems’ starting configurations understood in terms of competitive space and overlooks strategic and institutional factors, which are central to the operation of party systems as institutions and act as drivers of party system change. In some cases, initially observed patterns of competition in CEE attributed to historical legacies have eroded very rapidly. For a partial critique of Kitschelt’s broader conception of legacies as a mechanism of ‘deep’ causation, see: Hanley, *The New Right in the New Europe*, Chapter 2.

⁵⁹ See: Fowler, ‘Concentrated orange’.

⁶⁰ See: Grzymała-Busse, *Redeeming the Communist Past*.

⁶¹ See: Vachudova, ‘Right-Wing Parties and Political Outcomes in Eastern Europe’.

⁶² See, for example: Douglass North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); David Collier and Ruth Berins Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement and Regime Dynamics in Latin America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); James Mahoney, ‘Path Dependence in Historical Sociology’, *Theory and Society*, Vol 29 No 4 (2000), pp.507-48; and Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions and Social Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

junctures. Indeed, Lipset and Rokkan's argument that West European party systems were formed by cleavages present in the late Nineteenth century but then 'froze', as parties that emerged early on denied electoral markets to newcomers, is often cited as a classic path dependence perspective.⁶³

In post-communist politics, such path-setting 'critical junctures' have often been identified as occurring in and just after the period of transition in 1989-90, and have often been used to explain contrasting national patterns of party and party system formation. In her work on communist successor parties, Gryzmala-Busse incorporates the structural-historical paths and regime legacies identified by Kitschelt and his collaborators, but argues that organisational and ideological *choices* made by reform-minded elites in communist successor parties in 1989-91 played a decisive role in determining their future developmental path.⁶⁴ A similar framework of path dependency and post-transition critical junctures can be constructed to explain diversity and varying levels of success on the CEE centre-right. Moderate centre-right parties in CEE are typically the 'successor parties' of opposition movements. In Poland, almost all centre-right groupings of the 1990s have been descendants of the Solidarity movement, the most successful of them (Solidarity Electoral Action) quite explicitly so.⁶⁵ The Civic Democratic Party in the Czech Republic developed on the basis of the right-wing majority within the Civic Forum movement that led the Velvet Revolution of 1989.⁶⁶ Both of Hungary's broad centre-right formations of the 1990s, the Hungarian Democratic Forum and Fidesz, emerged from opposition groupings formed in the late 1980s.

However, perhaps reflecting the greater difficulties of co-ordination and stabilisation experienced by centre-right parties as successors to loose-knit anti-communist formations, our three cases suggest that there were, *not one, but two post-transitional critical junctures* for successful development when politicians' freely made strategic choices mattered for the successful creation of broad, durable centre-right party formations. The first of these was the uncertain political aftermath in 1989-91 of the transition from communism proper. In Hungary, the existence under late communism of plural opposition groupings, already distinguished along relatively well-established ideological lines, appeared to allow the transformation of the Hungarian Democratic Forum into the dominant voice on the right with comparatively little difficulty. The elite nature of the Hungarian transition and historically and ideologically grounded understandings of the right in Hungary meant that the Democratic Forum did not have to grapple with the integration of workers or social or free market liberals. The broader civic movements of the Czech Republic and Poland, Civic Forum and the Solidarity Citizens' Committees, posed a greater challenge to political entrepreneurs seeking to form broad parties. In Poland, the break-up of Solidarity produced a fractious array of small parliamentary parties, generating a series of unstable minority governments, with prospective party-building elites squandering the grassroots

⁶³ See: Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, 'Cleavage structures, party systems and voter alignments: an introduction', in Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan (eds.), *Party systems and voter alignments: cross-national perspectives* (New York: Free Press, 1967), pp.1-64; Kathleen Thelen, 'Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics', *Annual Review of Political Science*, No 2 (1999), pp.369-404; and Pierson, *Politics in Time*.

⁶⁴ See: Grzymala-Busse, *Redeeming the Communist Past*.

⁶⁵ See: Michal Wenzel, 'Solidarity and Akcja Wyborcza "Solidarność": An attempt at reviving the legend,' *Communist and Post-communist Studies*, Vol 31 No 2 (1998), pp.139-156.

⁶⁶ See: Hanley, *The New Right in the New Europe*, Chapter 4.

'organizational capital' represented by Solidarity's network of Citizens' Committees.⁶⁷ Detailed empirical research has shown that in 1990-1 Klaus and leaders of the Czech right had learned directly from the experience of Solidarity and accomplished the party-building process with greater skill and success than their Polish counterparts. Both the Hungarian Democratic Forum and the Czech Civic Democrats thus emerged successfully from the initial transition period as broad parties of the right, defeating liberal-centrist, centre-left and left-wing opposition in parliamentary elections in 1990 and 1992 respectively and forming majority centre-right administrations. Both formations then experienced a decline in popularity in the mid-1990s, related to failures of economic policy, and suffered setbacks at subsequent parliamentary elections, in 1994 and 1996, at the hands of a re-invigorated centre-left.⁶⁸ However, in Hungary, the weaknesses of the Democratic Forum's initial constitution were becoming clear even before electoral defeat. The party had never fully resolved the tensions created by the patrician conservative prime minister József Antall's 1989 'takeover' of a looser movement originally formed by more radical 'populist' writers. Meanwhile, although Antall explicitly acknowledged the Democratic Forum's ideological pluralism, it is doubtful that he was sufficiently interested in the party management tasks that this probably necessitated, even without the impact of his fatal illness. The Democratic Forum had started to fracture even before Antall's death in December 1993 removed its dominant personality, and the 1994 elections left the Hungarian right as fragmented as its Polish counterpart.

The defeat of the right by reformed communist successor parties in Poland and Hungary in 1993 and 1994 marked a second 'critical juncture' ushering in a fluid period of right-wing realignment and alliance building triggered by right-wing politicians' psychological shock at the former communists' 'Velvet Restoration'. In both Hungary and Poland this period saw right-wing political entrepreneurs create successful new electoral alliances. In Hungary, under Orbán's leadership from 1994-5 Fidesz moved in an increasingly conservative-nationalist direction. After initially floating the idea of a 'civic bloc' of centre-right parties, the re-launched Fidesz ultimately became the kernel of a unified Hungarian right, directly absorbing or becoming the dominant formal partner of less successful right-wing Christian and agrarian groupings while simultaneously garnering most of their electorates.⁶⁹ In Poland, the Solidarity trade union sponsored the creation of a right-wing electoral alliance, Solidarity Election Action, that remained a coalitional structure.⁷⁰ Both Solidarity Electoral Action and Fidesz defeated and displaced the left in subsequent parliamentary elections, in 1997 and 1998 respectively, gaining office at the head of right-wing coalitions, before once again being displaced by the left (in 2001 and 2002). However, unlike its Hungarian Democratic Forum predecessor, Fidesz remained united in office and withstood (and even gained renewed political impetus from) its narrow electoral defeat in 2002,⁷¹ as the Czech Civic Democrats had done

⁶⁷ See: Tomasz Grabowski, 'The Party That Never Was: The Rise and Fall of the Solidarity Citizens' Committees in Poland,' *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol 10 No 2 (1996), pp.214-256; and Magdaléna Hadjiisky, *La fin du Forum civique et la naissance du Parti démocratique civique (janvier 1990 – avril 1991)*, Prague: Documents du travail du CEFRES No 6, 1996.

⁶⁸ See: David L Bartlett, *The Political Economy of Dual Transformations: Market Reform and Democratization in Hungary* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1997); and Hanley, *The New Right in the New Europe*, Chapter 6.

⁶⁹ See: Fowler, 'Concentrated orange'; and Enyedi, 'The Role of Agency in Cleavage Formation'.

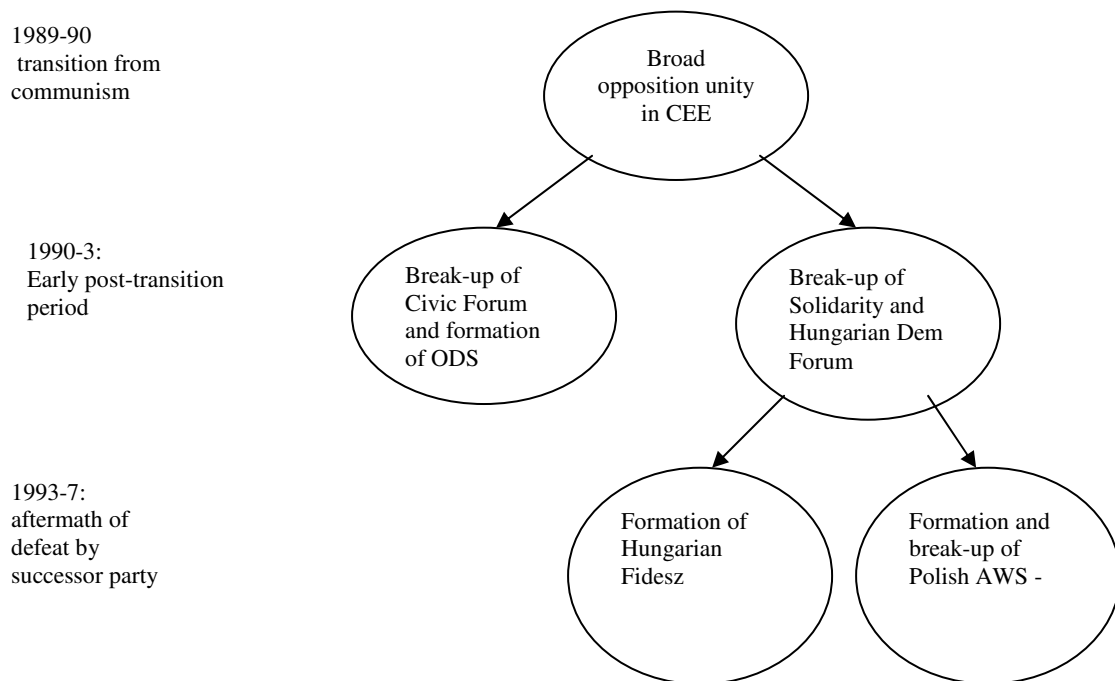
⁷⁰ See: Szczerbiak, 'The Polish Centre-Right's (Last?) Best Hope'.

⁷¹ See: Fowler, 'Concentrated orange'.

after the crisis of 1997-8. However, perceiving alternative structures to be more electorally promising, the components of Poland's Solidarity Electoral Action deserted the alliance before the 2001 elections, accelerating its electoral decline and leading to its outright collapse and the emergence of new set of small-medium right-wing and liberal groupings.

As **Figure 1** shows, this sequence of critical junctures produces a branching pattern characteristic of path dependent development amongst the three cases, which could perhaps be extended to other examples. The development of the centre-right in Romania, for example, appears to follow a 'Polish' sequence. Moreover, in this perspective, Czech centre-right development clearly seems an outlying case given its early and rapid consolidation.

Figure 1: Critical junctures in the development of broad centre-right parties in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic



However, there are reasons to regard explanatory frameworks based on path dependency and critical junctures with some caution. First, as suggested by earlier work on legacy explanations of patterns of communist successor parties' development,⁷² the outcome of the critical junctures of right-wing party development can be seen as partly conditioned by the character of the outgoing communist regime. The more liberal Hungarian communist regime, for example, allowed opposition groupings to take the form of ideologically distinct 'proto-parties', as part of a

⁷² See: Grzymała-Busse, *Redeeming the Communist Past*; and Luke March, 'Power and Opposition in the FSU: the Communist Parties of Russia and Moldova', *Party Politics*, Vol 12 No 3 (2006), pp.314-365.

strategy of partial co-optation and demobilisation. This favoured the early formation of ideologically distinct elite-led grouping like the Hungarian Democratic Forum. Conversely, the repressive 'bureaucratic authoritarian' regime in Czechoslovakia inhibited both the organisation of opposition groupings and their clear differentiation on ideological lines. This led to the creation of a single, rapidly mobilised overarching civic movement in the Czech lands, Civic Forum,⁷³ in 1989, which, once the initial difficulties of legitimising its transformation into a conventional ideologically-based party had been overcome, proved a viable basis for the emergence of a more unified centralised party with a shared programme of liberal transformation. Poland's very specific history of periodic eruptions of social protest and the emergence of the Solidarity trade union as the 'sponsor' of non-communist opposition also seems to have some bearing on the difficulties of centre-right party consolidation in that country, a pattern also observable in some historic cases of party formation in Western Europe.⁷⁴

Such ambiguity over the relationship of structure and agency arguably reflects more underlying problems with notions of path dependent development punctuated by critical junctures: both concepts are frequently under-theorised and applied with considerable inconsistency.⁷⁵ As several scholars have noted, the concept of periods of 'locked in' path dependent development punctuated and re-directed by critical junctures is a clumsy solution to the debate between structure and agency.⁷⁶ As theorists of path dependency have increasingly come to accept, such apparent anomalies stem from a failure to specify the mechanisms by which the outcomes produced by critical junctures are 'locked in', and whether for 'lock-in' to occur mechanisms must generate a logic of 'increasing returns' which make it difficult or impossible to retrace the path undertaken.⁷⁷

A failure to specify 'lock-in' mechanisms is present in many accounts of the path-dependent development of parties and party systems in new democracies. Lipset and Rokkan's classic account of the 'freezing' of West European parties and party systems in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries, for example, not only glosses over the political and institutional aspects of party formation during democratisations,⁷⁸ but leaves the *mechanisms* through which parties and party

⁷³ Public Against Violence was the analogous body in Slovakia.

⁷⁴ See: Panebianco, *Political Parties*.

⁷⁵ See: Ian Greener, 'The Potential of Path Dependence in Political Studies', *Politics*, Vol 23 No 1 (2005), pp.62-72.

⁷⁶ See: James Mahoney and Richard Snyder, 'Rethinking Agency and Structure in Regime Change', *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol 34 (1999), pp. 23-32; and Thelen, 'Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics'. Simply put, path dependent models are too open at the front end and too closed at the back. They suggest that initially outcomes can be extensively re-engineered by strategic action but thereafter, once paths are 'locked in', politics is fundamentally static until, for reasons not always well explained, another critical juncture occurs.

⁷⁷ See: Pierson, *Politics in Time*. As Greener argues, the accumulation of 'increasing returns' should be seen as a *phase* or a weakening process finally giving way to inertia. See: Greener, 'The Potential of Path Dependence in Political Studies'. In the present case of the development of broad centre-right formations, a continuous process of 'increasing returns' would logically lead to the absolute dominance of a single monopoly actor.

⁷⁸ See: Stahis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (New York, Cornell University Press, 1996).

systems ‘froze’ vague – a ‘narrowing of the support market’. Mair’s⁷⁹ subsequent exploration of the ‘freezing hypothesis’ does, however, suggest a range of mechanisms consistent with Pierson’s more theoretical account of path dependency as a set of processes generating ‘increasing returns’. These include: the monopolisation of pre-existing, human and material resources by established parties, leaving potential new entrants resource-starved and unable to meet high start-up costs; organisational strategies which encapsulate key constituencies and/or offer them selective group benefits; and discourse strategies shaping understandings of political competition. At the societal level, additional ‘lock-in’ mechanisms include the development of partisan identification among voters and members, and rational ‘adaptive expectations’ on the part of others for whom forming or supporting a new party with little prospect of immediate success represent wasted effort.

However, there are social and historical contexts, including many in post-communist CEE, where such mechanisms may be absent, fail, or work only feebly and intermittently. Mass organisation in post-communist Europe has, with a few well-defined exceptions, proved costly and ineffective;⁸⁰ social constituencies in the region are often ill defined; and partisan identification is weak and slow to develop in societies with limited civic engagement and where levels of cynicism about parties, politicians and politics are high. The growing role of state funding as the main source of party resources sustains a party only so long as it enjoys (and usually in proportion to its) electoral success and offers immediate resources to political newcomers. Although these factors also partially serve as a barrier to new party formation, they raise doubts as to the extent to which outcomes, such as relative success or failure, have been ‘locked in’ in the aftermath of critical junctures.⁸¹

Theorists applying ideas of path dependency and critical junctures to the emergence of parties in contemporary CEE have largely presented them as explanations of *national variance*, including the varying trajectories of individual parties, and *mechanisms* linking past causes to present outcomes, instead of the persistence of particular outcomes. Unlike Lipset and Rokkan’s classic study of West European party system formation, they have not usually argued that these outcomes are fixed or ‘frozen’ and many explicitly accept that the influence of legacies will *fade* over time.⁸² There does, nevertheless, seem to be an expectation in their work that path-dependent outcomes will tend to be quite durable. Gryzmala-Busse’s study of communist successor parties’ patterns of adaptation to competitive electoral politics, for example, concludes that although the determining effects of legacies will eventually wane and it would therefore be “misleading to think of party regeneration as a stable outcome... *some parties have a considerably greater chance of succeeding*

⁷⁹ See: Peter Mair, *Party System Change: Approaches and Interpretations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp.1-16

⁸⁰ See, for example: Ingrid van Biezen, *Political Parties in New Democracies: Party Organization in Southern and East-Central Europe* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁸¹ As Kopecký notes, where, as in much of the former Soviet Union, the state provides patronage resources but little or no public funding, incumbents *are* able to monopolize available state resources generating a dynamic of ‘increasing returns’ which ‘locks in’ their electoral domination, usually in the form of semi-authoritarian ‘illiberal democracy’. See: Petr Kopecký, ‘Political Parties and the State: the Nature of Symbiosis’, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol 22 No 3 (2006), pp.251-73.

⁸² See: Kitschelt, ‘Constraints and Opportunities in the Strategic Conduct of Post-Communist Successor Parties’; and Grzymała-Busse, *Redeeming the Communist Past*.

at this game by breaking with a discredited past, whilst making the most of the political resources it provides” (emphasis added) - the path, in her view, followed by successor parties emerging from the more liberal Polish and Hungarian regimes.⁸³ Kitschelt goes further, explicitly linking levels of electoral success with path-dependent legacies, which shape organisational and political strategies, and even suggesting that the imposition of institutional choices by dominant groups during the immediate transition period may represent a form of ‘lock-in’ mechanism.⁸⁴

Although there is some evidence that underlying patterns of partisan division have remained stable across CEE,⁸⁵ political developments since the mid-1990s suggest that, for specific parties and party configurations shaped by regime legacies, ‘fadeout’ has often been rapid. Slovakia’s Party of the Democratic Left, analysed by Grzymala-Busse, disappeared completely from the Slovak parliamentary landscape following the 2002 elections.⁸⁶ Similarly, the triangular, Benelux-style competition between approximately equal blocs of liberals, socialists and Christian-conservatives that Kitschelt and his collaborators identified in Hungary, for example, had by the late-1990s given way into a sharply polarised two-bloc system, in which the liberals had been largely absorbed into the centre-left. Some analysts of Hungarian politics have even detected an ensuing re-alignment of nascent cleavage structures.⁸⁷

As the evidence cited above suggests, any notion that centre-right party success in the period under review was strongly ‘locked in’ through a critical juncture process, therefore, would seem misplaced. Rather, the post-1989 ‘critical’ junctures in the CEE cases appear to have produced a very limited form of ‘lock in’ confined to the fact that start-up costs make it difficult for challenger parties to emerge while existing formations monopolise available resources and attract (limited) partisan identification. However, the high levels of electoral volatility evident in most post-communist states and the relatively low threshold of resources needed suggest that the opportunity structure for new entrants into the party system is in fact quite favourable in the CEE cases. In the CEE post-communist context, therefore, the outcomes of ‘critical junctures’ are not as all embracing, and do not appear to be subject to the same ‘increasing returns’, as is posited in the literature. Where such outcomes appear to exist, broad centre-right formations are less transmission mechanisms for strong historical legacies, as appears to have been the case with communist successor parties’ post-1989 transformations, and more merely instances of effective initial party formation. Although it is clear that successful CEE centre-right forces, such as the Czech Civic Democrats or Hungary’s Fidesz, have managed to trigger some ‘lock in’ mechanisms - such as partisan identification, adaptive expectations of their continued dominance, and (in Fidesz’s case) partial voter encapsulation - such mechanisms appear to be re-inforcing ones stemming from electoral success and seem, on their own, insufficient to account fully for such contrasting levels of party

⁸³ See: Grzymala-Busse, *Redeeming the Communist Past*, p.284.

⁸⁴ See: Kitschelt, ‘Constraints and Opportunities in the Strategic Conduct of Post-Communist Successor Parties’, pp.32-4 and p.38.

⁸⁵ See: Nick Sitter, ‘When is a Party System? A Systems Perspective on the Development of Competitive Party Systems’, *Central European Political Science Review*, Vol 3 No 1 (2002), pp.75-97; and Frances Millard, *Elections, Parties and Representation in Post-communist Europe* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

⁸⁶ See: Tim Haughton ‘Explaining the Limited Success of the Communist-Successor Left in Slovakia: the Case of the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL)’, *Party Politics*, Vol 10 No 2 (2004), pp.171-191.

⁸⁷ See: Enyedi, ‘The Role of Agency in Cleavage Formation’, pp.697–720.

success. Party success in these cases requires sustained, active maintenance on the part of party elites. Although we would not see a dramatic breakdown or collapse of well established and seemingly stable parties such as Fidesz or the Czech Civic Democrats as probable, this analysis suggests that their success may be a relatively brittle phenomenon. Indeed, we might ask also why these parties have not *already* proved unstable and prone to breakdown? Certainly in analytical terms, it is necessary to bring in other explanatory variables that can explain both the choices made at these critical junctures and how the success that stems from them can be sustained.

4. Other explanations of CEE centre-right success

4.1 *Elite cohesion and successful party formation*

In our view, the nature of the post-communist centre-right party-forming elites, particularly the degree of their cohesion and their positioning in early post-communist politics, plays a critical role in explaining the nature of the choices made at particular critical junctures. Many theories of democratic transition stress the role of autonomous elites in crafting exits from communism in CEE. A focus on elites has featured strongly in sociological explorations of post-communist power structures, most focusing on general processes of elite reproduction and circulation within national polities and the fate of the communist-era nomenklaturas.⁸⁸ The displacement of intellectual dissident politicians in the early post-communist period by technocrats or nationalistically inclined populists has been frequently remarked upon. Indeed, one sociologist has hypothesised a *functional* need for different types of political elites to lead different phases of post-communist transition.⁸⁹ However, there has been remarkably little systematic study of *competition* between ‘new’ (non-nomenklatura) elite groups in CEE.

Elites have also frequently been invoked in accounts of party development in CEE since 1989. However, with very few exceptions such analyses have often been confined to observations relating to organisational models, internal power dynamics and patterns of institutionalisation.⁹⁰ Most such studies revolve around well known phenomena such as the absence of mass organization, relative weakness of grassroots activism and dominance of (parliamentary) elites in (most) parties in the region. Although theories of democratization often assign elite choices wide latitude to determine outcomes, in *causal* terms the CEE parties literature considers party-

⁸⁸ See: Gil Eyal, Iván Szelenyi, and Eleanor Townsley, *Making Capitalism without Capitalists: The New Ruling Elites in Eastern Europe* (London: Verso, 1999); András Bozóki, ‘Theoretical Interpretations of Elite Change in East Central Europe’, in Mattei Dogan, ed., *Elite Configurations at the Apex of Power* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2003), pp.215-48; and Gil Eyal, *The Origins of Postcommunist Elites: from Prague Spring to Breakup of Czechoslovakia*, (Ann Arbor: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

⁸⁹ See: Jacek Wasilewski, ‘Three Elites of the Central-East European Democratization’ in Radoslaw Markowski and Edmund Wnuk-Lipinski (eds.), *Transformation Paths in Central and Eastern Europe*, (Warsaw: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2001), pp.133-42.

⁹⁰ An interesting recent exception is Bennich-Björkman’s comparative study of the founding elites of Estonia’s Pro Patria party and the Latvia’s Way grouping. However, the linkages made here focus on linking elite composition with party clientelism and reform outcomes, rather than party development *per se*. See: Li Bennich-Björkman, ‘Building post-communist states: Political corruption and strategies of party formation in Estonia and Latvia’ in Sven Eliæson (ed.), *Building Civil Society East of the Elbe: Essays in Honour of Edmund Mokrzycki* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp.288-305.

forming elites, if it considers them at all, as playing a subsidiary role as transmission, co-ordinating or switching mechanisms for other forces.

An example of this can be found in Gryzmala-Busse's work on the transformation of Central and East European former ruling communist parties after 1989.⁹¹ Here variation in the communist successor parties' electoral fortunes is explained by stressing the nature and origins of the contrasting sets of communist elites and the presence or absence of certain 'portable (transferable) skills' that they brought to post-1989 democratic politics. Despite a detailed historical grounding, her analysis tends to depict party elites as abstract bearers of skills and resources generated by varying communist regime types. Not only does this imply that leaders' 'choices' after 1989 were circumscribed, perhaps even pre-determined, by different patterns of state-society relations under communism,⁹² it gives little consideration as to how and why certain elite groups were able to act cohesively. Given the dense inter-locking of institutions, social, career and friendship networks and client-patron relationships that existed in the communist party-state, such questions are perhaps not difficult to answer for former regime elites. They *are*, however, posed more acutely by the cases of centre-right parties, which were formed by diffuse counter-elite groups which faced the task of founding *new* parties, rather than transforming old ones and, consequently, often had to manage extensive and repeated realignments.

In our cases, we find no significant variation on skills or in 'usable pasts', which can easily explain variation. For mass publics after 1989 in all three cases right-wing party-founding elites were credible opponents of communism and/or 'new faces' untainted by collaboration with the old regime.⁹³ The dissident intellectuals, economic technocrats, working class and student activists who founded right-wing and centre-right parties had a mix of skills and resources which embraced grassroots organisation, political negotiation and (to a more limited extent) campaigning for support in competitive electoral contests, as well as technical skills and theoretical knowledge of economics, law and the social sciences. However, it is difficult to see right-wing party forming elites in one case as significantly more skilled than in others. Moreover, there was no common set of skills that existed in both the Czech and Hungarian cases, where successful centre-right parties formed. The Czech Civic Democrats were founded by a core of elite neo-liberal technocrats catapulted to high political office in 1989, who had never publicly challenged the regime before its collapse. Fidesz, by contrast, was created by student activists who had emerged in the anti-communist youth politics of the late 1980s.

In our view, the *cohesion and socio-political positioning* of the elites that founded parties of the centre-right in Central and Eastern Europe, rather than their skills or resources, offer a better explanatory tool in accounting for the varying fortunes of the centre-right groupings compared. The concept of 'elite cohesion' has been widely used in comparative politics, most frequently in analyses of *national* political elites in

⁹¹ See: Grzymała-Busse, *Redeeming the Communist Past*.

⁹² Despite its path-breaking nature, this tension between structure and agency is arguably never adequately resolved in Grzymała-Busse's work. As Greener suggests, such problems are widely prevalent in work inspired by the 'historical institutionalist' branch of the 'new institutionalism'. See: Greener, 'The Potential of Path Dependence in Political Studies'.

⁹³ The extent to which some technocratic elites or (in the Hungarian case) conservative nationalists were co-opted by communist regimes is, arguably, less clear-cut but beyond the scope of this article.

unstable transitional societies, rather than party-forming groups in rapidly consolidating new democracies. Nevertheless, as with other aspects of elite theory, there is no reason why it cannot be transferred from the macro-level analysis of national politics to the meso-level study of organizational development. In common with other analysts, we take elite cohesion to refer to the ability of an elite group over time to reach and maintain consensus over key strategic and policy issues. Such cohesion is usually underpinned by networks of communication based on both formal membership of parties, governments or bureaucracies and informal ties forged through common life experiences, friendship and professional networks, and shared cultural values.⁹⁴

To turn first to the case of Hungary, Fidesz was founded in 1988 by students and graduates of a number of leading Hungarian universities as an independent youth organization intended to rival stagnating official organisations for young people, the party acronym standing for Federation of Young Democrats. Defining itself as a 'generational party', membership was initially restricted to those under 35. The Fidesz leadership group was highly uniform in its socio-demographic characteristics and life experiences. For example, of the ten 1995-2001 party presidium members, all were men; they were born within seven years of each other (1959-1965); seven grew up in the provinces; six had been members of one of the live-in 'disciplinary colleges' of Budapest's two elite universities, the network which formed the immediate intellectual, institutional and personal cradle for Fidesz from the early 1980s; and five had been founder members of the party in 1988, with another two joining the same year.⁹⁵ This homogeneity did not preclude disagreements and political splits. All these features were, for example, shared by Orbán rival Gábor Fodor, who left the party in 1993 after disagreements over the beginnings of the shift to the right and the adoption of conventional forms of party organization. However, once the Orbánites had established their supremacy in 1993, this shared history eased informal internal decision-making and provided a powerful sense of group identity. Moreover, because most of the leadership group had been heavily involved with Fidesz from such a young age, they may have been exposed to fewer alternative organisational cultures than the leaderships of more sociologically conventional parties. They thus possessed an intense sense of institutional ownership and loyalty which not only enabled them to act as a nucleus around which other right-wing elites could coalesce, but also facilitated Fidesz's long march across the Hungarian ideological spectrum.⁹⁶ Fidesz also underwent two radical (and contrary) organisational transformations. Its first redesign in 1993-4 was as an elite-driven, centralised, professionalized election-fighting machine, heavily focused on the mass media. This was followed after the 2002 election defeat by an explicit shift to strategies of mass mobilisation, organisation and encapsulation, through the institutionalisation of internal party sections representing different social constituencies and the launching of the grassroots 'civic circles' movement, estimated at its peak to have mobilised some 100,000 participants.

⁹⁴ See, for example: Bennich-Björkman, 'Building post-communist states'.

⁹⁵ Members of FIDESZ leadership bodies to 1999 are listed in: Csilla Machos, *A magyar parlamenti pártok szervezeti felépítése (1990-1999)* (Budapest: Rejtjel, 2000), pp.107-108. Subsequent data can be found at www.fidesz.hu. Personal data were taken from various parliamentary almanacs.

⁹⁶ See: Csilla Kiss, 'From Liberalism to Conservatism: The Federation of Young Democrats in Post-Communist Hungary', *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol 16 No 3 (2003), pp.739-63.

The Czech Civic Democrats were also founded by a cohesive, socially and generationally defined elite, which emerged during late communism: a group of economists, which included Klaus as well as a number of other subsequently prominent political figures, and which emerged during the 1970s and 1980s as part of a so-called 'grey zone' of critically minded technocrats holding posts in official research and financial institutions, who rejected Czechoslovakia's hard-line regime but had little need for independent organizations such as Charter 77. From the late 1960s this group not only came to reject reform communist notions of 'socialist market' but gravitated from the Keynesian 'neo-classical synthesis' towards neo-liberalism of the Austrian and Chicago schools. Figures from this group not only acted as an intellectual reservoir and conduit for ideas and policies that would define the Czech right, but also became the dominant elite group around which the Civic Democratic Party coalesced in 1990-1. Between 1992 and 1997, in addition to Klaus's role as party leader and prime minister, neo-liberal economists from the former 'grey zone' held two of the four Civic Democrat vice-chairmanships and four of the party's eleven cabinet posts.⁹⁷

However, consistent with the Civic Democrats' more limited success in building a broad inclusive centre-right formation, this elite's cohesion proved more limited than that of Orbán and his associates. By 1996-7, political differences between Klaus and his most prominent deputy chairman, Foreign Minister Josef Zieleniec, over the nature of transformation and the right's role as a vehicle for it had led to a breakdown in trust and elite solidarity which facilitated the emergence of details of illegal party financing practices and corruption in the privatization process, triggering a major public scandal.⁹⁸ After splits in 1997-8, the 'grey zone' economists, with the obvious exception of Klaus himself, disappeared as a coherent leadership elite within the Civic Democrats. Most left the party or retired from front-line politics, leaving the party leadership dominated by politicians with backgrounds in regional politics and by Klaus and his coterie of advisors. However, cohesiveness in itself is only a partial explanation for the effectiveness of the elites which developed the Civic Democratic Party and Fidesz as successful centre-right formations. Indeed, in isolation elite cohesion – like Gryzmala Busse's concept of 'portable skills' and 'usable pasts' - can be seen as overlapping with historical-structural or regime legacy accounts of post-communist party development, given that post-communist elite configurations were, in many ways, determined by patterns of state-society relations under (different forms of) communism. In our view the existence of a cohesive right-wing elite is an important (necessary) condition of success but not a sufficient one. Both Hungarian and Czech successful centre-right party-forming elites additionally had in common the fact that when the unity of groupings rooted in the communist-era opposition unravelled, they were *positioned as credible second-rank challenger elites* to figures from the opposition who had assumed positions of power after 1989: the predominantly ex-dissident social-liberal politicians who headed Civic Forum in late 1990, on the one hand, and the intellectuals and politicians of Antall's Hungarian Democratic Forum-led government, steeped in traditions of pre- and immediately post-war conservatism, on the other.

⁹⁷ See: Stanislav Balík, ed., *Občanská demokratická strana a česká politika* (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2006), pp.301-2. The remaining posts in the Civic Democrat leadership of the period were held by politicians with a background in the district organizations Civic Forum movement and, to a more limited extent, anti-communist or conservative former dissidents.

⁹⁸ See: Hanley, *The New Right in the New Europe*, Chapter 6.

Fidesz had been represented at both the Opposition Roundtable and the Hungarian roundtable talks proper and established itself as a distinct but relatively minor parliamentary party in 1990. Despite electoral losses, it re-entered parliament in 1994, when much of the Hungarian right which had coalesced around the once dominant Hungarian Democratic Forum was fragmented and in political disarray, with party leader Antall now dead.⁹⁹ In the Czech Republic the group of neo-liberal economists and technocrats had gained political office in the Civic Forum-led governments of 1989-90 and 1990-2 because of their expertise, rather than any direct electoral mandate, Klaus assuming the high-profile role of Czechoslovak Finance Minister. Despite Klaus's popularity and prominence, they had limited political influence and remained distant from the ex-dissident leaders of Civic Forum whose social-liberal inclinations and informal political style they distrusted. As one Charter 77 signatory wryly observed "[a]ll the other people in Civic Forum wear sweaters and call each other *ty* but these gentlemen wear ties and say *vy*".¹⁰⁰ Both the Fidesz and Klaus groups thus benefited from the credibility and resources offered by positions in government or parliament they had gained as part of the 'democratic camp' that had displaced communism. Both were, however, sufficiently peripheral that during fluid periods of realignment they were able to project themselves as political outsiders more closely linked to the provinces and the grassroots, than metropolitan elites and capable of bringing new policies and a new professionalism to transition politics.¹⁰¹

Analysed in an elite perspective, the Polish right at first presents a conundrum. In terms of size, credibility ('usable pasts') and their portfolio of political skills, Polish counter-elites should have easily outperformed their Hungarian and Czech counterparts in creating a successful broad centre-right party. However, the size and scope of the elites mobilized by the Polish opposition before 1989, most notably during the heyday of the Solidarity movement in 1980-1, meant that centre-right party forming elites in Poland were heterogeneous and fragmented. Always weak in its ability to exert social control, by the 1980s Poland's communist regime had to contend with multiple centres of oppositional activity and milieu. For example, in a survey of the Polish political scene in the 1989, Friszke identifies seven different political currents encompassing groupings that emerged in opposition to the communist regime: liberal, national-Catholic, Christian-democratic, populist-agrarian, radical-independent, centrist-democratic and social democratic.¹⁰² There were further cultural and ideological sub-divisions within each of these broad currents, and often a number of competing geographical centres of activity. For example, the liberal segment included: the extremely socially conservative and radically free market Union of Real Politics (UPR); the Kraków and Warsaw Industrial Societies and the

⁹⁹ See: Rudolf Tökes, *Hungary's Negotiated Revolution: Economic Reform, Social Change, and Political Succession, 1957-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Kiss 'From Liberalism to Conservatism'.

¹⁰⁰ See: Petr Uhl, 'The Fight For Socialist Democracy in Czechoslovakia', *New Left Review*, No 179 (1990), pp.11-19(p.15). *Vy* and *ty* are the formal and informal forms of address in Czech, corresponding to the distinction between *tu* and *vous* in French or *Sie* and *Du* in German.

¹⁰¹ In the Hungarian case, Orbán and his associates came from provincial backgrounds, but were educated at elite Budapest universities. During his rise to national prominence, Klaus, although a native of Prague, stressed the links he had established with grassroots Civic Forum organisations in North Moravia and other regions.

¹⁰² See: Andrzej Friszke, 'The Polish Political Scene (1989),' *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol 4 No 2 (1990), pp.305-341.

Economic Initiative group linked to the new right 'Dziekania' club; and the young liberals in the Gdansk Socio-economic Society-'Congress of Liberals' that emerged from and were linked to the 'Political Review' journal. Similarly, the national-Catholic current that emerged from the Young Poland Movement (RMP) was divided between: the Gdańsk-based and more liberal-democratic 'Young Poland' club, and the more fundamentalist-nationalist 'Order and Freedom' club based in Poznań.

Such fragmentation reflected the much wider cadre of activists, estimated by Grabowski at 10,000, mobilized as a legacy of the existence in 1980-1 of Solidarity as a mass movement with some ten million participants.¹⁰³ The equivalent Hungarian or Czech figures were only a few hundred in each case. Polish fragmentation was also, arguably, due to the sheer size and historic regional diversity of Poland compared with other post-communist states, particularly to the fact that there were a number of large urban centres in which opposition sub-elites could function. Thus even a distinct group such as Polish (neo-)liberal intellectuals who shared a common ideology marking them out from Catholic nationalists and working class trade union activists were fragmented into sub-groups based around different localities, different leading personalities and different (and to some extent competing) political agendas.¹⁰⁴

In contrast to the cases of Fidesz and the Czech Civic Democrats, no dominant sociologically homogeneous and cohesive elite emerged as the core of the centre-right proto-parties during the two 'critical junctures' identified. Far from the reducible division between economic technocrats and humanistic liberals characteristic of Hungary and the Czech Republic, those broad electoral coalitions that did emerge in Poland and briefly seemed capable of mobilising diverse ideological strands of right-wing voters, most notably the coalition of parties and individuals that came together to support Lech Wałęsa's successful 1990 presidential election bid (anchored in the Centre Agreement grouping) and the Solidarity Electoral Action coalition that won the 1997 parliamentary election, floundered because they were in essence also *elite* coalitions with no cohesive single elite forming a core leadership group.¹⁰⁵

In 1997, for example, the twenty one members of Solidarity Electoral Action's 'Coordinating Group', its *de facto* governing council, came from a diverse range of backgrounds compared with the core elite groups that made up Fidesz and the Czech Civic Democrats. In terms of their pre-1989 oppositional activity: ten of them had been involved primarily in the Solidarity trade union (not surprisingly given that nine of the Group's members were nominated by the union), four were involved in different groupings linked to the Movement for the Defence of Human and Civic Rights (ROPCiO) and its various offshoots in the national-Catholic and 'independence' currents within the opposition such as the Young Poland Movement, Confederation for an Independent Poland (KPN) and the Agreement for an Independent Poland (PPN); two were members of the Solidarity-linked Independent

¹⁰³ See: Grabowski, 'The Party That Never Was'.

¹⁰⁴ See: Jerzy Szacki, *Liberalism after Communism*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995.

¹⁰⁵ As Hanley argues, neo-liberal technocratic elites in the Czech Civic Democratic Party secured political dominance over more numerous provincial elites through an informal division of labour, which allowed the former to determine questions of high politics in exchange for the *de facto* autonomy of regional party organisations at local level. See: Hanley, *The New Right in the New Europe*.

Student Union (NZS); two were linked to different Catholic intellectual organisations; one was involved in Rural Solidarity; and two were too young to be involved in opposition activity at this time. In addition to the nine Solidarity trade union officials, the Group also comprised representatives of eight political parties representing Christian-national, liberal conservative, Christian Democratic, agrarianist and 'independence' ideological strands. It also included representatives from: a Catholic families grouping, the Lech Wałęsa Institute, and the 'National League', an organisation comprising right-wing local councillors. The Co-ordinating Group members also came from a number of regions with: four each from Silesia and Warsaw respectively; two each from Gdańsk and Wrocław; and the remainder drawn from Częstochowa, Kraków, Lublin, Łódź, Nowy Sącz, Poznań, Radom, Rzeszów and Szczecin. They also came from variety of educational and occupational backgrounds, including doctors, journalists, teachers, mechanics, students, architects, lawyers, builders, lecturers, university researchers and those working in publishing, agriculture, coal mining and textile industry.¹⁰⁶

4.2 *Ideological crafting*

However cohesive or well placed in post-transition power struggles, right-wing elites also needed to 'get the politics right' after initial party formation, takeover or re-positioning. This involved contingent, ongoing strategic choices in areas such as organizational strategy or electoral tactics, which are relatively well covered in the literature.¹⁰⁷ However, a further, neglected, aspect of right-wing party-building merits systematic examination: the crafting of durable political ideologies for the post-communist right. Many studies of party development either ignore ideology or reduce it to a series of specific programmatic and policy commitments amenable to quantitative measurement.¹⁰⁸ This is unfortunate, whatever the undoubted methodological difficulties posed by the study of party ideology. Ideology plays a crucial role in framing political action, giving cohesion and identity to political organisations and socializing incoming elites. Moreover, as Mair's analysis suggests, ideological crafting is one of the few additional means in contemporary Europe by which political elites may 'narrow the support market'; in other words, reduce the size of the floating, uncommitted electorate.¹⁰⁹ Most broad, established centre-right parties and political formations in modern Western democracies are ideologically heterogeneous political constructs. Similarly, although there is no shared formula - and the precise ideological make-up of parties such Fidesz, the Civic Democrats and Solidarity Electoral Action varied significantly - the most successful CEE centre-right groupings too have tended to bring together, both in their ideologies and in the range of sub-groups and factions represented within them, diverse elements which may extend from the established civic-minded intelligentsia and neo-liberals influenced by Western economic and public choice theory, to conservatives and national-populists,

¹⁰⁶ See: Andrzej Anusz, Rafał Mossakowski, Piotr Ołdak and Piotr Siczek, *ABC Akcji Wyborczej Solidarność: Informator o AWS* (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Fulmen, 1997).

¹⁰⁷ See: Aleks Szczerbiak, *Poles Together? The Emergence and Development of Political Parties in Post-Communist Poland* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001); Van Biezen, *Political Parties in New Democracies*; Enyedi, 'The Role of Agency in Cleavage Formation'; and Zsolt Enyedi, 'Accounting for Organisation and Financing: A Comparison of Four Hungarian Parties', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol 58 No 7 (2006), pp.1101-17.

¹⁰⁸ See: Kitschelt et al, *Post-Communist Party Systems*; and Grzymała-Busse, *Redeeming the Communist Past*.

¹⁰⁹ See: Mair, *Party System Change*.

usually committed to traditional social values and a moral order rooted in a discourse of the Nation (or the People) as a historic community.¹¹⁰ On the basis of this, such formations generally frame electoral-strategic appeals that might encompass a broad range of ‘naturally’ socially conservative or economically liberal socio-economic constituencies, such as the (smaller) property-owning classes and those living in traditional rural communities, and attract voters ranging from the political centre to the far right.

In the post-communist context, this kind of ideological crafting means developing an integrative narrative of post-communist transformation that can unite a broad swathe of activists, voters and ideological positions. These include older ‘historic’ discourses of conservatism, nationalism and populism that speak to traditional moral values and specific local and national historical identities; anti-communism; and ideas imported from Western contexts or developed locally in the context of post-communist social and economic transformation, liberal-capitalist modernisation and integration into European structures. As many observers have noted, there is often a tension between liberal and conservative ideas and political actors, especially at times of marked political and social change. This relationship can therefore be seen as especially significant for the consolidation and development of the CEE centre-right, particularly given that in a number of states in the region there is a historic divide between liberal and conservative-national/national-populist camps, which appears to have weakened non-socialist forces.

An integrative ideological narrative is, arguably, especially important in terms of both providing cohesion during the early stages of party formation and shaping the new political identities that are necessary to provide a meaningful framework for political action in periods of far-reaching social and political change, such as post-communist transformation. In post-communist democracies, particularly during the early post-transition period when structural determinants may be weaker, levels of uncertainty higher and political identities less well-defined, the weaknesses of civil society and well-understood social interests also give ideological construction a crucial role in orienting action. Politicians in early post-communist politics can, therefore, be seen not only as political entrepreneurs, but also as *ideological entrepreneurs*. In our view, success in terms of crafting an integrative narrative that combines the various discourses of the right and centre-right appears to be a key element in determining the emergence of inclusive and durable centre-right party formations across the region.¹¹¹

In the short term, a charismatic leader can hold together a diverse and heterogeneous formation, acting as a substitute for ideology or a common narrative. The charismatic leadership of Orbán and Klaus was clearly important in the early stages of centre-right party development in Hungary and the Czech Republic; and the lack of it a key

¹¹⁰ Gamble and Hall, for example, point to the critical role played by ideological crafting in ‘Thatcherism’ and the British New Right project. See: Andrew Gamble, ‘The Political Economy of Freedom’, in Ruth Levitas (ed.) *The Ideology of the New Right* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1986); and Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal* (London: Verso, 1988).

¹¹¹ See also Houghton and Fisher’s examination of the Croat and Slovak cases in: Tim Houghton and Sharon Fisher, ‘From the Politics of State-building to Programmatic politics: The Post-Federal Experience and the Development of Party Politics in Croatia and Slovakia’, *Party Politics*, forthcoming.

weakness in the case of sustaining Solidarity Electoral Action.¹¹² However, in the absence of elite cohesion and ideological integration, charismatic leadership provides only a temporary bond for emergent centre-right groupings. An illustration can be found in Lech Wałęsa's leadership of an extremely broad de facto centre-right coalition of forces during his 1990 presidential campaign. A nationally and internationally known figure since the early 1980s, Wałęsa used his personality and charisma, together with opaque election slogans such as 'acceleration', to hold together economic liberals less interested in de-communisation and economically collectivist de-communisers in a broad centre-right coalition including conservatives, Christian Democrats, clerical nationalists, liberals, most of the local Citizens committees that provided the logistical support for the 1989 campaign, and the Solidarity trade union.¹¹³ However, this did not provide a sustainable, long-term basis to develop a broad and durable political formation. Charismatic leadership thus simply provided a short-term breathing space for these parties to develop an integrative ideological narrative.

In the Czech context, a key element of the Civic Democratic Party's political success appeared to lie in its leaders' ability to frame a new ideological discourse of 'rightness' which imported New Anglo-American Right ideas, grounded them in a Czech post-communist context and related them to the delivery of a programme of post-communist social and economic transformation.¹¹⁴ The ideological discourse developed initially by Civic Democrats was an innovative synthesis of Hayekian neo-liberalism and aspects of Czech nationalism. It argued that the free market, political parties, ideologies of left and right and Western international institutions were 'tried and tested' and 'standard' forms of organisation, which could and should be quickly re-established in the Czech lands. Opponents on the centre-left, who wanted a greater role for social movements and civil society in the political sphere or for the state in economic reform, were, the Czech Democrats and their sympathisers argued, consciously or unconsciously seeking 'Third Ways' between Soviet-style communism and the West European mainstream. Such thinking, it was argued, echoed the failed reform communism of the 1960s. Although labelling itself ideologically conservative, the new Czech right-wing discourse was self-consciously radical, or even 'revolutionary', both in its desire to break with the (communist) past and in its disdain for most pre-communist Czech thinkers and parties, viewed as too provincial or too collectivist. Instead, such neo-liberal conservatism stressed its links with the past by suggesting, in a non-specific way, that affinity with the free market was rooted in the Czech national character and tradition. This represented an unusually and broadly successful piece of ideological crafting that served to reinforce the cohesion of the Civic Democrats and, at the same time, helped de-legitimise opponents on the centre-left.

¹¹² Although, in contrast to Wałęsa, Solidarity Electoral Action leader Marian Krzaklewski had the inclination (initially at least) to engage in party building and wanted to transform Solidarity Electoral Action into an ideologically broad, but member-based unitary party his personality and limited experience of front-line politics meant that he lacked both the charisma and the organizational skills to transform the grouping in this way. See: Szczerbiak, 'The Polish Centre-Right's (Last?) Best Hope'.

¹¹³ See: Szczerbiak, 'The Polish Centre-Right's (Last?) Best Hope'; and Wenzel, 'Solidarity and Akcja Wyborcza "Solidarność".'

¹¹⁴ See: Hanley, *The New Right in the New Europe*, Chapter 7.

After losing office in 1997, the Civic Democrats underwent significant ideological reconstruction and realignment, which saw them rediscover previously submerged traditional Czech nationalist paradigms in response to their loss of credibility as a vehicle for post-communist transformation together with the waning of the big issues associated with it. To some extent, the Civic Democrats' identity as an 'Anglo-Saxon' neo-liberal conservative party, rather than a Christian Democratic party on the German or Austrian model, was a conscious assertion of Czech national identity and independence against the dominance of Austro-German influences in Central Europe. Veiled anti-German undercurrents could also be detected in many of the Civic Democrats' statements on European integration during the early- and mid-1990s. However, the party's ideological discourse shifted away from Western neo-liberalism as a point of reference, instead stressing the notion of defending Czech 'national interests' within an enlarging EU. In doing so, the Civic Democrats started to draw on traditional Czech nationalist paradigms.¹¹⁵ Its April 2001 *Manifesto of Czech Eurorealism*, for example, attempted to align the Civic Democrats' preferred neo-liberal model of European integration with the Czech national tradition, claiming that liberal-nationalist thinkers of the Nineteenth Century such as Havlíček, Palacký and Masaryk were "strikingly close to Anglo-Saxon liberal-conservative thought".¹¹⁶ The period after 1997 also saw the foundation of a profusion of new right-wing think tanks and 'training academies' around the Civic Democrats intended both to socialize leaders emerging through the ranks and act as forums for further ideological development. However, despite attempts to re-launch the party as a champion of flat taxation and welfare reform in 2004-6,¹¹⁷ the exhaustion of the original ideological 'project' around which the Civic Democrats developed and the fracturing after 1997 of the neo-liberal elite that formed the core of its 'dominant coalition'¹¹⁸ may have prevented them from achieving the kind of hegemony on the centre-right enjoyed by Fidesz in Hungary. Nonetheless, the 'project' provided a unifying narrative during the party's key formative period that allowed sufficient time for the Civic Democrats to 'bed-down' and institutionalise. This gave them enough early organisational coherence to both prevent significant fragmentation following electoral defeat and engage in subsequent ideological and personnel renewal.

As with the Czech Civic Democrats, a key element in Fidesz's cohesion and success appeared to lie in its leaders' ability to construct a new integrative ideological narrative, in this case one that converted the potential of the 'national' and socio-culturally-based right into an ideology of national transformation that had wide popular and electoral resonance in the circumstances of the late 1990s. After turning away from liberalism, Fidesz under Orbán developed a new ideology whose key concepts are normally translated, including by Fidesz, as the 'civic' (*polgári*) and the 'citizen' (*polgár*), although 'bourgeois' is a legitimate and in some respects

¹¹⁵ See: Kieran Williams, 'National Myths in the New Czech Liberalism', in George Schöpflin and Geoffrey Hosking (eds.), *Myths and Nationhood*, (London: Hurst, 1997), pp.79-89; and Seán Hanley, 'From Neo-Liberalism to National Interests: Ideology, Strategy, and Party Development in the Euroscepticism of the Czech Right', *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol 18 No 3 (2004), pp.513-48

¹¹⁶ See: Jan Zahradil, Petr Plecítý, Petr Adrian and Miloslav Bednář, *Manifest českého eurorealismu*, April 2001, p.8 available at www.ods.cz/docs/dokumenty/zahradil-manifest.pdf (Viewed on 1 October 2006).

¹¹⁷ See: Hanley, *The New Right in the New Europe*, Chapter 6.

¹¹⁸ See: Panebianco, *Political Parties*.

more helpful rendering.¹¹⁹ The *polgári* concepts had two sets of historical associations: the political and socio-economic development ('embourgeoisement') of Hungary as a modern society during the Nineteenth Century; and the communist designation of the Western/capitalist states as the '*polgári* (i.e. 'bourgeois') democracies'. The *polgári* ideology was associated specifically with Fidesz, which sponsored the relevant process of ideological construction from 1994, and incorporated the *polgári* term into its name in 1995 to become Fidesz–Hungarian Civic Party (Fidesz-MPP).

The *polgári* ideology facilitated consolidation at both the mass-electoral and elite-intellectual levels. It did so by locating the post-1994 Socialist-liberal administration in a sweeping critique of the Hungarian transition, which formed part of a longer historical narrative of Hungarian nationhood and the Hungarian nation's 'civic'/'bourgeois' development. As with the Czech centre-right's critique of ex-dissidents' supposed disdain for democratic accountability and penchant for 'Third Ways', Fidesz's 'civic' ideology was anti-elitist and anti-communist. However, while the Czech Civic Democrats focused on the dangers posed by collectivist ideological temptations and the shortcomings of ex-dissident politicians, Fidesz identified a politico-economic elite that, it claimed, had been expropriating and exploiting national property since the very start of the communist period. In contrast to the Czech centre-right, Fidesz thus rejected key elements of neo-liberal economics, which it saw as serving the interests of Hungary's ex-nomenklatura elite and its foreign sponsors, and as part of the reason why the expected benefits of transition had not been more widely felt. However, *polgári* ideologues argued that policy should favour the 'sinking middle', rather than all those who might consider themselves 'transition losers'. This was partly because the state was seen as having a greater duty to help those apparently willing and able to help themselves; and partly because the struggling middle groups were seen as carriers of moral and cultural values, such as respect for work and the family, which the *polgári* thinkers wished to promote as goods in themselves. The *polgári* ideology, therefore, offered itself as a critique of 'transition' and a promise of change, rather than a commitment to complete an existing process.¹²⁰ Unlike the Czech Civic Democrats, the Fidesz ideology reacted against a transformation process it saw as having gone awry.¹²¹ However, the *polgári* ideology still made for a more aspirational, Western and forward-looking appeal than many traditional forms of Hungarian conservatism. Significantly, both Fidesz and the Civic Democrats were responding to phenomena identified as post-communist, rather than simply harking back to the anti-communist struggle. Indeed, Fidesz's ideology of embourgeoisement *depended* on the Hungarian communist successor party's practice of neo-liberal economics.

¹¹⁹ The Hungarian term is in many ways closer to the German *Bürger* which can also be rendered into English as either 'citizen' or 'bourgeois'.

¹²⁰ See: Fowler, 'Concentrated orange'.

¹²¹ There are, however, parallels between Fidesz's turn from the liberal camp to 'national revival' and the Civic Democrats' post-1997 turn from neo-liberalism to 'national interests'. Both arguably reflected the limitation of liberalism as a durable ideology for a broad centre-right in CEE. However, in the Hungarian case it was competitive pressures on the liberal 'centre' from the communist-successor Socialist Party on the one side and the political right on the other that prompted ideological realignment; rather than the waning of the big issues of post-communist transformation that, along with the Civic Democrats' loss of credibility as the vehicle for that transformation, was most significant in the Czech case.

Finally, the *polgári* ideology facilitated centre-right organisational concentration because of the way it was developed. It emerged from a milieu of discussion circles and intellectual societies which were initiated or mobilised after 1994 by Fidesz and elites associated with other moderate centre-right parties who wished to promote the coming-together of these political forces. These bodies and their activities, later paralleled by the new think tanks of the Czech centre-right in its (less successful) post-1997 ideological re-alignment, constituted a key mechanism by which Fidesz was integrated into 'core' centre-right elite circles, and through which the party gained access to, and credibility from, contacts with personnel who had had government experience in 1990-1994.

The ideological development of Solidarity Electoral Action offers a contrasting picture to both the Czech and Hungarian cases. From the outset Solidarity Electoral Action was a heterogeneous political construct espousing an eclectic mix of ideologies encompassing socially conservative trade union-oriented corporatism, Christian Democracy, economically interventionist and liberal forms of Catholic nationalism and less overtly Church-inspired strands of liberal-conservatism. However, the problems associated with this ideological heterogeneity were not *necessarily* insurmountable; and the coalitions of forces that united around a common ideology in Hungary's Fidesz and the Czech Civic Democrats were also very broad. However, Solidarity Election Action and its associated intellectual milieu failed in the task of developing a coherent and inclusive ideological narrative that could provide the grouping with programmatic and ideological cohesion over the longer term beyond a single election. Indeed, unlike Klaus in the Czech Republic and Orbán in Hungary, the relevant Polish elites made little effort to formulate a unifying ideology to accompany their organizational and electoral project. In particular, Krzaklewski, the leader of the Solidarity trade union, on whose initiative Solidarity Electoral Action was formed, failed to use the period running up to the 1997 election, when he enjoyed a dominant position on the Polish centre-right analogous to that of Klaus or Orbán during the equivalent stages of Czech and Hungarian party development, to promote the formulation of a cohesive, forward looking ideology for the new grouping.

Despite a successful 1997 election communications strategy presenting a youthful, forward-looking image of moderation and professionalism,¹²² the only unifying narrative that held Solidarity Electoral Action together was a shared nostalgic anti-communism and a desire to defeat the communist successor Democratic Left Alliance. As Wenzel notes, Solidarity Electoral Action was only able to unite on the basis of invoking and attempting to re-capture the symbolism of the original Solidarity movement and recreating a feeling of 'societal unity' from the 1980s, rather than any forward-looking programme.¹²³ The contrast with Hungarian developments is especially noticeable, given that Fidesz's *polgári* ideology responded to phenomena identified as specifically *post-communist*, rather than simply harking back to the anti-communist struggle, and sought to redefine the nature of Hungary's post-communist 'transition'. Ultimately, Polish developments left cronyism and concerns for electoral self-preservation – factors certainly present, but managed more successfully in the Hungarian and Czech cases – rather than any organisational loyalty or ideological vision as the only bonds holding Solidarity Electoral Action together.

¹²² See: Aleks Szczerbiak, 'Electoral Politics in Poland: The Parliamentary Elections of 1997,' *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol 12 No 1 (1998), pp.58-83.

¹²³ See: Wenzel, 'Solidarity and Akcja Wyborcza "Solidarność".'

5. Conclusion

In this paper we have considered why some centre-right party formations in CEE have been consistently more successful than others during the decade-and-a-half of competitive electoral politics following the fall of communism. We defined a 'successful' centre-right party formation as one that has been able to construct an inclusive electoral entity encompassing a socially and ideologically broad range of voters and sub-groups and remain stable and cohesive over a period of years. All other things being equal, we argued, such broad and durable groupings represented more preferable outcomes for the actors concerned than a more fragmented or plural right. Taking three national case studies, we operationalized this dependent variable of party success through a range of measures examining the extent to which a dominant centre-right party formation has been able to garner a substantial proportion of the total centre-right and right-wing vote across a series of post-1989 elections. On this basis, we ranked Hungary first (high breadth, medium durability), the Czech Republic (medium breadth, high durability) as the second most successful case, and Poland (low breadth and durability) as the least successful.

Reviewing explanations that might be derived from the existing literature on post-communist party development to explain this variance we found macro-institutional explanations that focused on executive structures and electoral system design to have limited explanatory power. It was often difficult to separate out processes of cause and effect and, to the extent that this was possible, we concluded that electoral system design at most re-inforced the performance tendencies of already existing groupings. Historical-structural explanations that focused on regime legacies were able to explain the ideological positioning of the different centre-right formations in our three cases, but did little to explain the relative 'success' of the various centre-right organisations. The introduction of a more explicit framework of path dependence, stressing the role of choices and political crafting at critical junctures, seemed to offer a plausible resolution. In contrast to earlier work on the post-1989 transformations of communist successor parties, our research identified two potential critical juncture periods, which represented windows of opportunity for the development of CEE centre-right groupings: the immediate post-transition period (1989-91) and/or the aftermath of defeat by successor parties in the Hungarian and Polish cases (1993-4). However, much existing theory is weak on mechanisms of 'lock-in', where such self-reinforcing mechanisms have been suggested they are unlikely to work very powerfully in CEE, and the detailed empirical analysis of our cases raises doubts as to whether such 'lock-in' has actually taken place as most applications of the path dependence/critical juncture framework require. Indeed, all the existing explanations have difficulty in coping with change in the fortunes of a single formation in one country; they would all suggest that any given formation would be set for a particular fate for the duration.

Given the shortcomings of these approaches, we then looked for supplementary and complementary explanations capable of accounting for the variation in centre-right party success across the three cases. Our analysis identified two such additional factors: (i) the presence of cohesive and credible elites outside the group of ex-opposition figures who first took power after the fall of communism; and (ii) the subsequent ability of such elites to (re-)fashion broad integrative ideological narratives that relate current processes of post-communist transformation to earlier conservative, nationalist and anti-communist traditions. As such our work falls short

of a fully integrated model of (centre-right) party success in CEE of the type developed in other contexts in the comparative literature.¹²⁴ To do so the factors we have discussed would need to be formulated into a more explicit theoretical model and perhaps subsequently extended to other national cases and party types in the region. We believe, however, that our research has clear implications for the study of party (system) development in the region.

First, this paper suggests that research on party development in relatively open, competitive and ideologically-based post-communist party systems of CEE should be more aware of the role of informal elite networks in party formation and stabilization. Much work on post-communist elite networks and the informal political practices they embody has focused on phenomena of patronage and clientelism in reform laggards such as Bulgaria, Romania or post-Soviet states such as Russia. In such contexts informal linkages and practices are so dominant that institutions like parties can often be mere facades for informal power structures.¹²⁵ This is clearly not the case in states such Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic and we are far from dismissing the importance of formal rules and roles in party development in the region. However, we feel, some of the tools and concepts developed to study informal elite practices and linkages in other post-communist contexts might be usefully re-imported to the study of party development in CEE. In this regard, the pioneering work of Scandinavian political scientists working on the Baltic sub-region may represent an important point of departure.¹²⁶

Second, our research suggests that ideology and ideational factors may need to be incorporated more seriously and systematically into the study of party success and party cohesion in CEE (and beyond). Some party specialists have argued that concepts such a 'logic of ideas' or 'structures of discourse' are so vague and difficult to operationalise that they should, at most, be used for residual explanation when more easily testable hypotheses are exhausted.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, such research strategies have been developed with some success in the field of domestic and

¹²⁴ See: Kitschelt, *The Logics of Party Formation*.

¹²⁵ See: Andrew Wilson, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2005); and Alena V. Ledeneva, *How Russia Really Works: The Informal Practices that Shaped Post-Soviet Politics and Business* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

¹²⁶ See: Bennich-Björkman, 'Building post-communist states'. We are also broadly sympathetic to Steen's concept of post-communist democracies as 'elite network states' in which institutions (both formal and informal) depend on the strength of elite networks for their stability and effectiveness. Although Steen's arguments were developed to explain the relative stability and democratic success of the Baltic states, we believe they may have more general applicability (at least) to phenomena such as party success across CEE. See: Anton Steen, *Between Past and Future: Elites, Democracy and the State in Post-Communist Countries: A Comparison of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997). We also note the use of the network analysis in sub-fields of research on communist and post-communist politics such as the study of social movements or post-socialist industrial transformation. See: Maryjane Osa, *Solidarity and Contention: Networks of Polish Opposition* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); and David Stark and Gernot Grabher (eds.), *Restructuring Networks in Post-Socialism: Legacies, Linkages, and Localities* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹²⁷ Kitschelt, for example, rightly argues that 'the independent influence of "ideas" on parties' and citizens' preferences can be addressed in a methodologically straightforward way only in cases where electoral- or office-seeking rationality yields different predictions about party positions than a logic of ideas'. See: Kitschelt, *The Transformation of European Social Democracy*, pp.278.

international political economy of the region.¹²⁸ Ideology, we believe, may have a similar role to play as ‘a compliance mechanism’ underlying the success of some parties in the region.

¹²⁸ See: Hilary Appel, *A New Capitalist Order: Privatization and Ideology in Russia and Eastern Europe* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004); and Rawi Abdelal, *National Purpose in the World Economy: Post-Soviet States in Comparative Perspective* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001).

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