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The Europeanization of Social Democracy in East Central Europe

The Europeanization of social democratic parties in the new member states has reached a turning point with accession, especially in relation to the upcoming elections to the European Parliament (EP) in June 2004. At the same time, domestically the social construction of democracy is high on the agenda in East Central Europe (ECE) after a long decade of political and economic transformation which has brought the region to the stage of democratic consolidation. The ECE countries have arrived at a crossroads: in parallel with EU accession they must decide what kind of public sector they will create, almost from scratch, and how a new democratic state will be built. This paper focuses on the present situation of social democracy in ECE, particularly in respect of the connection between social interests and political parties in the Europeanization process. It tries to combine a bottom-up and a top-down approach, presenting the attempts of leftist party elites to solve social problems and represent societal interests on the one hand, and describing the forms and intensity of popular pressure from below on the other.

The formation of political parties in ECE, indeed, has been to a great extent an elite-dominated process and the party elites have used several forms of political marketing to attract voter support without a meaningful social response. It is equally true that the ECE parties – at least in their rhetoric and mostly before elections – have tried to satisfy their constituencies' demands, so to some extent they have had to pursue social interest-driven politics. However, the main influence on ECE party formation has been the example of the Western European party system: only those have survived that could fit into the pre-existing party-types with an "EU license", that is, have received an "accreditation" from the West.

This paper focuses on the changes in the external role and internal structure of left-wing parties in ECE, contrasting between external and internal Europeanization, also in respect of the painful road from politics to policy, that is, from ideologically-driven political battles to concrete policy-making processes. Our conclu-

sion is that despite particular efforts to solve the problems of those who have lost out from systemic change and EU accession, the challenges they have faced have brought hard times for the Left everywhere in ECE, indicating a difficult start for social democracy in the westernmost part of the "East," namely Central Europe.

The birth pangs of the new social democracy in East Central Europe

Political parties in ECE have developed through three stages: (i) social movements, (ii) "forum" parties as umbrella organizations, and (iii) parliamentarization. ECE political parties can be described in accordance with the two axes of left-right, and Europeanization-nation-centrism (or traditionalism). This typology gives us four basic types of ECE party: (i) Europeanized Left, (ii) Europeanized Right, (iii) Nation-Centric Left and (iv) Nation-Centric Right. Following their general ideological orientation, the ECE parties joined their respective party internationals in the 1990s. Furthermore, we must distinguish the stages of democratic transition and democratic consolidation; these stages of internal development by and large coincide with those of Europeanization as stages of association and accession. The association period demanded only a general Europeanization of parties and governments; the present accession period presupposes a thorough Europeanization in terms of acceptance of the full body of the *acquis communautaire*. This new task is too much for them, however, and has produced a "performance crisis" for the ECE parties which we shall analyse in terms of the EU representation paradox.¹

The birth pangs of social democracy can be summarized in terms of the following social and political processes: (i) the emerging social crisis in the democratic transition leading to political demobilization; (ii) the protracted social crisis in the 1990s provoking an urgent need for "systemic change in welfare"; (iii) the

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1 In my books *The Politics of Central Europe and Emerging Democracies in East Central Europe and the Balkans* (Ágh 1998a and 1998b) I systematically describe all ECE parties and the stages of ECE political developments.

inability of left-wing parties in East Central Europe to reach the poor, what one might consider their “natural” social base – on the contrary, generally the better educated, more urban and more secure have tended to vote for the Left, which has so far failed to elaborate a discourse attractive to the marginalized, the rural and the uneducated. Western analysts usually start from two assumptions in discussing ECE social democracy, illustrated by the following quotation: “Obviously, the building of capitalism is not a genuinely social-democratic task. However, modern, Western social democracy has made its peace with modern capitalism to whose shaping it has largely contributed. In the transition countries, social democrats had the opportunity to create capitalism with a human face from scratch” (Crook et al. 2002: 17). The first assumption is too rigid in its use of the term “capitalism,” which existed – although in a very distorted form – in the ECE countries until the late 1940s. It returned, in another distorted form, in the late 1980s: “building capitalism” may not be the best way of describing the return to a market economy given its dire social consequences in the relatively backward, semi-peripheral ECE countries. However, the cases of Spain, Portugal, and Greece were very similar in the 1970s and 1980s. The second assumption – that social democrats in ECE had the opportunity to create capitalism with a human face – may be supposed to be a reference to such ideal Western social-democratic models as Denmark. It is even less well-grounded than the first and, moreover, is a dangerous illusion. “Currently existing capitalism” in ECE has, in fact, an “inhuman face,” hence one could even blame ECE social democrats for not taking the opportunity to “build” a better capitalism. It is particularly important that the PES has regularly emphasized the importance of “economic and social governance in the Union,” even in relation to the EU Constitution (Amato 2003).

In fact, socio-economic and political development in ECE has not been unilinear but cyclical. In addition, it has not been dominated by domestic factors and actors but by the dual challenge of Europeanization and globalization. Put simply, the role of external factors and actors has been so overwhelming that domestic actors’ – including social democrats’ – room for maneuver has been minimal. In the democratization process, especially at the beginning, ECE societies and states have been very weak and so little able to resist outside pressure. At the same time, the actors have not had clear ideas about the process and the alternatives. However, the weakness of states and lack of preparedness of domestic actors have not been the main causes of the emergence of capitalism with an

“inhuman face” in ECE countries, which can rather be attributed to the tremendous outside pressure that has left very little scope for the management of domestic developments. Nevertheless, some alternatives have been available for domestic actors, and so development has not followed the same path in every ECE country. However, there are no fundamental differences among them and they present a series of versions of “inhuman” capitalism.

Otherwise, the Western social democrats who have analysed the actions of the ECE social democrats have pointed out with justification that the latter have made a great effort towards achieving the “final goal” of transition, that is, some kind of welfare state:

The final goal of transition (the type of economy, society, welfare state) has been hardly clear during the first years of transition, though probably clearer among the left who preferred a European welfare state than among the right who oscillated between Thatcherism, neo-liberalism, economic nationalism, social conservatism and religious concepts of society. The preferences of voters in Central and Eastern Europe have generally been in favour of less inequality but they have had no clear strategies about how to achieve that goal. (Crook et al. 2002: 17)

Left and Right have adopted very different approaches to transition strategy, yet the simple fact has not been mentioned that the ECE Right has received much more assistance than the ECE Left has from its Western counterpart. It is dangerous to refer to voters’ preferences because this raises the specter of populism, the deadly shadow of democratization, since living standards had to fall during the years of economic crisis management and it was impossible to manage the process with popular support. This argument is also contradicted by the fact that “even in apparently fast reforming countries, like Hungary or the Czech Republic, social-democratic parties had to implement sometimes harsh policies in order to establish capitalism because their conservative or liberal predecessors had failed to do the job” (Crook et al. 2002: 17).

This, indeed, has been the real trap for ECE social democracy. The ECE Right has not been ready for socio-economic crisis management and it has deepened the crisis with counter-productive policies; even more, it has moved towards social and national populism to win elections. The ECE Left has had to face up to the task of crisis management and the ensuing loss of popularity. The Hungarian and the Polish leftist governments did a good job of crisis management in the mid-1990s and created the conditions for sustainable economic growth but their austere measures were too

painful and they were turned out at the next election. Before, during, and after the crisis management period, in fact, the “disappointed population reacted angrily” and popular satisfaction with the market economy and democracy drastically declined in the 1990s (Crook et al. 2002: 18). However, in order to attain the long-term goal of systemic change in political, economic, and social consolidation this popular dissatisfaction was inevitable. The real question is when and how this transition will come to an end and here EU accession provides some rays of hope: “The greatest hope and fastest chance of solving the dilemma, however, still lies with the accession to the EU” (Crook et al. 2002: 18). I will return later to the issue of the second crisis and the new trap of materialist demands emerging from EU accession and the Europeanization of ECE social democratic parties.

Nonetheless, when discussing positive prospects one must not neglect two diverging social processes. First, high unemployment has proven to be transitory: it has been a generational affair and/or connected with economic restructuring between industry and services, as well as between the state and private sectors. Secondly, however, the extreme polarization of wealth will be a long-term phenomenon; it may even characterize the deep structure of ECE societies “for ever.” Acute social polarization has produced a kind of social model alien to the social construction of democracy and against the efforts of ECE social democracy to complete the political and economic transformation with a social one – with so-called “systemic change in welfare.” The growing electoral abstention in ECE has been connected with the “social costs of transition” in which the social deprivation of the losers has coincided with their political “disempowerment.” The socially deprived strata or those temporarily or permanently disadvantaged by economic transformation have been less organized and more deprived politically than their counterparts in the West. It has been a fatal blow to social democracy in ECE because its potential constituency – and virtual or actual allies – has been marginalized and/or disoriented and discouraged. Thus, ECE social democrats have been confronted with the unsolved problems of the social costs of transition and were unable to pursue a genuine leftist socio-economic program for many years until national economies recovered in the late 1990s and some initiatives could be started for social recovery too.

The collapse of the former regimes was accompanied by a deep social crisis, and systemic change has produced a new one in turn. In fact, beyond this, the entire process resulted in a singular – so far hardly noticed – contradiction. The exclusion of the impover-

ished masses from politics has been the price paid for the survival of democratization while avoiding the danger of populism (see Greskovits 1998). The controversial nature of democratic transition derives from the fact that all ECE countries underwent a transformation recession in which they lost approximately one quarter of their GDP, resulting in large-scale impoverishment, increasing social inequality, an alarming degree of social dislocation, and a major deterioration of living standards. Exclusion, subordination, and lack of recognition characterize the first phase of democratization even in the most advanced Central European countries. As a result of economic exclusion (mass unemployment) and social fragmentation (polarization and marginalization of social strata) there has been a huge divergence in the political transformation between the disempowerment of the losers and the empowerment of the winners. Political recognition and social inclusion are still largely missing in the young Central European democracies where the exclusion and subordination of the losers has been the rule. The social construction of democracy has not only been delayed but deeply disturbed and distorted by these successful political and economic processes consolidating the basis for democracy. Put simply, the removal of the *economic* deficit created a serious *social* deficit and the new problem is how to cope with the latter. Moreover, early democratization led to the *political* demobilization of the masses. The new agenda is about how to mobilize and empower them now, at the stage of early consolidation that represents a special task for ECE social democracy. In general, these issues have also been discussed as the “social costs of transition” and the “political costs of transition” (on the winner-loser issue in general see Tang 2000).

What we call “the trap of material need” refers simply to the drastic fall in incomes in the 1990s, at which point the “post-materialist” period, which had begun to emerge to some extent in the late 1980s, was postponed. As already mentioned, in ECE two parallel processes occurred in the 1990s: (i) the drastic reduction of real incomes and (ii) increasing social and regional polarization. Real incomes decreased by about 30 per cent compared to 1989, and returned to that level only in the early 2000s. By this time social polarization was complete: a wide gap had emerged between the lowest and highest income brackets in the course of a decade (from 1:3 to 1:10). The fall in incomes was accompanied by a drastic reduction in public services: a near collapse of the public sector threatened the ECE countries in the early 1990s. Under permanent budgetary pressure public services were drastically reduced, and in some cases completely

abandoned. This reduction had two consequences in the 1990s. Not only was there a decrease in the delivery of public services and the erosion of public institutions, but even more shocking was the drastic reduction of public employees' wages. Instead of a general emphasis on developing a middle class, as the slogan of the new democratic society demanded, there was a very marked process of declassification of the middle class (for instance, teachers and doctors) in the 1990s, with only a minor recovery in the 2000s. The disintegration of the formerly substantial middle-income strata has produced an upper class of successful entrepreneurs and those professionals who have moved from the public to the private sector. By the mid-1990s this had resulted in the exclusion of large groups of professionals, including most civil servants, from the emerging middle class and the recent reintegration has been slow and uncertain. The final result has been the demobilization of voters generated by economic and social exclusion from the productive world.

The demobilization of the masses in the early 1990s was in some ways a conscious attempt on the part of parties and politicians eager to avoid populism. However, it was even more an unintended result of the economic and social marginalization already discussed. In both ways it has generated an "unstructured political market" with a low party-membership density (Beyme 2001: 139, 153). The two major institutional outcomes of demobilization have been in the world of civic associations and in industrial relations: first, there has been a pervasive lack of both civil organizations representing various losers' groups and channels, other than voting in elections, for civil control over state policy-making; second, the trade unions were delegitimized and marginalized, so the interests of employees remained mostly underrepresented at both national and shop-floor level. The trade unions were hit by rapid de-industrialization and declining wages and, since they could not cope with the problems of unemployment and impoverishment, they lost a major part of their membership. Reform of the trade unions inherited from the communist system has not made rapid progress and the newly organized trade unions have usually not been proper partners for ECE social democracy. In fact, depoliticization has been much wider than electoral demobilization. People have turned away from politics in ECE because they feel that it does not address their real problems; that is, it has shown a very low level of "social responsiveness."²

2 There is a large literature on ECE trade unions (for example, Waller and Myant 1994; Hausner, Pedersen and Ronit 1995; Orenstein 1998; Cox and Mason 1999; and Cook, Orenstein

The external and internal Europeanization of ECE parties

So far, little attention has been paid to ECE parties' participation in the European party system. This process may be contrasted with former EU enlargements:

With each earlier enlargement, the EU has taken on a country whose political families are recognisably the same as those in the existing member states. By contrast, not all East European countries show signs of developing party systems that centre around Christian and Social Democrats, Conservatives and Liberals as the dominant political forces. (Hix 1997: 3)

First, the real question is whether political parties in Central and Eastern Europe have anything in common at all; the term "post-communist" countries has become an empty shell and by now sweeping over-generalizations have lost all validity. Second, the ECE parties, with all their infantile disorders, are "centered" on the major party families of the West and have formally joined them. As Geoffrey Pridham has pointed out in several places, "transnational party linkages" have played a vital role in the development of the ECE parties, leading to a "party-political convergence in Europe" (Pridham 2000).

The dominant approach to the impact of the EU on national party systems is perhaps what one might call the "limited impact" school developed by Peter Mair (Mair 2000). This approach has recently appeared in a number of other papers discussing "parties resisting change" in Europeanization (Raunio 2003). Paul Lewis extends this approach to the ECE parties (Lewis 2003: 6) and discusses more the indirect impact of Europeanization on the ECE parties. In my view, the reason for this interpretation lies in the missing distinction between the external and internal Europeanization of the ECE parties: Europeanization which is very "direct" or "hard" on one side, and very "indirect" or "soft" on the other. I understand by external Europeanization an elite-based process through which contacts with and/or membership of international party organizations have emerged and the ECE parties' programs, values, and public discourses changed accordingly. Internal Europeanization is a process which reaches and transforms the membership and the constituency of the ECE parties, as well as their relationship to civil society; internal party organizations and popular beliefs change in parallel with this. Concerning external Europeanization, the categorization developed by James Sloam can

and Rueschmeyer 1999). However, this issue requires separate treatment.

be very helpful: he distinguishes between ideational transfer networks for ideas and electoral programs, policy transfer networks for policy alternatives produced by “epistemic communities” to solve certain problems, and information networks involving Western and ECE parties (Sloam 2003: 22–24). These networks have, indeed, been very active and through them external Europeanization has proceeded rapidly, reshaping the ECE social democratic parties in their outward-directed operations.³

The contrast between the external and the internal Europeanization of the ECE parties can be explained in terms of a “push and pull” effect. For the ECE parties EU accession is a must, above all for the Left, all of whose political actions have been propelled by their desire to be accepted by and integrated into EU social democracy. This push effect has been counterbalanced by a pull effect based on worries concerning a second generation of losers from European integration effected through “cheap enlargement” (Micheale Schreyer). Social democratic analysts note these “hopes and fears”: EU accession will increase inequalities not only among social strata but also among the richer and poorer regions. These analysts present this issue as a paradox: “Social democrats have been the strongest advocates of accession in many countries. (...) Why did social democrats support EU membership in spite of the costs and partial drawbacks for their own clientele?” This is correct but not complete:

*Joining the EU will narrow the range of options among the possible varieties of capitalism to be established in Central and Eastern Europe substantially. That basically is a desirable outcome for social democrats in the applicant countries as the options compatible with EU membership tend to be social democratic in a wider sense, i.e. they are based on the European ‘social model’ as expressed and defined by the Treaties of the EU and the *acquis communautaire*, including the European Social Charter and the Charter of Human and Civil Rights. (Crook et al. 2002: 22–23)*

The European Social Model is undoubtedly attractive, but the ECE countries also need the EU as both an engine for economic growth and a safeguard for further democratization. Hopefully, the social price of EU membership that has been paid so far – calculating on a five-year period of relative troubles and disappoint-

ment – will be compensated in the longer run by ever closer proximity to the European Social Model. However, the price paid by some social strata will be converted into a political price to be paid almost exclusively by ECE social democracy as ECE populations encounter a second trap of material need and a second generation of losers emerges. The ECE social democratic parties have been sandwiched between EU adjustment requirements and the popular disappointment caused by this adjustment.

Conversely, although the ECE leftist parties have been closely tied to their Western counterparts their domestic development has substantially diverged from the Western path. Mass parties, peoples’ parties, and/or cadre parties must be understood against the background of painful social transition. My hypothesis is that the ECE social democratic parties fall into the category of “small peoples’ parties,” expressing a contradiction between the relatively small size of the party membership and the fact that they represent all social strata to some extent. The newly emerging ECE parties are usually only cadre parties, that is, groupings of office seekers. People do not join political parties in ECE because of political demobilization alone, but above all because they are busy with the everyday burdens of adjustment to the new realities – they simply do not have time or energy for party business. The result is the senescence of party memberships. It seems, however, that the ECE social democratic parties have escaped this trap, since they have attracted more members than the other parties and from all social strata. This has been attributed to their successor character. However, the only true mass parties are the unreformed ruling parties (such as the Czech Communist Party and its sister parties in the Balkans). In fact, the reformed parties have a relatively small membership with a large and increasing percentage of new recruits. It is also significant that the ECE social democratic parties have an overrepresentation of more educated and higher-income strata in terms of both membership and constituency, combined with an underrepresentation of the less educated and lower-income strata.⁴

The elaboration of a genuine social democratic program in ECE has become necessary in order to represent those who are politically silent and to invite them back into politics as partners. This is the future of the

3 As Heinz Fisher argues, the Western parties’ various foundations have played a major role in the Europeanization of the ECE parties (Fischer 2003). He describes in detail the role of the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity (www.europeanforum.net), established in 1993.

4 This contrast between the “educated” and the “uneducated” membership and the resulting divergent electoral support is considerable in Hungary. The centre-right party FIDESZ increased this gap with its nationalist rhetoric and won the election in 1998. At the last general election in 2002 nationalist-traditionalist discourse was also very successful in mobilizing the least educated and poorest strata of Hungarian society but failed to attain an electoral majority.

party–society relationship in the form of social inclusion or cohesion based on the re-integration into society of those who have lost out. This has been reinforced by EU accession both negatively and positively: this process has created new losers but also offers an opportunity for social cohesion through sustained economic growth and meeting EU requirements. Democratization and marketization have been very successful in ECE, yet there is still a long way to go before living standards recover and a real “participatory revolution” or “deliberative democracy” develop. By the early 2000s the disintegration, segmentation, fragmentation, and social exclusion described above have come to form an obstacle to social integration and political recognition. Thus, “national reunification” has been left to the newly elected social democratic governments. Eastern Enlargement has therefore to be seen as a two-sided integration process, both with other national states and in terms of national identity. The dual challenge of globalization and Europeanization makes domestic integration more difficult in ECE. In the mid-1990s, when the first leftist governments came to power, severe economic crisis management was the most urgent task. Since 1996 sustainable economic growth has begun to create the conditions for a “systemic change in welfare.” The patient decade is over in ECE and now people are demanding that the wage gap with the EU be closed. Paradoxically, the serious treatment of Euro-issues in ECE parliaments was hindered in the 1990s not so much by the anti-European parties as by the parliamentary parties’ too faint commitment to Europeanization: they had no clearly outlined Europeanization policies, programs, or profiles of their own in the concrete terms of the EU policy universe. Only a few marginal parties produced anti-European ideas and sentiments, and even some markedly populist parties in ECE parliaments usually avoided direct confrontation with Europeanization. These small, extreme right-wing populist parties found various indirect ways of communicating their resistance to European integration, usually by reinterpreting “Europe” in accordance with their own ideas. Otherwise, there was a nebulous consensus about Europeanization that did not allow the direct and public articulation of anti-European ideas and interests. However, the situation changed during the accession negotiations and in the course of preparation of the referendums on accession, when anti-European voices were heard more loudly. Clear cases of both hard and soft party-based Euroscepticism could be found in all candidate states in the late 1990s (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2001: 20; in more detail, Taggart and Szczerbiak 2003).

The real turning point came in the late 1990s when soft party-based Euroscepticism appeared in its strong form in governing right-wing parties, for example, in Hungary: “Soft Euroscepticism [was] taken up by two parties in the governing coalition, [with] FIDESZ [Hungarian Civic Alliance] as the major party and the Smallholders Party as the junior partner. FIDESZ’s leader, premier Viktor Orbán, has increasingly adopted ‘rational interest’ Euroscepticism” (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2001: 18). Even the more consolidated conservative parties have recently taken a populist turn or adopted some Eurosceptic ideas:

By the late 1990s, however, the lack of real debate, and the perception that these countries were kowtowing to an exploitative EU, began to create the opportunities for more populist leaders to arise and succeed, even where populism had earlier been discredited. Thus, in its rightward shift, Viktor Orbán’s FIDESZ in Hungary exploited popular discontent and blamed the EU. Similarly, former Czech prime minister Václav Klaus, once ousted from power, turned to Euro-skepticism as a way to regain popularity, speaking out against the EU’s ‘creeping silent unification of the continent’. In Poland, finally, a fourth of the seats in the fall 2001 elections have been claimed by anti-Union parties. (Grzymala-Busse and Innes 2003: 69)⁵

The emerging ECE parties tried to demobilize civil-society organizations in the early 1990s. Consequently, there has been a sharp contrast between the ECE young democracies and Western developments as regards the participatory revolution from the very beginning. There was a drastic decline in social and political participation in ECE as early as the first mobilization phase of systemic change and the participatory revolution has still not been completed. This contrast between East and West, in terms of the rise and decline of participation in ECE, offers the key to understanding the weaknesses of political representation in ECE. A short summary of these weaknesses is sufficient here, presenting their causes in historical sequence. First, the “missing middle,” with its intermediary organizations and social actors, is the traditional weakness of mesopolitics in ECE. This was reinforced by state socialism and is still one of the most important characteristics of ECE democratization. Second, the new power elites have sought to demobilize the masses and social movements in the party formation process. This lack of

5 Anti-EU tendencies vary from country to country in ECE. The situation is most complicated in Poland: see on the Polish parties’ relationships to the EU membership Słomczyński and Shabad (2003), pp. 509–10.

political organizations for meaningful participation caused a further shock to participation. Third, "over-participation" – that is, the quasi monopolization of the political scene by political parties – has contributed substantially to an alienation from politics and a lack of trust in new democratic institutions, and its effects are long-lasting (see Ullrich and Plasser 2001).

ECE systemic change began with the mobilization of the masses in social movements in order to effect a political breakthrough. However, the parties' demobilization of the masses and construction of a system with themselves as quasi-monopolistic political actors after the democratic transition blocked the possible emergence of a participatory culture. This participation deficit brought about by demobilization, however, provoked a representation crisis. Distortions in democratic representation are not confined to ECE states: they have been noted also in the consolidated democracies, usually in relation to the EU and its institutions. However, it is true that they are more acute in the ECE countries. The distinction between deficit and crisis is, of course, even more important for the new ECE democracies where proper participation and adequate representation are the exception. Therefore, the ensuing representation deficit is necessarily the rule since proper participation is missing and the whole system of representation is still very much under construction. Dissatisfaction and frustration with representative democracy are very high, and relate to both the perception that politicians are ineffectual and a lack of trust in public institutions (obviously the two are closely correlated). This asymmetrical state of affairs is repeated within meso- and micro-politics: as middle-class organizations are the most developed, so the economically advantaged have a "voice," while the disadvantaged have remained politically "silent" and some may at best have only an "exit" option.

Consequently, there has only been semi-convergence with the West so far, producing the external-internal contrast in Europeanization. In addition, there has been a massive transfer of resources to right-wing parties from the West (including from Western church organizations). There has been nothing similar on the Left, although some left-wing political foundations have played an important role in ECE democratization. The massive resource transfer in favor of the Right has been one reason for the asymmetrical situation of civil society organizations, establishing a clear domination of rightist and church-oriented civic associations in meso- and micro-politics. Strangely, the Left is strong "below," among the population at large, and "above," as a well-organized party, but rather weak "in-between," in organized civil society.

New challenges for the ECE Left in the EU

The extended competences of the European Parliament (EP) and the intensified PES–EPP competition in it have led to the genuine transnationalization or Europeanization of elections and to the emergence of real pan-European parties. Compared to how things stood previously, by the 2000s "the EP party system has become more consolidated and more competitive as the powers of the EP have increased." In fact, "the party groups in the EP constitute a highly developed, relatively stable, and reasonably competitive party system. (...) Also, in voting behaviour, the EP parties are highly cohesive and increasingly so" (Hix et al. 2003: 311, 327). As a result, ECE social democracy faces two new challenges in the EU: first, the new social democratic project of "reinventing the state," and second, cooperation with the PES faction in the European Parliament, involving a painful march from politics to policy (-making) in the form of "reinventing the party." The task of reinventing the state concerns both the social construction of democracy and the creation of EU-conforming institutions. These efforts ran into difficulties again in 2003 with the trap of material need emerging anew as the world economic recession caused serious problems in the ECE states, including falling economic growth and increasing state indebtedness. "Reinventing the party" involves a fundamental change from pragmatism to strategy, from abstract-ideological politics to public-policy orientation, including the development of expertise inside the party. This task overlaps with preparations for the EP elections and effective membership of the PES in accordance with the expectations of international social democracy.

The ECE parties are still lagging behind in terms of internal Europeanization, but they have changed a lot in this long decade. Again, there are hard times ahead for the ECE social democratic parties due to the new conflicts generated by EU accession. The problem of EU representation is that the national elites support EU integration more assertively than their populations, constituting one side of the democratic deficit. In ECE, the pro-European leftist parties support EU membership even more than the national elites as a whole. Consequently, they will have to deal with the difficulties and disappointments of EU accession more than the Eurosceptic centre-right parties; at the same time, they can benefit more from EU membership than their competitors. People generally now accept the benefits of EU membership for the country as a whole, but they see hardly any benefits for themselves. Increasing approximation to the European Social Model may bring

ECE populations closer to the social construction of democracy and this represents a major historical opportunity for ECE social democracy. Western social democracy has strongly influenced the development of its ECE sister parties, but they must continue to assist them in their further social democratization and Europeanization. Such further assistance would be in their own interest because in the 2004 EP elections the ECE sister parties' contribution to the PES faction may be decisive. If mutual success is to be achieved, further institutional and policy transfer is needed to the ECE social democratic parties from the West to complete their institutional reforms as regards internal Europeanization.

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