Journal of European Public Policy

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rjpp20

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Published online: 08 Feb 2011.

To cite this article: Milada A. Vachudova (2008) Tempered by the EU? Political parties and party systems before and after accession, Journal of European Public Policy, 15:6, 861-879, DOI: 10.1080/13501760802196614

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13501760802196614

Journal of European Public Policy 15:6 September 2008: 861–879

Tempered by the EU? Political parties and party systems before and after accession

Milada A. Vachudova

ABSTRACT Party systems of European Union (EU) candidate states follow a predictable evolution over time. Before negotiations begin, most major political parties respond to EU leverage by adopting agendas that are consistent with qualifying for membership. Consequently, the party systems – at least for a while – reflect a consensus on the direction of domestic policy-making. Candidate states where regime change in 1989 was followed by illiberal democracy or authoritarianism are the most interesting. For key parties in these states, pushing for EU accession is a marker of profound moderation in their agendas. Yet after EU accession, the parameters for party competition broaden again. The lifting of accession-related constraints is especially apparent among parties that adopt more nationalist and culturally conservative positions. However, preliminary evidence suggests that such parties have made only modest political gains.

KEY WORDS Conditionality; EU enlargement; leverage; party systems; political parties, post-communism.

INTRODUCTION

The study of European Union (EU) conditionality has focused on how the governments of candidate states have changed domestic policies, laws and institutions in order to qualify for EU membership. However, political parties are arguably the most important and most proximate source of domestic policy change – and thus of compliance or non-compliance with EU requirements. Scholars have shown that ruling political parties rarely comply with the EU's external requirements if the costs of compliance are too high and threaten to undermine the domestic sources of their political power. Consequently, it is important to understand how parties construct and change their agendas, especially when they are in opposition and able more easily to recalibrate their appeals.

The purpose of this article is threefold. The first is to explore how parties and party systems in EU candidate states evolve over time. Can we identify a

Journal of European Public Policy
ISSN 1350-1763 print; 1466-4429 online © 2008 Taylor & Francis
http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals
DOI: 10.1080/13501760802196614

common sequence of change? The second is to explore whether and how EU leverage influences the positions of political parties. Has the EU helped to bring about a convergence in favor of liberal democracy and comprehensive economic reform in the party systems of candidate states? The third is to begin exploring how well mechanisms of EU influence on parties are working in conditions that are less auspicious because countries that have already acceded are no longer subject to the EU's membership conditionality (see Epstein and Sedelmeier 2008).

I argue in this article that the party systems of EU candidate states do follow a predictable evolution over time – and this is caused by participation in the EU's pre-accession process. In almost all cases, major political parties respond to EU leverage by adopting agendas that are consistent with EU requirements in the run-up to negotiations for membership. Consequently, the party systems – at least for a while – reflect a consensus on the general course of domestic policy-making. Candidate states where regime change in 1989 was followed by illiberal democracy or authoritarianism are the most interesting. For key parties in these states, pushing for EU accession is a marker of profound moderation in their agendas, including support for democratic standards and economic reform. Yet after EU accession, the parameters for party competition broaden again. The lifting of accession-related constraints is especially apparent among parties that adopt more nationalist and culturally conservative positions.

What does it mean to adopt an EU-compatible agenda? I use the Chapel Hill dataset on the positions of national political parties in 2002 that depicts the structure of political competition in the EU's post-communist member states (I use 'the post-communist candidates,' 'East Central Europe' (ECE) or simply 'the East' as shorthand for these states), and sheds some light on how political parties bundle different issues.[1] The dataset is built on expert surveys and provides the position of each party on European integration, as well as its position on two dimensions of political competition: the left/right economic dimension, and the gal/tan cultural dimension, where 'gal' stands for green/alternative/libertarian and 'tan' for traditional/authoritarian/nationalist.

Based on the content of the requirements for EU membership, we know that the EU expects parties in the East to take positions that tend toward the *right* and toward *gal*. Governments are instructed, for example, to decrease the role of the state in the economy and provide protection for the rights of ethnic minorities. We can see in Figure 1 that support for European integration in the post-communist candidates is highly correlated with party positions that are *right* and *gal*. Indeed, opposition to the EU is concentrated in the *left* and *tan* quadrant – and hard *left* and hard *tan* positions are *never* combined with support for European integration. This is consistent with earlier research that finds that pro-Europeanism in the East is concentrated among parties with *right* and *gal* positions, and anti-Europeanism among *left* and *tan* parties (Beichelt 2004; Kopecký and Mudde 2002; Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2005; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004). This is distinct from the West, where pro-European attitudes are associated with *left* and *gal* party positions and anti-European attitudes with

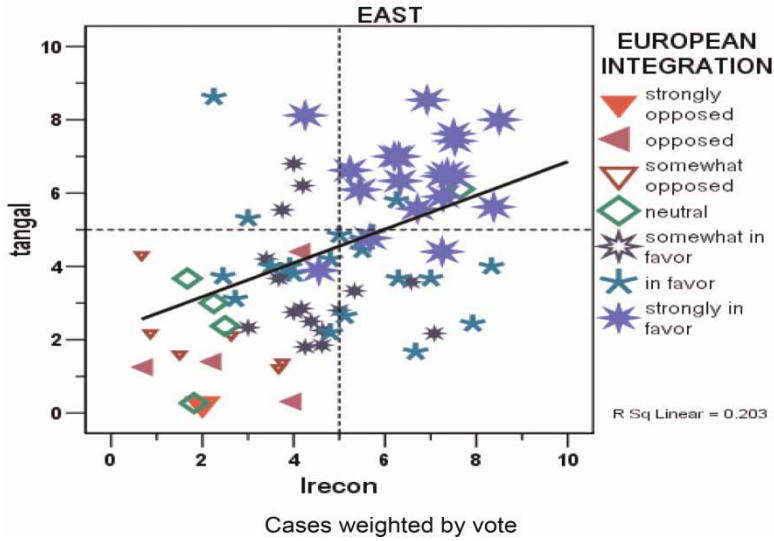

Figure 1 Structure of party competition and support for European integration: nine post-communist EU candidate states, 2002

right and *tan* positions (Marks *et al.* 2006). The main axis of domestic party competition in the East is at a 90 degree angle to that in the West (Evans and Whitefield 1993).

This article is divided into three parts. First, I describe the mechanisms that allow the EU to influence the positions of political parties in candidate states. Second, I trace the changes in party positions in two distinct groups of states – those that embark on a liberal and those that embark on an illiberal political trajectory after 1989. Third, I examine the timing and the sequence of changes in the two groups of states after EU accession, and explore what they mean for party positions in states that have now joined the EU.

MECHANISMS THAT SHAPE PARTY POSITIONS

One of the central challenges for comparative politics and international relations studies is to identify the specific mechanisms that translate international influence into changes in the positions of political parties and the behavior of domestic élites (for an overview, see Sedelmeier 2006). For all EU candidates, three mechanisms that guide and constrain the actions of governments are important. First, straightforward *conditionality* is at play: moving forward in the EU's pre-accession process is tied to adopting laws and implementing reform in different policy areas and also restructuring the state administration (Andonova 2003; Epstein 2008; Grabbe 2006; Hughes *et al.* 2004; Jacoby 2004; Kelley 2004; Pridham 2005; Sissenich 2007; Vachudova 2005). Often, this process creates

external legitimation for domestic preferences, allowing politicians to sell policies that they have long supported (Grabbe 2006). Second, the process itself serves as a *credible commitment* mechanism to ongoing reform, because reversing direction becomes prohibitively costly for any future government. As candidates move forward in the process, governments are thus locked into a predictable course of economic policy-making that serves as an important signal to internal and external economic actors.[2] Meanwhile, moving toward EU membership changes the character and the strength of different *groups in society*, increasing the pressure on the governing political parties to deliver the necessary reforms (Epstein 2008; Vachudova 2005).

The conditionality and the credible commitment mechanisms work mainly on political parties that are in power and therefore have to deliver progress within the framework of the EU's pre-accession process. What positions on European integration did these parties bring with them to office? There is evidence that being in power during the pre-accession process does push parties to take positions that are somewhat more supportive of European integration than would otherwise be predicted by their ideological profile or party family (Vachudova and Hooghe, forthcoming). However, ruling parties with domestic sources of political power that are antithetical to the requirements of EU membership never make a radical shift to bring their domestic policies into compliance with the EU (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005; Schimmelfennig 2007; Vachudova 2005). It follows that parties that govern while the country is making across-the-board progress in satisfying EU requirements must have adopted an EU-compatible agenda prior to taking power.

As I have argued elsewhere, the initial configuration of powerful domestic élites and institutions at the moment of regime change produced strong political competition in some states, and weak political competition in others (Vachudova 2005). In illiberal democracies[3] EU requirements were at loggerheads with the domestic agendas of political parties in power, and progress toward the EU was slow. Conditionality had little success in changing the policies of governing political parties in Slovakia, Bulgaria or Romania (or indeed in Croatia or Serbia) even after the EU's pre-accession process was in place in 1995. By influencing the information and the institutional environment, however, EU leverage helped to create what the illiberal democracies were missing at the moment of transition: a coherent and moderate opposition, and an open and pluralistic political arena.

For the purpose of understanding party systems, the key mechanism is *adapting*: when and why did political parties change their positions on European integration and concurrently on economic and cultural issues? In general, greater support for European integration goes hand in hand with party positions that are culturally more *gal* (green/alternative/libertarian), and economically more *right*. What distinguishes the party systems of the liberal and illiberal pattern states in the early 1990s is whether or not the majority of parties in parliament distanced themselves from hard *left* and hard *tan* positions almost immediately after regime change.

Even in the liberal pattern states, however, where this took place rapidly, we can trace the importance of *adapting* to a pro-Western agenda for opposition and communist successor parties alike. This process began decades before regime change for some opposition groups, and even for some communist parties that were already becoming more technocratic and open to capitalist economic innovations in the 1980s (Bozóki and Ishiyama 2002; Grzymala-Busse 2002). The impetus for oppositions and reforming communists alike was a general turn toward the West, and not a specific reaction to the leverage of the EU, which would not come online until about 1994.

In the illiberal pattern states, political parties with strong *left* and *tan* positions took power after 1989. These were either repackaged communist parties or new, opportunistic nationalist parties. They faced weak, fragmented oppositions that they further undermined by restricting access to the political arena. In this domestic context, EU leverage, in concert with other international actors (Epstein 2005; Gheciu 2005; Grabbe 2006), contributed to changing the nature of political competition by influencing the opposition (Vachudova 2005: 161–80). They offered information to opposition political élites and other domestic actors that were adapting to a political and economic agenda compatible with liberal democracy and comprehensive market reform. Parties designated as mainstream right or left had been neither strong nor unified in these countries after 1989, nor had they necessarily moderate and *gal* positions. Over time, many opposition politicians shifted substantially their position on ethnic minority rights and on economic reform to oppose the illiberal regime, and to make their parties fit the increasingly attractive 'pro-EU space' on the political spectrum. This space was particularly attractive, given the growing and increasingly visible costs of illiberal rule. What motivated individual political élites was in each case a different mixture of political calculation, on the one hand, and a desire to promote the 'European' vocation of their countries, on the other. But in most cases information given in interviews as well as the steady defection of politicians from the illiberal parties suggested that these individuals considered the political prospects of the opposition parties more attractive than the short-term gains of being part of the ruling clique.[4]

The mechanisms of conditionality and credible commitment explain why governments in the candidate states, despite their very different political backgrounds and profiles, do not halt or reverse reform. Indeed, these mechanisms ideally trigger a second wave of adapting as formerly illiberal (or even authoritarian) political parties transform themselves and adopt positions that are consistent with Western liberal democracy and economic reform. For EU leverage to transform the nature of the party system, this second wave of adapting is critical.

Around the time that formal negotiations begin between the EU and a candidate state, the party system tends to have the weakest hard *left* and/or *tan* parties, and the least Euroskepticism. In post-communist countries that are in the membership queue, there are generally no parties that oppose qualifying for EU membership that stand a chance of winning elections or taking part

in a governing coalition. Even today, when the post-communist membership queue is composed of six or seven Western Balkan states, Serbia's party system is the only exception. As we see below, formerly illiberal or authoritarian political parties learn that they can improve their chances of re-election by adapting to the expectations of the EU and other international actors.

CHANGES IN PARTY POSITIONS AND THE CONSENSUS ON EU MEMBERSHIP

Communist rule in the East bundled together *left* and *tan* positions, especially as communist parties increasingly resorted to nationalism to shore up illegitimate regimes (Kitschelt 1992). As the unravelling of the communist system put the transition process in motion, proponents of marketization and liberal democracy converged to the opposite pole. And from the mid-1990s, the prospect of EU membership reinforced this axis as accession required delivering market-oriented economic reforms and upholding liberal democratic standards. Consequently, in the East, hard *left* positions and, more importantly, strong *tan* positions have been bundled with strong Euroskepticism. All Euroskeptic parties (a score between 1 and 3.5) or neutral parties (a score between 3.6 and 4.5) are located in the *left-tan* quadrant. The one exception is the Czech Civic Democratic Party (ODS), which I discuss below.

My purpose in this section is to show how important political parties in ECE changed their positions over time. The process of joining the EU is central to understanding changes in individual party positions as well as broad changes in the structure of political competition. The positioning of political parties on European integration in 2002 is depicted for each country in Figures 2 and 3. If we had data to draw these country tableaux for the early 1990s, we would have found a crowded radical *left-tan* quadrant in countries such as Bulgaria and Romania, as well as more widespread and more radical Euroskepticism. In others, such as Poland or Hungary, we would have observed a less populated *left-tan* quadrant, as well as less Euroskepticism. EU candidate states fit into one of two groups depending on whether they embarked on a liberal or illiberal trajectory of political change immediately after the collapse of communism. (On the impact of communist legacies, see Bunce 1999; Ekiert and Hanson 2003; Ekiert *et al.* 2007 and Orenstein 2001.) An important observable implication of these two trajectories is the timing of a consensus in the party system about the benefits of joining the EU: this consensus occurs earlier in liberal pattern states – and also dissipates earlier, just before accession takes place.

Party systems on a liberal trajectory

In states following a liberal trajectory immediately after the collapse of the communist regime in 1989, a consensus developed very early among mainstream political parties in parliament in favour of liberal democracy and comprehensive

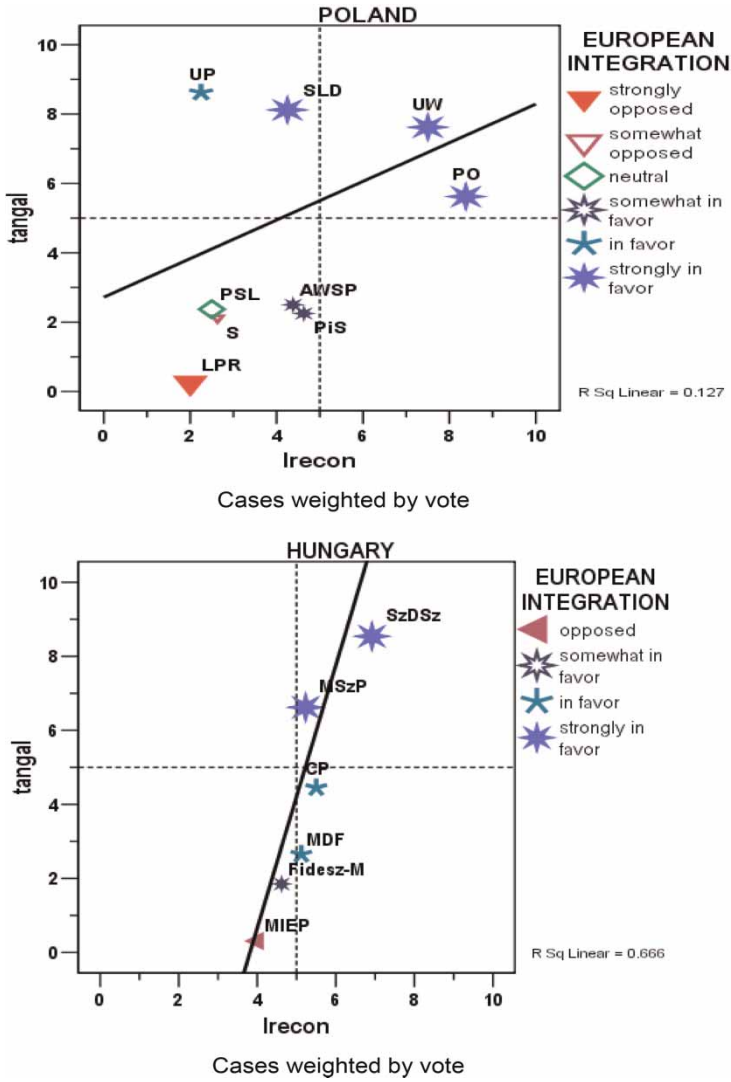

Figure 2 Structure of party competition and support for European integration, 2002. Early trajectory = liberal

economic reform. Joining the EU was rapidly embraced as an integral part of the country's transformation. In this group, including Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia, a strong opposition to communism created movements and political parties that were able to win power at the moment of regime change, and immediately took positions that were *right* and *gal* (or only mildly *left* or *tan*). I only have space in this article to discuss the party systems in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic at any length.

And even among these three there were, of course, some exceptions. The Hungarian Democratic Forum (HDF) won the first democratic elections in Hungary, but its tenure in office from 1990 to 1994 was marked by what the international community considered to be overly *tan* foreign policy positions that were characterized as destabilizing and nationalist. In 1994 EU leverage arguably made its debut when it joined other Western actors to pressure the HDF to moderate its positions related to ethnic Hungarians living in neighbouring states (Vachudova 2005).

The communist party in states on the liberal trajectory exited from power and, in some cases, reformed itself rapidly into a modern European social democratic party, embracing comprehensive market-oriented reforms and EU membership.[5] This was critical because it enabled an early consensus on the direction of political and economic reform. The Polish and Hungarian communist parties best fit the ideal type: they were already reforming themselves in the 1980s in dialogue with a strong opposition and in advance of a negotiated end to communism. Far from being located in the *left-tan* quadrant in the early 1990s, the Polish and Hungarian socialist parties were much closer to the *right-gal* quadrant, and won the second free elections in 1993 and 1994 respectively on a *centrist-gal* platform. On national and cultural issues, both parties were hailed as moderate alternatives to the right-wing post-opposition parties that had ruled before them. On economic issues, the Polish Socialists (SLD) continued Poland's radical economic reforms, while the Hungarian Socialists (MSZP) initiated and implemented Hungary's most radical economic reforms. As Figure 2 shows, by 2002, Hungary's Socialists had become equally centrist on economic policy as Hungary's right-wing parties (see Bozóki and Ishiyama 2002; Grzymala-Busse 2002).

Early reform deprived Euroskepticism of a natural ideological and organizational base in the *left-tan* quadrant. Instead, ex-communist parties made preparing for EU membership a priority. Hence, a *centrist-gal* ex-communist party solidified the consensus in the party system. The Euroskeptic *left-tan* quadrant remained organizationally thinly populated throughout much of the 1990s. In Poland, one mildly *left-tan* party sat in parliament before 1997, the Polish Peasants (PSL). In 1997, two new *tan* parties, the Polish Peasants Self-Defence Party (Samoobrona) and the extremist Catholic-nationalist League of Polish Families (LPR), emerged as strongly Euroskeptic parties. But they were considered 'unusable' as government parties by Poland's mainstream. In Hungary, the extreme-right Justice and Life Party (MIEP) did not jump the 5 percent threshold to enter parliament in 1994 or 2002; it did in 1998, but it was also deemed 'unusable' by Hungary's mainstream parties.

The impact of EU leverage on the positions of political parties during this period thus took three main forms. First, it assisted in the transformation and adapting of the former communist parties: they could sell their technocratic expertise and *gal* positions as an asset in preparing the country for EU membership (Grzymala-Busse and Innes 2003). Second, it limited the choice of coalition partners. A major reason for excluding extremist parties from

government was their hostility towards EU accession – and the EU's hostility toward their hard *tan* and hard *left* positions. Finally, once in government, all parties would be subject to the discipline of the conditionality embedded in the EU's pre-accession process.

The unique case of the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic is a strange case. Although it followed a liberal trajectory of political change – voting out the communist party and voting in an opposition-led government in 1990 – its party system is unique because of the positions of two major parties. The ODS was in 2002 the only party on the right to be openly hostile to the EU, and also the largest Euroskeptic party in the Eastern dataset. It has a score of 3.8 on a 7-point scale, which reflects the party leadership's position.[6] For over 15 years now Klaus has portrayed the EU as a dangerous socialist experiment, and a threat to national identity and sovereignty along the lines of *right-tan* Euroskeptic parties in Western Europe. Meanwhile, the radical *left* and *tan* Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) is the only major communist successor party in ECE that remains unreformed and unrepentant. It has continuously garnered between 10 and 20 percent of the vote in parliamentary elections after 1989.

Thanks to the ODS and the KSČM, the Czech Republic has the highest percentage of voters casting their ballots for Euroskeptic or Euroneutral parties: 43 percent in the national elections in 2002, and 48.2 percent in 2006, and this in a party system without a radical *tan* party. The KSČM and the ODS have together put the Czech Republic's extreme right-wing *tan* party out of business. The KSČM has taken over its xenophobic, chauvinistic and anti-semitic agenda, while the ODS has appealed to more moderate voters who feel threatened by immigrants and ethnic minorities, distrust the EU, and identify with Czech parochialism (Williams 1997; Hanley 2007). In power from 1992 to 1997, and now again since 2006, the ODS's hallmark remains strong right-wing economic rhetoric and *tan* appeals.

Does it make sense to talk about the impact of the EU on party positions in this domestic context? What is striking is that the ODS lost power in 1997 – on the eve of the start of negotiations with the EU – and did not regain power until well after the Czech Republic had entered the EU. Since a majority of Czech voters did support EU membership, the ODS's anti-EU stance likely strengthened the hand of the relatively moderate Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) which governed in various forms from 1998 until 2006. ODS leaders, for their part, did limit their anti-EU activities, stopping short of attempting to scuttle the Czech Republic's accession even when they could have toppled a minority ČSSD government in power from 1998 until 2002. Ultimately the ODS's ideological and instrumental opposition to European integration had to give way to EU conditionality, which draws its power from the tremendous benefits of joining the EU (and the costs of being left outside).

Party systems that shift from an illiberal to a liberal trajectory

Romania, Bulgaria and Slovakia experienced an illiberal trajectory of political change in the early 1990s because ruling political parties did not embrace liberal democracy and comprehensive economic reform for many years. Hard-line communist parties in Romania and Bulgaria that had faced little opposition before 1989 found that the surest way to transform themselves into credible players on the new democratic scene was to exploit left-wing economic populism and ethnic nationalism while rewarding supporters with opportunities to extract resources from a partially reformed economy (Hellman 1998; Gould 2004). The Romanian Party of Social Democracy (PSDR) (now called the Democratic Party (PSD)), and the Bulgarian Socialist Party (KzB or BSP) were not only hard *left* but also hard *tan* well before the end of communism, brutally suppressing ethnic minorities during the 1980s to shore up the legitimacy of the regime. Even as they adopted the formal institutions of democracy and began some economic reforms after 1989, these parties did not adopt EU-compatible domestic policies. In Slovakia the dominant force was not a former communist party but a new nationalist-populist party. Vladimír Mečiar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) ran election campaigns that were a textbook mixture of left-wing economic populism and xenophobic nationalism (Fisher 2006).

The PSDR, the BSP and the HZDS all kept to the economic left, promising to protect workers from radical 'Polish-style' economic reform. They also embraced xenophobic nationalism, out-competing but also befriending the radical *tan* parties that emerged after 1989. These parties, which supported the PSDR and the HZDS in governing coalitions in Romania (1994–1996) and Slovakia (1994–1998), respectively, blended nostalgia for fascism's national triumphalism with nostalgia for communism's economic security and closed polity.

Illiberal rule had major implications for party positioning on European integration. In the early reforming countries *left-tan* parties were marginalized, but here parties used radical *left-tan* appeals – defence of the nation from its enemies and defence of the citizen from unfettered capitalism – to win elections and concentrate political power. This delayed the effect of EU leverage. In their quest to hold power and divide up its spoils, these parties and their *left-tan* allies implemented policies that were inimical to progress towards EU membership.

As a consequence, EU leverage was confined to working slowly and indirectly by censuring governments and buttressing domestic opposition. By the second half of the 1990s, EU leverage gained enough momentum to impact domestic political change. As a variety of opposition parties campaigned against the *left-tan* policies of the governing parties, qualifying to join the EU became a common plank of their electoral platforms. Meanwhile, the EU became bolder in its assessments and criticisms of the candidates, and also in its threats to postpone negotiations indefinitely. Slovakia received the most explicit threat, when the EU made it known during the 1998 election campaign that a government under HZDS control would not be invited to the negotiation table.

Once countries became enmeshed in the EU's pre-accession process, the costs of backsliding became prohibitive. Formerly anti-EU parties learned, however, that they could adapt their agenda to the expectations of the EU and other international actors – and, in some cases, get back very quickly in the political game. The most dramatic turnarounds so far have been by the PSD in Romania and the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). Though Croatia was not part of our survey, it is an additional EU candidate that has, more recently, shifted from an illiberal to a liberal trajectory. While in opposition, both the PSD and the HDZ shed their extreme nationalist rhetoric and adopted a modernizing program based on economic reform and a more efficient state.

International party links have also played a role. For the PSD and the BSP acceptance by the Socialist International and the Party of Socialists (in the European Parliament) was an important additional external incentive from programmatic change (Petrova 2006). Upon winning re-election in 2000 and 2004, respectively, the PSD and the HDZ continued to satisfy EU requirements – and on some measures did a better job than their 'reformist' predecessors. In 2005 the BSP in Bulgaria was also re-elected after years of gradually shifting toward the agenda of a mainstream European socialist party. All three parties were returned to power while their country was still qualifying for EU membership, and made progress toward membership a priority of their government. Ironically, as part of the EU's process, the PSD, the HDZ and now the BSP governments have had to tackle endemic corruption in the economy and in state institutions that their party comrades helped to create.

Shut out of power from 1998 to 2006 while Slovakia implemented reforms that allowed it to join the EU in 2004, the HZDS has taken a different course. The EU made the tradeoff faced by the Slovak voter at the 2002 elections abundantly clear: re-elect Mečiar, and Slovakia will not be invited to become an EU member at the Copenhagen European Council summit in December 2002. The HZDS was increasingly frantic to gain some international respectability. The party program declared 'its irreversible decision to support Slovakia's integration into the EU with all of its might;' but the party's transformation appeared limited to these kinds of declarations (Bilčík 2002: 25). The HZDS entered government again in 2006 with other *left-tan* parties. Since Slovakia had already joined the EU, the constraints on its behaviour in government would be much looser, and its transformation quite different, from that of the PSD, the HZD or the BSP.

AS ACCESSION DRAWS NEAR

Before accession, a strong consensus developed in the party systems of the two groups of states about the course of domestic reform and EU membership, but at different times. In 1995, there were no parties embracing radical *left*, radical *tan*, or Euroskeptic platforms in government or even in parliament in Poland or

Hungary, while *all* parties in the coalition governments of Romania, Bulgaria and Slovakia fit these labels in deeds and rhetoric.

Yet when we look at Figure 3 depicting the party landscape in Romania, Bulgaria and Slovakia in 2002, we see that things had changed dramatically. EU leverage has pulled all parties away from radical *left* and *tan* positions, including Romania and Bulgaria's big late reforming ex-communist parties and Slovakia's HZDS. Romania's former communist party, now the PSD, has shed much of its *tan* political agenda. It is following the Polish and Hungarian socialist parties in hailing its technocratic skills and joining the Socialist International. After winning the 2000 elections, it pragmatically pursued the reforms necessary for EU membership. Similarly, the Bulgarian Socialist Party shed much of its radical *left* and *tan* agenda in preparation for the 2005 elections, which it won. Finally, the HZDS, after being defeated in 1998, gradually became more moderate and begged to be trusted as a party that could bring Slovakia into the EU, though the Slovak voters (and the EU) were in no mood to give it a chance in 2002. Instead, Slovak voters elected a *right-gal* government that continued with sweeping *right-gal* social and economic reforms.

In contrast, important shifts in the party landscape in Hungary and in Poland by 2002 had recalibrated the mainstream right as parties took advantage of new opportunities to oppose European integration, to take stronger *left* and especially *tan* positions, and to consider coalition partners that had previously been unacceptable. The strengthening of *tan* parties such as Samoobrona, LPR, and MIEP also signaled that these party systems were about to turn more critical toward the EU.

In Hungary, Fidesz vacated the *right-gal* quadrant, which had become crowded since the Socialists (MSZP) had moved into the centre, and adopted *tan* appeals. Under the leadership of Viktor Orban, it had by 2002 become the hegemon on the mainstream right. In the process, it appropriated the nationalist rhetoric of the radical-*tan* MIEP and took positions that appeared to the left of the MSZP on matters of economic reform.[7] As it adjusted its ideological profile, Fidesz also updated its European partners. In 2000, Fidesz left the pro-European, predominantly *gal* Liberal International and joined the more conservative European People's Party, where it is closest to Forza Italia and the German Conservative CSU (Enyedi 2005). While Fidesz is not Euroskeptic, it protests EU encroachments on national sovereignty and culture in strident terms unlike its socialist competitor.

In Poland, a new party, the Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS), successfully organized disparate *tan* fractions and won the national elections in 2005. Its coalition government included two *left-tan* parties, Samoobrona and the extremist LPR. This government was strongly *tan*, taking nationalist, traditionalist, and populist positions while strongly criticizing European integration. It was also strongly *left*, advocating state aid for disadvantaged groups and trumpeting its mistrust of economic liberalism.

Over time, we can detect a similar sequence in how these party systems have evolved. By adopting a market-oriented, non-nationalist and pro-European

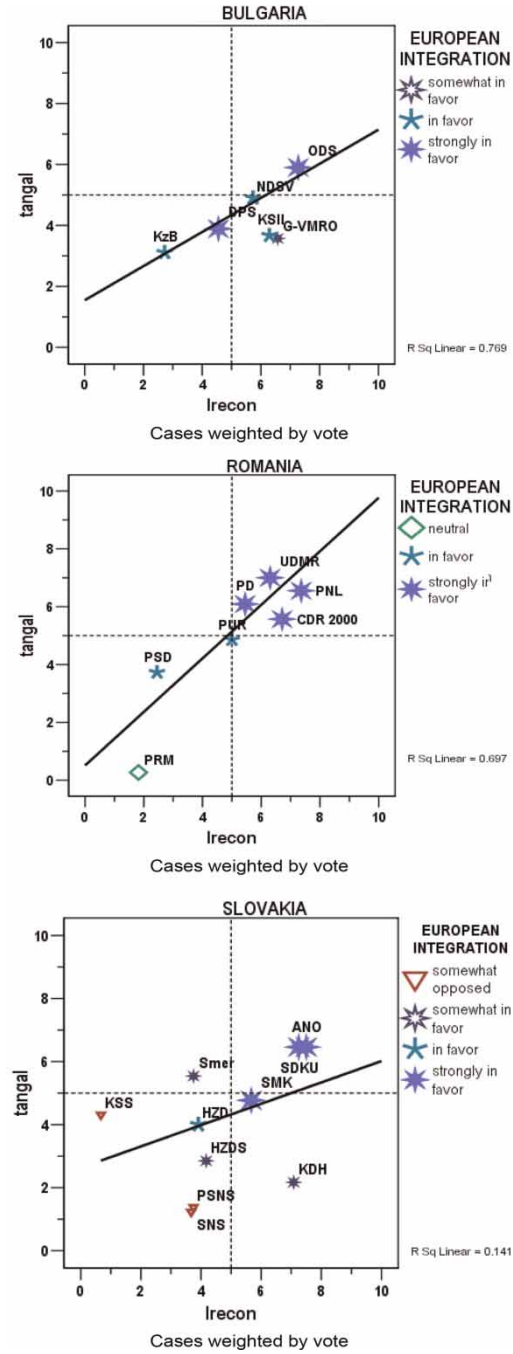

Figure 3 Structure of party competition and support for European integration, 2002. Early trajectory = illiberal

political agenda immediately after 1989, the opposition parties and the reforming communist party created a consensus on the direction of domestic policy-making. A communist party that reformed rapidly brought along a large portion of the traditionalist electorate that might otherwise have voted for radical *left-tan* parties.

As accession approached, however, other parties had emerged in the *left-tan* quadrant vacated by the reforming communist party. These parties took up, among other issues, Euroskepticism. The most dynamic new parties in this quadrant tended to be more *tan* than *left*, making few if any connections to the country's communist past. At the same time, conservative mainstream parties took more critical positions on Europe while also adopting more strongly *tan* positions. They were prone to appropriating some of the nationalist discourse of radical *tan* parties in the *left-tan* quadrant, or inviting them to support their government (Hanley 2004; Pop-Eleches 2004). Hungary's Fidesz, the Polish PiS, and the Czech ODS all used the nationalist discourse of radical *tan* parties. And the Polish PiS came into power in 2005 with the support of two *left-tan* parties, Samoobrona and the radical LPR. There is also speculation that Hungary's Fidesz would consider a coalition with the radical *tan* MIEP in the future.

The transformation was so great that, by 2002, more citizens were actually voting for Euroskeptic and Euroneutral parties in Poland and Hungary than in Romania and Bulgaria. Polish parties that fit these categories received 27.1 percent of the vote, and Hungarian parties 4.4 percent (this does not include 35 percent for Fidesz, which, with a score of 4.6 on the scale, fell just outside the range of Euroskeptic-Euroneutral parties in 2002). In contrast, Romanian parties received 19.5 percent and Bulgarian parties zero. In the *left-tan* quadrant, Romania's premier radical *tan* party, the Greater Romania Party (PRM) of Vadim Tudor, persevered with a hard *tan* agenda, although it had tempered its position on the EU considerably. In Bulgaria, the *left-tan* quadrant was emptied of parliamentary parties as the Bulgarian Socialist Party gradually shifted its agenda after 1997.

Using the earlier reformers as a guide, one would expect EU leverage to weaken on Bulgaria and Romania as accession nears. Indeed, during the elections of 2005, a new nationalist, anti-European party emerged in Bulgaria's hard *left-tan* political space. Named 'Attack,' this new Bulgarian party received 8.2 percent of the vote. Meanwhile, in Slovakia the election results of 2006 were very different from those in 2002: the populist *left-tan* SMER party of Robert Fico formed a government that includes the radical *tan* SNP, which had received 12 percent of the vote, as well as the *left-tan* HZDS. SMER, a social democratic party, has been suspended from the Socialist International for forming a coalition with the xenophobic and chauvinistic Slovak National Party (SNS).

Once more time has passed, however, scholars may be able to detect new trends and study new causal mechanisms that link EU membership with party positions. Even after EU membership is attained, European integration

may temper the attraction of voters to *left-tan* parties through a different set of mechanisms, such as changing the preferences of important groups in society. Poland's early elections in 2007 provide some potential evidence because of the domestic backlash against the *left-tan* PiS government. This backlash may have been partly triggered by the PiS government's terrible relations with EU institutions and member governments, and their perceived costs for Poland. As the strongest party in parliament Polish voters replaced the PiS with the more *right* and also more *gal* centrist party, the Civic Platform. Moreover, the *left-tan* parties with the most radical positions and with the strongest Euroskepticism were resoundingly defeated: Samoobrana received 1.5 percent and the LPR 1.3 percent of the vote, well below the 5 percent threshold to enter parliament. Meanwhile, the 2006 elections in Hungary brought a surprising defeat to the *tan* Fidesz – and a surprising victory to the *gal* Hungarian Socialist Party, which became the first party to win two consecutive elections in Hungary since the regime change of 1989.

The preliminary data from the 2006 Chapel Hill dataset on party positions on European integration support a tentative conclusion that party systems have not turned more markedly *tan* or even Euroskeptic after accession. In 2002 there were nine parties that were opposed, somewhat opposed or strongly opposed to European integration – and in 2006 there were also nine such parties. We see a decrease in the number of parties in the *left-tan* quadrant from 25 in 2002 to 19 in 2006. This suggests that neither opposition to European integration nor strong *tan* appeals are considered resoundingly better political strategies after accession. However, we do see a decrease in the number of parties that *strongly* favor European integration from 19 to 15. And the number of parties in the *right-gal* quadrant has decreased from 17 to 13 as more parties move into the *left-gal* quadrant. The end of conditionality may have given parties more freedom in choosing their positions on economic and social issues. This kind of analysis, however, cannot tell us about the relative importance of parties with different positions in domestic politics.

CONCLUSION

The prospect of opening negotiations with the EU for membership creates incentives for political parties to make their agenda EU-compatible – and this means compatible with satisfying the EU's extensive domestic requirements. Major political parties shift toward more *right* and more *gal* positions, such as decreasing the state's role in the economy and protecting ethnic minority rights. As a result, I have argued that most party systems reflect a consensus on the benefits of European integration and, of necessity, on the priorities for domestic policy-making. For some states the EU's impact on party positions has arguably been decisive in pulling them from an illiberal to a liberal democratic trajectory.

After EU accession has become a certainty for the ECE candidates, EU conditionality has diminished and the importance of hard *left* and especially

hard *tan* parties has increased. Governments in Poland and Slovakia have taken strong *tan* positions – and invited extreme *tan* parties to join their governing coalitions. However, in Poland this contributed to a domestic backlash that brought down the government in early elections. Moreover, preliminary data on party positions in 2006 show no increase in the number of parties opposed to European integration, and a decrease in the number of parties situated in the *left-tan* quadrant. Further research is needed to explore how EU membership may have activated different mechanisms – 'beyond conditionality' – that are contributing to this relative moderation in politics after accession.

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APPENDIX

Position on European integration	Mean expert score along 7-point scale ranging from strongly opposed to European integration (1) to strongly in favor of European integration (7). Question: 'How would you describe the **general position on European integration** that the party's leadership has taken over the **course of 2002?**' *Source*: Chapel Hill dataset
Left/right position	Mean expert score on 11-point scale ranging from extreme left (0) to extreme right (10). Question: 'Political scientists often classify parties in terms of their ideological stance on **economic issues**. Parties to the **right** emphasize a reduced economic role for government. They want privatization, lower taxes, less regulation, reduced government spending, and a leaner welfare state. Parties to the **left** want government to play an active role in the economy. Using these criteria, indicate where parties are located in terms of their **economic ideology**.' *Source*: Chapel Hill dataset.

(*Table continued*)

Appendix Continued

Gal/tan position	Mean expert score on 11-point scale ranging from libertarian/postmaterialist (0) to traditional/authoritarian (10). This score is reversed in our analysis. Question: 'Parties may also be classified in terms of their views on **democratic freedoms and rights. "Libertarian" or "post-materialist"** parties favor expanded personal freedoms; for example, access to abortion, doctor-assisted suicide, same-sex marriages, and greater democratic participation. **"Traditional" or "authoritarian"** parties often reject these ideas; they value order and stability, and believe that the government should be a firm moral authority. Where are parties located in terms of their **ideological views on freedoms and rights?"** *Source*: Chapel Hill dataset.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My grateful thanks go to Liesbet Hooghe for creating the graphs used in this article, and to Ulrich Sedelmeier and Rachel Epstein for their very helpful comments. I also warmly thank the rest of the team of scholars at UNC Chapel Hill who have worked recently on the Chapel Hill dataset: Ryan Bakker, Anna Brigevich, Catherine De Vries, Erica Edwards, Gary Marks, Moira Nelson, Jan Rovny, and Marco Steenbergen.

NOTES

1 Dataset and codebook are available at http://www.unc.edu/~hooghe.
2 Interviews with officials from post-communist candidate countries, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2004 and 2005.
3 By liberal democracy I mean a political system in which state institutions and democratically elected rulers respect juridical limits on their powers and political liberties. They uphold the rule of law, a separation of powers, and boundaries between the state and the economy.
4 Interviews with former opposition members in Bratislava, Zagreb, Belgrade and Sarajevo, 2004 and 2005. On the evolution of the Slovak and Croatian opposition, see Fisher (2006).
5 In Lithuania and Latvia, the communist party was outlawed at independence in 1991.
6 There is a divide between the party leadership, which denigrates the EU regularly and champions pairing it down to a free trade zone, and the rank and file, who are in favor of EU membership but have reservations about a federal EU. The ODS has one of the highest scores on internal dissent in the dataset. On why the Czech party system has developed this way, see Hanley (2007).
7 On the challenges of categorizing parties on the economic left–right spectrum, see Vachudova, forthcoming.

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