The Bulgarian Socialist Party: The long road to Europe

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Abstract

The article provides an analysis of the evolution of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) from a Marxist party in the late 1980s into a European socialist party by the early 2000s. The BSP dominance of the political process in Bulgaria during the early and mid-1990s can be attributed, this article argues, to several factors: the nature of the old regime, the absence of any meaningful opposition before 1989 and its relative weakness during the transition period, the crucial role that the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) played in the transition to democracy, and the organizational continuity that the newly renamed BSP chose to maintain. In turn, the preserved dominance of the BSP allowed it to remain relatively unreformed in terms of economic and foreign policy positions. It was only after its devastating defeat in the 1997 elections that the BSP came to advocate a truly social-democratic platform and to support a pro-EU and pro-NATO foreign policy. This ideological transformation of the BSP was supported and encouraged actively by the Party of European Socialists, which has been deeply involved in the process of strengthening the social democracy in Bulgaria since the mid-1990s. As a result of this transformation, by 2008 the BSP is recognized as a democratic, center-left party.

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Keywords: Bulgarian Socialist Party; Transition to democracy in Bulgaria; Bulgarian politics; Bulgarian parties; PES
Bulgarian politics and policy-making since 1989 have been influenced greatly by the “successor” party to the Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP) — the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP). Unlike in most other countries of the region, the BSP won the first democratic elections in Bulgaria in June 1990. After a narrow defeat in 1991, it won elections again in 1994 and it was not until 1997, when it became highly discredited as a governing party, that it went through a major crisis of legitimacy. However, by the 2005 elections the BSP was once again the most popular political party in Bulgaria (see Table 1 for elections results). Although the BSP was officially in government only during 1990–1991, 1994–1997, and after the June 2005 elections, it was a crucial supporter of the Berov government during 1993–1994 and briefly participated in the 2001 Sax-Coburg-Gotha government. Thus, the party has had a substantial imprint not only on Bulgarian party politics, but also on the government policies and reform efforts.

The BSP dominance of the political processes in Bulgaria during the early and mid-1990s can be attributed to several factors: the nature of the old regime, the absence of any meaningful opposition before 1989 and its relative weakness during the transition period, the crucial role that the BKP played in the transition to democracy, and the organizational continuity that the newly renamed BSP chose to maintain. In turn, the preserved dominance of the BSP allowed it to remain relatively unreformed in terms of economic and foreign policy positions. It continued to have reservations about market reforms and EU and NATO membership for most of the 1990s. It was only after its devastating defeat in the 1997 elections and the reforms that followed that the BSP came to advocate a truly social-democratic platform and to support a pro-EU and pro-NATO foreign policy. This ideological transformation of the BSP was supported and encouraged actively by the Party of European Socialists, which has been deeply involved in the process of strengthening the social democracy in Bulgaria since the mid-1990s. As a result of this transformation, by

Table 1
Bulgarian Election Results, 1990–2005

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<td>Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and Electoral Alliance</td>
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<td>Union of Democratic Forces (SDS) and Alliance (ODS)</td>
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<td>8.0</td>
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<td>Movement for Rights &amp; Freedoms (DPS)/as ONS in 1997</td>
<td>6.0</td>
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<td>Bulgarian Business Block (BBB)</td>
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<td>Popular Union (NS) of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BZNS) and the Democratic Party (DP)</td>
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<td>Bulgarian Euroleft (BEL)</td>
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The Table includes only parties that have been represented in Parliament on at least one occasion. Source: Richard Rose, Neil Munro, Elections and Parties in New European Democracies. Available from http://www.abdn.ac.uk/cspp/last (accessed March 13, 2008).
2008 the BSP became recognized as a democratic, center-left party. It was granted full membership in the Socialist International (SI) in 2003 and in the Party of European Socialists (PES) in 2005.

The BKP/BSP and the Bulgarian transition to democracy

The Communist Party regime in Bulgaria was the most loyal to the Soviet Union among the countries of Eastern Europe. Much of the Bulgarian political system was shaped after the Soviet one, and the country never experienced any attempts to create a “national” communist regime, or to challenge the communist party dogma in any major way. In Kitschelt’s (1995) classification, the Bulgarian Communist regime was “patrimonial” implying that power was concentrated in the hands of a small elite which used repression and clientelist co-optation to thwart any opposition to the regime. As a result, at the time of transition, opposition to the ruling party in such regimes remained weak and the regime enjoyed the support of a wide spectrum of the population (Kitschelt et al., 1999, pp. 23–24).

In Bulgaria, political dissent was indeed very limited. By 1946–1947, the Bulgarian Communist Party had begun to crush all opposition to its rule using show trials and other extra-legal means. Political opponents belonging to other parties, including those that had been originally sympathetic to the BKP and had participated in the Fatherland Front (OF) against the “fascist” regime, were sent to labor camps and other detention facilities (Petrova, 2004, p. 163). Dissidents within the party were also tried and sent to prison. Political repression eased with the end of the Stalinist era, but the challenges to the regime until the late 1980s were either internal power struggles against Todor Zhivkov (who assumed leadership of the party in 1956 and remained so through the 1980s) or very limited pro-democracy individual activities. The position of the BKP remained solid and dominant well into the 1980s. Neither the events in Hungary in 1956 nor the Prague Spring had any significant impact on the regime’s stability.

The stability of the Bulgarian regime can be attributed to several other features besides the political repression of its opposition. The historic links between Bulgaria and Russia dating back to the 1878 liberation from Ottoman rule made the close links with the Soviet Union a “natural” and accepted development. Especially during the 1970s, the regime was able to provide the Bulgarian people with extensive social benefits that eased tensions in society and thwarted further opposition. However, these programs were expensive and did not match the economic development of the country; this became clear as the 1980s advanced.

It was the closeness to the Soviet Union that in many ways proved detrimental to the country in the mid-1980s. By then it had become clear that the country was undergoing an economic and social crisis — food and energy shortages were paralleled by rising ethnic tensions. The domestic legitimacy of the regime declined sharply; this was aided by the fact that by then the political idealism of the BKP membership had been replaced by complacency, careerism, and opportunism (Delev et al., 2006). As a result, its support was assured as long as the economic situation in the country remained stable. Until then, it had been the USSR that had provided
economic assistance in situations like this. After 1985, however, Moscow refused to bail out Zhivkov’s regime, and instead pushed for political reform in Bulgaria (Kalinova and Baeva, 2000, p. 130).

Zhivkov’s efforts to reform the economic and political system in the country started at the July session of the BKP in 1987. The “July Concept” in fact offered deeper and broader reforms than those in the USSR as they were to prepare the country for a “limited political and economic pluralism” (Kalinova and Baeva, 2000, p. 138). Reforms of the economy, administration and local government started almost immediately, although they were seen by some as yet another attempt of Zhivkov to stay in power. The reforms, however, not only contributed to the further strain in the relations between Sofia and Moscow, but by mid-1989 could no longer be sustained in their present form because of rising political pressure from within the country.

It was the Turkish minority in Bulgaria rather than pro-democracy groups that posed the biggest challenge to the Communist party regime in 1989. For decades the Bulgarian Communists had carried out assimilation campaigns against the Turkish minority in Bulgaria, culminating in the forced changing of their names and surnames to Bulgarian equivalents in the summer of 1985. Four years later, the Turkish minority, organized by the clandestine Turkish National Liberation Movement in Bulgaria, staged public protests. As some of these were put down violently, they led to international outrage and domestic criticism. Even ethnic Bulgarian intelligentsia, which had been quiet until then, began to call for the respect of minority rights in the country (Kalinova and Baeva, 2000, p. 148; Eminov, 1997). The Bulgarian government responded by allowing the Turkish minority to leave the country and move to Turkey. In fact, this was a forced migration rather than a real choice and by mid-1989 about half a million Bulgarian citizens left the country for Turkey. This led to a major crisis in the Bulgarian economy and society and added to the already brewing pressure for reform.

By 1989, the regime had little challenge from the nascent opposition groups. Although some had begun to emerge in 1988, they were still poorly organized and without coherent programs. The most prominent among them were the environmental group “Ekoglasnost” and the “Club in Support of Glasnost and Perestroika in Bulgaria”. They gained some visibility during the summer and fall of 1989, but the pressure for reform that they exercised was relatively insignificant.

Some extra pressure for reform came from the Bulgarian intelligentsia, but is was also of quite limited nature — both in terms of its demands and its strength. In the spring of 1989 the professional organizations of the Bulgarian writers, journalists, and actors used their annual conferences as an opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with the developments in the country. According to them, those were falling short even of the perestroika and glasnost reforms in the USSR (Kalinova and Baeva 2000, p. 146).

Despite the limited nature of these protests taken individually, when added together, they began to put some pressure on the BKP to change. In response, reformers within the BKP engineered the resignation of its General Secretary, Todor Zhivkov, on November 10, 1989, in what Linz and Stepan would call an internal
coup within the Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP) (Linz and Stepan, 1997, pp. 338–339). At this point, Petar Mladenov assumed his position, while a couple of months later, the top positions were distributed among the reformers: Petar Mladenov remained in the position of Head of State, while Alexander Lilov became chairman of the party and Andrey Lukanov – Prime Minister of the country. The “reformers” in the party called for the rehabilitation of political prisoners and blamed Zhivkov for the economic, financial and political crisis in the country. Thus, while they seemed willing to allow the opening up of the system much in the manner of Gorbachev’s glasnost and perestroika, they did not appear to offer any serious promise of democratization. They were prepared to liberalize the political and economic systems of the existing Communist regime, but they were not ready to question the leading role of the BKP or the socialist economic principles (Linz and Stepan, 1997, pp. 338–340). Consequently, radical change of the sort already underway in Poland and Czechoslovakia seemed unlikely.

However, developments in the country took on a momentum of their own and soon, democratization seemed unavoidable (Spirova and Derleth, 2007). Historic parties that had been banned in the mid-1940s, such as the Democratic Party and the Social Democratic Party, re-emerged and new political groups were created. The Union of Democratic Forces (SDS), formed on December 7, 1989, united most opposition groups under an umbrella organization (Kumanov and Nikolova, 1999, p. 157). On December 14, 1989, the BKP leadership introduced an amendment to the Bulgarian constitution that removed the provision about the leading role of the party in the country, thus effectively ending its guaranteed monopoly on power, at least formally.

Round Table Talks (RTT) between the BKP and the opposition were held from January until May 1990 to establish the basic rules of the transition to multiparty elections. The BKP and the SDS were the main negotiation partners, which legitimized the SDS and secured the continuing role of the BSP in the democratic transition. The most important decisions of the RTT were to introduce constitutional amendments guaranteeing human rights, to end the presence of the BKP organizations in the workplace, and to de-politicize the army, police, judiciary, and the diplomatic core (Kalinova and Baeva, 2000, p. 155). They also set the stage for the first democratic elections. The Communist party was in a dominant position at the talks which secured it some favorable decisions such as using a mixed electoral system for the elections and holding them relatively quickly. Despite protests by the SDS that both of these disadvantaged the newly formed opposition, the elections proceeded in June 1990.

At the same time, the BKP itself was undergoing change. Unlike other successor parties in the region, such as the Hungarian Socialists, the BKP did not formerly disband, but simply changed its name and the membership documents of its members. In March 1990, the BKP asked its members to demonstrate their affiliation with the party by participating in a referendum on the party’s name. With the agreement of 86% of those who participated, the party decided to replace “Communist” with “Socialist” in its name (Baeva, 2001, p. 245). The referendum also provided evidence for the sharp decline in the membership of the party. From
November 1989 to April 1990 the party had lost more than a quarter of its members. With 726,000 (73% of the 1989 membership) members, however, the BSP remained an extremely powerful political organization. The “new” Bulgarian Socialist Party was registered in April 1990 (Kumanov and Nikolova, 1999, p. 122).

The decision to preserve organizational continuity with the old BKP allowed the BSP to have an organizational edge over the new parties in the political system. For the following decades, it would benefit from the organizational structures in place over the whole country. By 2003, similarly to other successor parties in the region, it remained the best-organized party in the Bulgaria. While the organizational development of the party is beyond the scope of this article, suffice it to say that even after its defeat in 1997 and 2001, the BSP maintained a membership that exceeded that of all other parties in parliament put together, preserved organizational presence in all 280 municipalities of the country, and had a highly encapsulated electorate (Spirova, 2005, pp. 606–608). In addition, it inherited the enormous property of the BKP and even after giving up a large portion of it, still remained clearly the best provided for party in the country.

The BSP until 1997: the Big Pretender

As a result of its dominance in the political process in the country and the conservatism of its membership, the BSP was not forced to re-invent itself as a European social democratic party in the early 1990s. Although it started calling itself a social democratic Party as soon as it changed its name, its platform continued to have strong anti-reform elements while its foreign policy position remained highly ambivalent towards the EU and NATO.

In several of his studies of “successor parties” in post-Communist Europe Ishiyama has classified the BSP of the mid-1990s as “ideologically incoherent” (1999, p 97); “partly reformed” (Ishiyama and Bozoki, 2001, p. 39); and as following “leftist-rereat” strategies (Ishiyama, 2006, p. 24). Ishiyama bases this classification on a content analysis of the program of the BSP in which several anti-reform and pro-reform terms are used to produce a composite index of the pro-reform orientation of the party. On a scale of 0 (anti-reform) to 1 (pro-reform) the BSP scored 0.51, putting it right in the middle of the scale. For comparison, the Hungarian Socialist Party scored 0.86 and the Polish successor party scored 0.82. In the lower end, the Russian Communist Party scored 0.23. What this score indicated was that the program of the BSP at this point contained more positive references to terms such as “socialist,” “socialism,” “controlled economy”, “state control” and “nationalization” than positive reference to certain pro-reform terms such as “democratic socialism,” “market”, “capitalism”, “private property” and “privatization” (Ishiyama and Bozoki, 2001, p. 38).

In addition, Ishiyama’s study also produced an index that measured the extent to which the party “made reference to national and patriotic values” as compared to “humanistic” references that would include references to European values, human rights, and international cooperation (Ishiyama and Bozoki, 2001, p. 38). Again measured on a scale of 0–1, the BSP scored 0.64, putting it among the successor
parties more concerned with national—patriotic values than humanistic ones (see later section).

These characterizations reflect other, less sophisticated readings of BSP’s program and positions during that period (Derleth, 2000, p. 162; Murer, 1995, p. 213; Murer, 2002, p. 392; Kumanov and Nikolova, 1999, p. 123). In fact, just a brief quote from the opening chapter of the BSP program in 1995 provides a clear indication of its spirit:

The Bulgarian Socialist Party is committed to the creation of a peaceful, free, democratic and of social justice society in Bulgaria, where the rights, the welfare and a new higher quality of life for all Bulgarian citizens will be guaranteed. This is our socialist understanding of the society which is supposed to appear as result of the undergoing political, economic, social and other reforms in our country (BSP, 1995, p. 11).

The program also directly reflected the ambivalent foreign policy positions of the BSP. While Bulgaria needed to integrate with Europe, it also needed to maintain and develop “relations of priority with Russia and other states of the CIS”, while NATO membership, according to the program, should be decided by a referendum (BSP, 1995, pp. 70–71). However, the party openly came out against NATO membership for Bulgaria on numerous occasions.

An analysis of the BSP 1991 election platform reveals very similar trends. The dominant themes of the document are strong etatism, including state intervention in the economy through price controls, setting levels of permitted unemployment, regulation of the labor and housing market; moderate nationalism; open rejection of the restitution of private property to its pre-1944 owners; and maintenance of special relations with the USSR while also pursuing association with Europe (Mitev, 1995, pp. 107–109).

These visions also clearly corresponded to the supporters of the BSP at this time. A study of the support base of the BSP in 1994 demonstrates that the typical supporter of the BSP in 1994 opposed the free market ideas, held anti-Western foreign policy positions, was older, and lived outside the capital (Spirova, 2002). Contrary to popular arguments, the study found no support for the idea that the BSP was attracting the support of only those hurt socially and economically from the transition, at least not at this point. In fact, it seemed that the BSP had a base of an ideologically coherent electorate that believed in its professed principles, and might even have been more “retreatist” than the official BSP position (Spirova, 2002).

The policies of the 1995–1996 Videnov government also reflected similar ideas. Its goal was to create a “mixed” economic system: private property and free enterprise combined with substantial state involvement. A key facet of this system was the development of a “social market economy” to maintain the extensive and expensive, but popular, social welfare system of the old regime. Privatization proceeded slowly. Although the 1991 Privatization Law provided the legal framework for the transition of state companies to private ownership, many large and unprofitable companies were not privatized. Fearing increased unemployment, the government was reluctant to close loss-making state-owned companies. This situation was worsened by the fact that
most firms lacked the money to service their debts. The bad debts of state companies piled up in 1995–1996 and in 1996 this situation brought the banking system to the point of collapse. With two-thirds of the banks insolvent, bank failures led to the extreme devaluation of the national currency, the Lev. In the second half of 1996, the Lev lost more than 600% of its value. Although international financial organizations made loans conditional on closing these companies, the government moved slowly. Of the 64 state-owned companies the government promised to close in 1996, only five were actually closed (Spirova and Derleth, 2007).

The economic crisis of 1996 led to mass protests in the winter of 1996–1997 and the end of the BSP government. The Cabinet resigned and after some deliberation an interim government was elected and early elections were called. Won decisively by the opposition, the June 1997 elections proved to be a breaking point for the BSP. They provided the evidence that the support base for the BSP of the early 1990s had declined drastically and the party was in a state of deep crisis.

Electorally, during the 1990–1997 period, the BSP had been trying to establish itself as a legitimate party representing the democratic left in Bulgaria. One of the ways to do so was to form electoral alliances with other parties; in fact the only time it has contested elections on its own was in 1990. In 1991, the BSP formed a pre-election alliance with nine small parties. None of these nine parties were serious competitors — the most popular of the alliance partners — the Fatherland Party of Labor (OPT) — had gotten 0.6% of the vote at the previous elections, and none of them seemed to present a potential for the future. In hindsight, it would seem that the choice of an alliance strategy in this case was “hastily done” (Krusteva, 2003). The official motivation, according to then BSP Chairman Lilov, was the “unity of goals” of the alliance partners, namely “to protect democracy and civil peace” (Engelbrekt, 1991). The alliance certainly did not bring any electoral advantages to the BSP in terms of direct electoral support contribution. However, the alliance did provide a form of legitimacy for the BSP, at a time when the SDS and the DPS were advocating the outlawing of the BSP because it was a successor to the BKP. Having other, “democratic,” parties cooperate with the BSP lent it legitimacy as an equal participant in the democratic process. However, during the next elections, none of the 1991 alliance partners was included in the new BSP-led alliance (Spirova, 2007, p. 87).

This inclusion of the OPT, a party with an openly nationalist ideology, in the BSP alliance was indicative of another feature of the BSP’s position at the time — its relative nationalist rhetoric. In his 1998 article explaining the cooperation of successor parties with nationalist parties in post-Communist Europe, Ishiyama pinpoints the nature of the previous regime as the explanation for the presence or absence of such cooperation (Ishiyama, 1998, p. 75) He argues that “patrimonial regimes [as in Bulgaria] produces Communist successor parties (and party systems) which were ‘un-institutionalized’, with an ambiguous identity which made it far easier for them to make political deals ‘with the devil’” (p. 76). However, given the low electoral benefit of this cooperation, and BSP’s own program, I would argue that the two parties were not “strange bedfellows” as Ishiyama has called them, at least not during the early 1990s.

Because of the lack of a clear break with the past, and the openly nationalist policies of the BKP in the 1980s, it seems natural that the BSP would maintain some
elements of a nationalist tendency in its program. Allying with openly nationalist parties, then, was not a major departure from its own position. In fact, as Ishiyama’s later work demonstrates, the BSP had opened references to nationalist and patriotic issues (Ishiyama and Bozoki, 2001). Thus, it was not the absence of identity, but the preservation of BSP’s pre-1989 identity that allowed for this cooperation.

In addition, it should not be ignored that in the very early 1990s Bulgarian society was still quite uncertain about its position on the national question. This early period is often obscured by the later exemplary incorporation of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) into the politics and government of the country. In fact, compared to the rest of the Balkans, Bulgaria was often referred to as an island of ethnic stability. However, the situation in 1990 was quite different — mass protests of the Bulgarian population in the regions where the Turkish minority lived, followed the decision of the BKP to lift the ban on Turkish names in late 1989 (Kalinova and Baeva, 2000, p. 154). The “ethnic situation” in the whole country continued to be tense and, as Vassilev has argued, “the nationalist backlash seriously threatened the country’s political stability and peaceful transition to democracy” (Vassilev, 2001, p. 40) While the situation was contained in a peaceful manner, the nationalist feelings continued to brew, especially following the election of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms to Parliament in 1990. Eager to benefit from this popular sentiment, the BSP allied with OPT in 1991 while BSP MPs challenged the constitutionality of the DPS in the Constitutional Court in 1992 (Ganev, 2003, p. 601).

However, the nationalist position of the Socialists had to be tamed quickly by political expediency. With only three parties in Parliament during 1991–1994, when the SDS government collapsed in late 1992, the DPS and the BSP emerged as possible coalition partners. “To the amazement of many observers, a tacit BSP—[DPS] legislative alliance emerged, sustaining the Berov cabinet in office for almost two years” (Vassilev, 2001, p. 53). As the DPS solidified its legitimate position in Bulgarian political life and the nationalist rhetoric in the country decreased substantially in the face of the carnage in next-door Yugoslavia, cooperation between the two emerged as an ever more certain a possibility. This cooperation put an end to the BSP’s nationalist inclination of the early 1990s and although some weaker tendencies remained through the decade, it never went back to the rhetoric of the 1991–1992 period or the 1991 electoral alliance with the OPT.

In 1994, the BSP was again the most popular party in the country and certainly did not need additional support to win the majority of seats in parliament. Despite this, in a continued effort to legitimize itself in the political system, it formed an alliance with two other parties: one of the agrarian party factions, BZNS-Alexander Stambolijski, and a splinter from the SDS, an environment-oriented party called Political Club “Ekoglasnost”. The behavior of the BSP at these elections showed some ideological consistency; both Ekoglasnost and BZNS-AS were left-leaning organizations that had similar policy objectives as the BSP. In addition, both of them had a larger societal presence and stronger organizations than the BSP’s 1991 alliance partners (Spirova, 2007, p. 89). Since then, the BSP had consistently looked to the left for political allies.

However, despite its popularity, the 1993–1994 period also saw the only official splinter of the BSP. An interesting feature of the BSP was that it was the only Bulgarian
party that provided for “ideological platforms” or, factions, to develop within its membership (Krusteva, 2003). One of these factions was the circle DEMOS led by Alexander Tomov. Citing “ideological incompatibility” with the BSP, DEMOS left the BSP in 1993. Although it went through several different stages, this move ultimately led to the formation of the Bulgarian EuroLeft (BEL) in 1997, which has been the only contender of the BSP on the left end of the political spectrum that has succeeded to enter Parliament, albeit for a short time (Spirova, 2007, pp. 63–67).

According to BEL leaders, at the time of their original decision to leave the BSP, the latter’s positions on various issues of the economic and political development of the country were “nostalgic for the old type of government, [favoring] price control, control over the banking sector, and so on (BSD, 2003). In contrast, politicians around Tomov were reform-minded and pro-Europe, and for them the policy positions of the BSP were untenable (GOR, 1993; BSD, 2003; Zankov, 2003b).

In 1997, the new party BEL claimed to unite the “true” social democrats in Bulgaria and clearly distinguished itself from the BSP (BSD, 2003, p. 40; Capital, 1997a). These included, besides the original BSP defectors, more defectors from the Socialists, and a faction of the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party, which had previously been part of the SDS but had not been able to pose a clear threat to the BSP until then. BEL attempted to represent the “the third way” — in both the ideological space and the party system of Bulgaria.1 Its position was clearly to the left and center-left in terms of social issues, but its foreign policy position supported European integration and NATO membership (Spirova, 2007, pp. 61–67).

Thus, by the time of the June 1997 elections, the BSP was in complete disarray. Its government has been completely disgraced by the economic crisis; the party was weakened by the defection of some of its younger and popular leaders; and, for the first time since 1990, it had a real challenger for the center-left vote. Although it sought more alliance partners, it was unable to attract them, as an association with the BSP was an electoral liability. Thus, the BSP preserved its 1994 alliance partners and contested the “predetermined elections” (Capital, 1997b). Plagued by the “guilt” attributed to it for the economic crisis of 1996–1997 and various internal struggles between the BSP leadership and the allies, the alliance got about 22% of the vote and 24% of the seats in the 1997 Parliament (Capital, 1997a). This was the first clear and decisive defeat of the BSP in the democratic history of Bulgaria.

The BSP since 1997: rejuvenating a centenarian2

After the defeat in 1997, the BSP clearly needed a new beginning. As the specially convened committee noted, the BSP had to move into a new stage of development, in both political and organizational terms. Politically, the party needed to leave behind

1 Even the fact that the party borrowed the term from Blair’s Labour Party was indicative of its effort to identify with European Socialism.

2 Having inherited the BKP, which in turn inherited the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party established in 1891, the BSP often prided itself to be a “centenarian”. This was especially true in the beginning of the 1990s when it wanted to point out that it was the only party with tradition and experience.
some “traditional ideologies” and to replace them with “socially oriented ideological pragmatism” while organizationally the party needed to reach beyond its traditional support groups and incorporate all segments of society into its membership and electoral base (Zahariev, 1998, p. 8). One of the major recommendations of the committee was for the BSP to accept “capitalism” as a normal form of economic development rather than as an “evil,” and to treat its basic principles such as the right to private property as already unchallengeable in the country (Mihaylov, 1998, pp. 11–21). Another, equally radical point, was to accept membership in NATO as the normal path of development for the country (Andreev, 1998, p. 134). Neither of these ideas was accepted readily by the whole party and its leadership. The pragmatic faction formed around Georgi Parvanov managed to take control of the party at its 1998 Congress, although only after a bitter factional struggle with those who did not see the need for such radical reforms. The changes continued at the 2000 Congress, and since then the BSP has tried to re-invent itself as a European social democratic Party.

However, the party was still to accept a new political program in 2008, despite the efforts of several committees created for this purpose (Pirinski, 2006). As a result, it is impossible to make any arguments about the value changes in the BSP based on a comparison with the Ishiyama’s data of the mid-1990s. However, an analysis of the BSP election program, the stated priorities for its new political program, its policies and its electoral behavior, reveal quite a different political party. The BSP of the mid-2000s can be classified as a European social democratic party.

Radical departure from its 1994 program is the BSP’s acceptance of the market economy as a reality in Bulgaria. There are no negative references to “capitalism” in its election program, and the main goal of the party was no longer to ensure a continued role for the state in the economy, but to ensure an equality of opportunity for all Bulgarians in the context of a market economy. In addition, the party was openly seeking to attract “small-business entrepreneurs” with its election campaign: it promised not only better and more efficient legal framework but also lower taxes and fees (BSP, 2005).

In terms of foreign policy, its positions similarly diverged from 1994. This was not surprising as Bulgaria had joined NATO in 2004, and was about to join the EU in 2007. As a result, the BSP’s goals again were to ensure that Bulgaria’s national interests were protected within the two organizations rather than any principled objections to the membership (BSP, 2005). The “nationalistic—patriotic” discourse was likewise toned down, and instead the BSP promised to ensure “ethnic and religions tolerance, in correspondence with the European standards and policies” (BSP, 2005). Overall, the BSP argued, its program provides a “modern social-democratic alternative” (Pirinski, 2006).

Electorally, the BSP has continued its tradition of broad electoral alliances. In 2000, the BSP saw a possibility to make a comeback. The SDS government had become quite unpopular, and BEL – a major competitor for the left vote in 1997 – was suffering from internal dissent and was in no position to challenge the BSP successfully. However, the BSP’s popularity was barely over 13% (NCIOM, 2001). In an attempt to enlarge its electoral support, the BSP sought and formed its largest
electoral alliance. In early 2001, 19 parties and organizations with socialist or social-democratic ideology formed an alliance called “Coalition for Bulgaria.” The alliance defined itself as a broad, left-centrist electoral formation that had a single platform and would run common lists (Coalition for Bulgaria, 2001). In the 2001 elections the alliance won 17% of the vote, which translated into 45 seats in the legislature of which only 22 were distributed among BSP leaders (Spirova, 2007, pp. 90–91).

There is no doubt that the majority of the expense and work in the electoral campaign of the alliance was carried out by the members and structures of the BSP. There is also little doubt that the electoral benefit of forming the alliance was minimal. In fact, the party experienced a lot of internal discontent over having joined the alliance because local branches and members were dissatisfied, working for the political benefit of other parties (Krusteva, 2003). The BSP argued that it aimed to ideologically unify the left and to put the “idea” of social democracy in Bulgaria into reality (Krusteva, 2003; Coalition for Bulgaria, 2001).

However, just as in 1991, the party was seeking legitimacy. This time, however, legitimacy came from abroad. The Party of the European Socialists (PES) and the Socialist International (SI) had been making conscious efforts to unite the social-democratic parties and factions in Bulgaria since the mid-1990s. The BSP, then still relatively unreformed, was excluded from the early stages of this process (Spirova, 2008). In fact, the creation of the Bulgarian EuroLeft in 1997 was supported by PES because they saw it as the potential “democratic” center that could unite the social democrats in Bulgaria (Krusteva, 2003; Avramov, 2002; Zankov, 2003a,b).

However, by 1999, the BSP had clearly made the choice to support a pro-European position. It became part of the PES-organized unification processes and started to contest the focal place of Bulgarian social democracy with BEL. This process was paralleled by the decrease in electoral support for BEL, thus making the BSP the only possible “unifier.” However, the two processes of unification continued in parallel for a while with BEL refusing to accept the BSP as a social-democratic party, and the BSP refusing to accept anything but an alliance on its own terms.

The 2001 BSP strategy was thus an attempt of the party not only to secure greater electoral support but also to gain the approval of PES and the Socialist International. By 2005, BEL had lost any electoral significance while the BSP had finally emerged as organizationally and ideologically rejuvenated. The efforts of PES centered on the BSP and it granted the party full membership just before the June 2005 elections. The stronger position of the BSP allowed it to form an alliance with fewer members — it no longer needed the validation the previous broad alliance gave it. It signed an agreement with seven other parties, thus significantly reducing the size of the alliance and the number of non-BSP candidates that were given top positions in the lists (Vencislavova, 2005). Thus, only 4 of the 85 seats the alliance won went to alliance partners.

As joining the EU was a top priority for the country during this period any association with Europe and European structures created an image of a forward-looking, progressive party. As a result, the BSP advertised unashamedly its links with the European Socialists in the 2005 elections. This trend continued as the BSP became a leader in the governing coalition. At the 2007 elections for the European
Parliament, the **BSP** was the only party in the country that used the acronym of its European federation in the name of its electoral list.

**Conclusions**

Over the last two decades, the Bulgarian Socialist Party has evolved from the party of democratic socialism to a European social democratic party. This transition, however, came much later than in most other countries of the region. For most of the 1990s, a time of key political and economic reforms for Bulgaria, the BSP remained only “partly reformed” and advocated policies that could not be classified as social-democratic in the European, 1990s, meaning of the term. The absence of reform in the early to mid-1990s was possible because of the role the BSP had played in the democratic transition of Bulgaria. The BSP both initiated and dominated the initial liberalization and later democratization of the Communist party regime. It also chose to maintain organizational continuity with the old BKP, which gave it a strong advantage over the other parties in the system. The party also faced little competition for the center-left vote. It was not until BEL was created in 1997 that a real threat emerged; until then the BSP was not only the only “successor” party but also the only party of the left with any meaningful program and behavior. Supported by a conservative electorate, the BSP had few incentives to change.

The failure of the BPS ideology and politics to provide for a socially based market reform of Bulgaria during 1994–1996 led to its complete delegitimization and, ultimately, to its reform in the late 1990s. Its policy positions, leadership, and organizational priorities changed and so did its relations with the Party of European Socialists. Electorally, it maintained its position of leadership in the numerous groups of smaller leftist parties and political movements in the country. Thus, driven by domestic realities and international considerations, the **BPS** emerged as a truly social-democratic party in the early 21st century.

**Appendix**

Bulgarian party names and their acronyms

- **BBB** – Bulgarian Business Block
- **BEL** – Bulgarian EuroLeft
- **BKP** – Bulgarian Communist Party
- **BNS** – Bulgarian People’s Union
- **BSD** – Bulgarian Social Democracy
- **BZNS** – Bulgarian Agrarian National Union
- **BZNS-AS** – Bulgarian Agrarian National Union-Alexander Stamboliiski
- **BZNS-M** – Bulgarian Agrarian National Union-Mozer
- **DPS** – Movement for Rights and Freedoms
- **DSB** – Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria
NDSV – National Movement Simeon the Second
NV – New Time
ODS – United Democratic Forces
OPT – Fatherland Party of Labor
SDS – Union of Democratic Forces

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What is to be done? Succession from the League of Communists of Croatia

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Abstract

Croatia’s complex and violent transition contributed to conditions under which ex-communists have exerted significant influence over multiple post-Communist parties. In the 1990s, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) led by President Franjo Tudjman employed war to impose a semi-authoritarian system that further weakened the electoral prospects of the most logical Communist successor party—the Social Democratic Party (SDP). The SDP-led coalition’s win in the 2000 elections ushered in conditions that enabled a deeper democratization in Croatia that brought it closer toward integration into the EU. HDZ’s loss in 2000 and EU leverage then helped compel HDZ to reform and to continue work toward meeting EU accession requirements.

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Keywords: Communist successor parties; Croatia; Nationalism; Democratization; Ethnic politics; EU integration

Introduction

Croatia’s transition away from Communist party rule involved moving away from a politically decentralized one-party Communist system, secession from a multiethnic Yugoslav federation, and Serb control of one-third of its territory,

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which brought significant international intervention that began in 1991 and lasted until 1998. This complex process of transition helps explain why it is difficult to identify a single party as the Communist successor party, which Ishiyama (1999: 88) defines as the party that was formerly the governing party in the Communist regime and which inherited the preponderance of the former ruling party’s resources and personnel. While it is true that the League of Communists of Croatia—Party of Democratic Change (SKH-SDP), which became the Social Democratic Party (SDP) after losing the founding elections in 1990, most clearly evolved out of the former governing Communist regime, it is also the case that significant numbers of Communist party personnel fled to newly formed parties. Many ethnic Croats joined the nationalist Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). Many ethnic Serbs initially joined the Serb Democratic Party (SDS), which led the revolt against the elected Croatian Government from 1991–1995 and later joined the Independent Democratic Serbian Party (SDSS) in the late 1990s. It is important to place the influence of the former Communist regime against this complex background and within several different parties in the post-Communist period.

Regime type in the communist era

It was common for Yugoslav socialists from the 1960s and on to portray the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as a physically and politically open regime, which split with the Soviet Union in 1948 and initiated a broader program of finding a third path of development. However, Western scholarship has long observed that Yugoslavia’s “breakthrough” after 1948 was less a principled project in which Yugoslav liberals rejected Stalin’s “bureaucratic socialism” and more a result of Tito’s success in holding onto power against the “predation” of Stalin and the Cominform (Ulam, 1952; Shoup, 1968; Johnson, 1972; Zimmerman, 1987). In the course of this struggle for power and beginning in the 1950s, Yugoslav theorists developed a more liberal approach to the organization of state power. Tito and his comrades managed to hold on to the reins of power, and only in the 1950s did they develop a more liberal socialist alternative that looked to non-Soviet socialist sources to provide a legitimizing basis for governance. This was an effort to find a third path to socialism (Rusinow, 1978; Baskin and Pickering, 2008).

Central were the efforts in the 1950s and 1960s at economic reform that led Yugoslavia a long way from economic practice in the Soviet Bloc. Most dramatically, the reforms in the mid-1960s were intended to include Yugoslavia more fully into the international economy, in part to exert pressure on Yugoslav firms to increase the efficiency of labor rather than the growth of employment. Such policies led to quickly growing unemployment in the late 1960s, the formal opening of borders and the dramatic outpouring of workers to employment abroad (Rusinow, 1978; Baskin, 1986; Zimmerman, 1987; Woodward, 1995). By 1973, more than 224,000 Croatian citizens, or 18.3 percent of active labor from Croatia, were employed abroad (Baskin, 1986: 30). In 1971, Croats constituted 39 percent of all Yugoslav migrants and were the single largest contingent of migrants from
Yugoslavia. This economic liberalization ultimately held dramatic consequences for Croatian politics, for it took a highly mobilized segment of the population outside the reach of Yugoslav state institutions for the purposes of their political socialization and symbolic identification. Many Croats from outside of Croatia have played prominent roles in domestic politics—as supporters of parties and as party functionaries in parties in post-Communist Croatia (Hockonos, 2003). The post-Communist party system helped to integrate this population, much of which was once considered persona non grata in Yugoslavia, into the mainstream of contemporary Croatian politics.

Efforts to liberalize and reform the Communist Party were rather modest, such that through the 1980s the authority of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) as the sole venue for legitimate political activity in Yugoslavia—renamed the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) in 1952 so as to make it appear more voluntarist and popular—was never too seriously threatened. Its deviation from the Soviet norm emerged from its unique geography and political space between the two blocs that enabled it to survive until the early 1990s as a somewhat apostate socialist order that gave birth to liberal trends in politics, economics, culture, management, foreign policy, and academia. But this less rigid Communism featured economic reforms that never became self-sustaining and political-administrative reforms that created dysfunctional bureaucracies. These included the 1974 constitution, the Delegate System and the 1976 Law on Associated Labor, all efforts made in the name of a more humanistic socialism. These Yugoslav reforms differed far more on paper than in how they actually organized political power or generated self-sustaining economic development. The reforms did create three genuine departures from the Soviet political norm: far more liberal censorship practices, far more open borders, and economic reform efforts that eliminated central planning but that never extended beyond the dominance of “social” ownership of property. These departures made available literature, models and methods of study and work that were common outside the socialist world.

Against this background, Croatian socialism in practice was not particularly liberal and reflects its uneven political and social integration, in which parts were administered directly from Vienna, parts administered from Budapest, and parts had been part of the military border of the Habsburg Monarchy with a significant population of ethnic Serbs. These traditions led the distinguished historian, Mirjana Gross, to characterize the “integration of the Croatian state” in the nineteenth century as a central force in modern Croatian history (Šidak et al., 1968; Gross, 1977, 1993). A second factor concerns conflicts between Serbs and Croats over the nature of Yugoslavia in which Croats have always favored a more decentralized (“federal” or “confederal” at different times) Yugoslavia. These differing concepts led to polemics throughout the nineteenth century, to political conflict in interwar Yugoslavia in which the popular leader of the Croatian Peasant Party was assassinated in the Sabor in 1928, to terrible violence during World War II and the subsequent victory of the Partisan movement under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito. The CPY “solved” the Croatian Question in 1944 by defeating Andreja Hebrang’s strategy of negotiating a genuine compromise between the Communist
Party and the Peasant Party within the anti-fascist Council for Peoples’ Liberation of Croatia in favor of the traditional, Leninist democratic centralism. This meant the end of a genuinely federal solution in socialist Yugoslavia and the establishment of the “leading party” as the main venue for addressing Serb–Croat political relationships in Croatia. Hebrang’s political error was to believe that power might be devolved to the regional party organizations (Irvine, 1993; Dubravica, 1996).

Until his death in 1983, Tito’s partisan comrade, Vladimir Bakarić, remained the dominant figure in Croatian politics and served as Chairman of the Croatian party from 1948 through 1969, when he handed off leadership to his chosen successors, Savka Dapčević-Kučar and Miko Tripalo. The waxing and waning of the liberal tradition in Croatian socialism turned more on questions of nationality, autonomy, and federalism than on questions of genuine political pluralism and the autonomy of the individual in social life.

Coinciding with the liberalizing economic reforms and departure of hundreds of thousands of Croats to employment abroad in the late 1960s, the Hrvatsko Proljeće (Croatian Spring) under the leadership of Savka Dapčević-Kučar, Miko Tripalo and Pero Pirker, made genuine efforts to broaden the regime’s social base and to increase Croatia’s autonomy within the Yugoslav Federation. “The basic orientation of that movement was democratic and socialist …[with] the real belief of the Croatian leadership that the activization of an ever-greater number individuals and pressure of the people would influence the bureaucratic logic and its structures in order to help move towards a more radical social reform” (Tripalo, 1989: 8). But the expansion of the social base in Croatian politics led to the emergence of large-scale social movement that included nationalist forces and that threatened the leading role of the party. One close observer pointed out that “…an analysis of their practical political activity and speeches…could only conclude that they began to feel themselves increasingly as leaders of a mass movement rather than as leaders of the League of Communists....” (Bilandžić, 1985: 423). Tito ended this experiment at the famous meeting in Karadjordjevo in December 1971 as part of a much broader purge of liberals within Yugoslavia, a move that followed an earlier purge of hardliners (Rusinow, 1978; Ćuvalo, 1990: ch. 3; Kasapović, 1991). Tito’s purge led to the formal reassertion of the party’s leading role in each republic and autonomous province under a complex set of institutional and administrative arrangements that were codified in the 1974 Constitution. This order embodied a corporatist set of institutions that bound the republics together and that channeled mass participation through the Socialist Alliance of Working People, the Trade Unions, and other formal organizations and working groups (Rusinow, 1978; Bilandžić, 1985; Kasapović, 1996). The result was eight centralized, party-centered unreformed republic-level economic and political systems (Gagnon, 2004: 59). These purges ushered in a prolonged period of “Croatian Silence” (Hrvatska Šutnja), where illiberal figures, such as sociologist Stipe Šuvar, played leading roles in silencing “techno-managers,” “anarcho-liberals” and others who deviated from the norm of democratic centralism. The “ideological dictatorship” of the League of Communists over social, cultural, educational and scientific developments “was stronger in Croatia than in any other place in Yugoslavia.” (Kasapović, 1991: 29) For a time,
this “radical anti-liberalism of the [victorious] orthodox communist faction....de facto erased all traces of free political and cultural activity.” (Kasapović, 1991: 34)

This period of orthodox reaction ended only in the late 1980s as part of a broader change in Yugoslav politics: “Liberalization did not....begin as an expression of a political program of one faction within the bloc in power, but as a consequence of the inability of any faction to completely control politics in the whole country, that is, in all republics of the Federation. (Kasapović, 1996: 87)” The Central Committee of the League of Communists of Croatia began opening up significantly to consider a range of previously taboo subjects: conformism, the role of social science in party activity, and the leading role of the party in society. The pages of the party journal, Naše Teme, (Our Issues) were full of roundtable discussions on religion, the character of the state, the character of pre-Communist Croatian history, and so on (Počeci Moderne Hrvatske 1985, Reforma ili Obnova 1989, Kriza i Avangarda 1987, and Socijalna Struktura 1988). As its genuine legitimate authority in Croatian society continued to slide, party intellectuals and leaders continued to search for answers to the key questions of Yugoslav politics: the federal question, the economy, the pluralization of political life, and the breakdown of the Yugoslav Communist system (Ramet, 2002: 44–45).

Ivica Račan’s narrow victory as President at the 11th Congress of the League of Communists of Croatia in December 1989 formally ended the “Croatian Silence” by giving the leadership’s official support for a genuinely liberal and reformist approach to governance (Ramet, 2002). With the defeat of a series of reform proposals at the 14th Extraordinary Congress of the LCY in January 1990, Račan led the Croatian delegation out of the Congress just after the Slovene delegation departed. Under Račan, the SKH sponsored multiparty elections in April 1990, changed its name to the SKH-SDP (the League of Communists of Croatia—Party of Democratic Change, or Savez Komunista Hrvatske—Stranka Demokratske Promjene, to later become the Social Democratic Party), and graciously accepted its defeat to the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica or HDZ) at the polls (Baskin, 1990; Loza, 2007). The defeat led to the departure of more traditionally-oriented communists from the SDP, especially Croatian Serbs, under Borislav Mikelić, and marked the beginning of the social and political implosion in the summer of 1990 that led to war in 1991. It also led to an explosion of multi-party activity in the period from 1989 until the war in Croatia in 1991, including the appearance of Serbian parties, a set of national Croatian parties, and social democratic parties, most of which were led by former members of the LCY.

**Opposition strength during the Communist period**

There were two types of opposition during the period of Communism that could have led to the authentic liberalization of Croatian politics. The first was a sophisticated, cosmopolitan, neo-Marxist and all-Yugoslav group that emerged from the Praxis School (Sher, 1977; Gruenwald, 1992). It began at a symposium in Bled, Slovenia that rejected dogmatic conceptions of dialectical materialism and led to the creation of the Korcula Summer School from 1963 to 1974 and to a Yugoslav and
international edition of the journal, Praxis, that brought together social scientists from throughout Yugoslavia. Among the leading lights of this “movement” were internationally respected academics from the Zagreb University, including Rudi Supek and Ivan Kuvačić (sociology), Danko Grlić, Gajo Petrović and Milan Kangrga (philosophy), and many others. It represented less a coherent program of opposition than a neo-Marxist critique of Stalinism and the “dictatorship of the proletariat” that featured a bloated, controlling state apparatus (Gruenwald, 1992: 178–9). The Praxis School’s very autonomy represented a threat to the regime since it threatened to broaden the basis of political legitimacy in Croatia, and contributed to a proto-pluralism within Yugoslav official discourse. Although the Praxis group never developed a mass movement or comprehensive programmatic political alternative to the LCY, it helped create the political space in which very different kinds of opposition could emerge: a new-left student opposition in 1968 and a more tradition-bound national opposition in Croatia that achieved significant institutional strength—first in 1971 and again in 1990.

In the end, the national opposition proved to be much more robust than one rooted in a Marxist discourse that was critical of Yugoslavia’s (and Croatia’s) socialist regime. Praxis’ social basis was far thinner than that of an opposition that was rooted in national and cultural concerns. The economic reforms of the 1960s that led over 5 per cent of the population to seek work abroad were bound to create socio-cultural uncertainty concerning the nature of the regime that forced them to travel abroad for work. And the majority of Croats did not mediate this uncertainty through a sophisticated ideological framework, but through a religious one that was more familiar in the small towns and villages of their origin. Official campaigns against the Catholic Church in Croatia in 1971 and 1981 were clearly linked to concern with Croatian nationalism, a purge of liberals within the party, the shutting down of the nationalist cultural society Matica Hrvatska in 1971, and with the imprisonment of several leading Croatian nationalists, including future Croatian President Franjo Tudjman and Liberal Party Leader Vlado Gotovac. (Šagi-Bunic, 1983, Ramet, 1985). Matica Hrvatska amounted to an organized opposition to the League of Communists. Gotovac had been editor of its weekly, Hrvatski Tjednik (Croatian Weekly), whose readership grew dramatically and quickly as a genuinely popular paper that gave voice to broad cultural and national concerns in Croatia in a way that was unmediated by the official Marxism of the regime (Baletić, 1990).

This helped to stoke a mass movement among students at the university that quickly went outside of a framework that could be politically acceptable in Croatia. In sum, the “Croatian Spring” leadership’s effort to create a mass social basis for the regime raised the issue of whether Yugoslavia’s socialist government was sufficiently authoritative to weather these political challenges by co-opting the nationalist leaderships and integrating these national movements into the regime. The socialist regime might have played on the very real divisions within the national movements and within the Church in order to navigate a genuinely reformist and reconciliatory path. However, because both the Church and the national movement remained outside the bounds of mainstream Croatian political life in the 1970s and 1980s, an
orthodox Leninist regime’s refusal to engage these popular movements constructively sowed seeds of the regime’s own destruction. The capacity of the nation-church nexus to win moral and material support from without made it a significant source of opposition to self-management socialism as led by the League of Communists. This capacity was strengthened still further by economic reforms that would increase unemployment and temporary migration abroad in a manner that enhanced the insecurity of workers and peasants of all nationalities throughout Croatia.

With the closing of the Korčula summer school and the shutting down of the journal, Praxis, in the mid-70s, individuals from the Praxis movement soon found other forums in which to meet. In the early 1980s, a research group called Čovijek i Sistem (Man and the System) brought in former Praxis contributors from throughout Yugoslavia and a range of younger students for monthly meetings at the Philosophy Faculty in Zagreb under the joint chairmanship of academics Rudi Supek and Eugen Pusić. The group would also meet for several weeks each spring at the Dubrovnik Post-Graduate School. These forums provided the younger generation with the opportunity to cut their teeth politically outside of the official organizations—and many individuals from these meetings emerged to political prominence after 1990.

The growing political character of these activities was realized much more fully in 1989. Then, the Association for a Yugoslav Social Initiative (Udruženje Jugoslovenske Demokratske Inicijative, UJDI) provided a forum that explicitly brought together liberal Communists and non-communist civil society in an effort to support the emergence of genuine political pluralism and reform. It began regular meetings in Zagreb and throughout Yugoslavia that would include political pariahs—for example, political prisoners, proponents of the 1960s Croatian Spring—to reintroduce themselves to official reformers and to find a place in Croatian politics. It could have initiated a long-term process of reconciliation, as when the economist Branko Horvat and poet and editor Vlado Gotovac publicly apologized to each other in Zagreb for their polemics in 1971 at a meeting attended by one of the authors. There were also a host of social and political initiatives, from the emergence of a “Green” movement to the establishment of the Croatian Social Liberal Party and the first large congress of the nationalist HDZ, for which many émigrés returned for the first time in decades. These developments demonstrated that in advance of the elections in April 1990, Croatia was the venue to a market for a wide variety of political ideas and organizations (Pusić 1991).

**Type of transition from Communism**

As noted above, in late 1989, the Croatian Communist leadership endorsed the legalization of multi-party elections by “bowing to internal pressures, the example of Slovenia, and news of collapse of Communist regimes in other East European states” (Cohen, 1997: 77). In 1985, only 28 percent of members of the Croatian Communist party looked positively on a multiparty system, while several months before the March 1990 founding election, 65.3 percent of Croatian Communist party members looked favorably on political pluralism, and non-Communists were
even more enthusiastic about political competition (Cohen, 1997: 79). The SKH party members made political choices to “exit” from the party in late 1989 and 1990 (Hirschman, 1970). Between the end of 1989 to June 1990 membership in SKH-SDP fell from 298,000 to 46,000, with an estimated 27,000 defecting to the HDZ between late 1989 and March 1990, and another 70,000 defecting to the HDZ in 1990 (Cohen, 1997: 115, in Goati, 1991). More significantly, a considerable number of prominent former Communists, many of whom were purged following the Croatian Spring (including the former General and future President Franjo Tudjman) established the nationalist HDZ between February and June 1989 with significant assistance from the Croatian diaspora. Former party leaders Tripalo and Dabčević-Kučar associated themselves with the moderate non-communist self-styled sophisticated “Coalition of National Accord,” whose supporters were noticeably more secular than those in HDZ (Šiber, 1991: 113). In short, the twilight of the era of a formally organized vanguard guiding Croatia’s politics led many Communists to seek alternatives in non socialist parties that would win popular affirmation (Djuric et al., 1990).

These party membership numbers suggest that the HDZ, which Croatian voters swept into power in the April 1990 multiparty elections, could be considered a Communist successor party. A total of 97,000 deserted from the SKH to HDZ, while only 46,000 decided to stay in what became the SDP. The numbers of Communist defectors to the HDZ might suggest that the transformation from one-party Communist rule could in some sense be described largely as “highjacked by the ex-Communists.” This is despite the fact that the HDZ’s message was ardently anti-Communist. During the 1990s, the HDZ was a movement party that united different factions around the goal of Croatian sovereignty. Gagnon (2004: 137) points out that HDZ’s rhetoric in the 1990 elections revolved around the threat posed by Belgrade, the need to change the governing party after four and one-half decades of Communist Party rule, and democracy. The HDZ campaign featured moderate candidates who had been mid and lower-level Communist Party officials during the Croatian Spring, even though some within HDZ grouped local Serbs with Milosevic (Gagnon, 2004: 137). People voted for HDZ largely in rejection of the often arbitrary rule and corruption of the Communist Party during the past 45 years and as an affirmation of Croatian national and religious identity (Baskin, 1990). In short, the HDZ appeared as the most authoritative anti-Communist choice to Croatian voters. Gagnon (2004: 141) described the HDZ candidates standing for election in 1990 as a mix of moderate democratic and economic reformers who had been purged from the Croatian Communist party during the Croatian Spring; technocrats and managers of socially owned firms who were interested in maintaining control and economic growth of their firms; ardent nationalists who were authoritarian and ethnically chauvinistic; and those, particularly in western Herzegovina, with links to

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1 As Chip Gagnon suggests, further research should investigate the number of SKH cadres who defected to HDZ.
Ustaša émigrés. The resources brought by the nationalist diaspora played an important role in bolstering the HDZ’s organizational capacity.

In 1990, the SKH-SDP initially retained its multiethnic character. Its membership at the time of the founding elections was 52 percent Croat, 28 percent Serb, 3 percent Yugoslav, and 3 percent “others” (Šiber, 1992: 143). Several characteristics and preferences distinguished party supporters of SKH-SDP from supporters of HDZ. In comparison with supporters of HDZ, supporters of SKH-SDP were more likely to be concerned with the economic situation rather than with Croatia’s position in Yugoslavia. On the issue of reform of Yugoslavia’s territorial system, SKH-SDP supporters preferred a confederation of autonomous states or the existing Yugoslav federation, as opposed to HDZ supporters who preferred either a confederation or secession (Šiber, 1992: 144–164). Finally, SKH-SDP supporters were also less religious and more likely to place themselves in the center of the ideological spectrum than were HDZ supporters (Šiber, 1992: 150, 165).

A survey conducted at the end of the 1990 election campaign showed that twice as many Serbs voted for the SKH-SDP (46 percent) than for the nationalist Serb Democratic Party (23 percent). The same survey revealed that Croats and Serbs held vividly different views of national equality and discrimination in Croatia (Zakošek, 1991: 152, 171). Such dramatic ethnic polarization, even within the SKH-SDP in 1990, points to the difficulty of the emergence of only a single “successor party” in the case of Croatia.

The fact that HDZ’s most powerful leaders were ex-Communists who had been purged from the Communist Party in the early 1970s and/or nationalists—including diaspora—who had long rejected Communism, while the SDP arose out of what was left of the Croatian Communist Party suggested that SDP was a more appropriate Communist successor party. HDZ’s victory over the SKH-SDP in the founding 1990 elections, however, did not signify a full rupture, or comprehensive transition, from Communist-style structures of power that remained intact. An over-confident SKH-SDP mistakenly believed that a majoritarian electoral system would ensure its victory and enable it to consolidate power in the first post-Communist multiparty election. However, the winner-take-all, majoritarian system actually ensured that HDZ’s win of 41.8 percent of the popular vote in the first round of the elections (and about the same in the second round) was translated into 67.5 percent of the seats in parliament (Gagnon, 2004: 139). The constitution adopted in December 1990 established a strong semi-presidential executive that gave the president a great deal of authority for policy making (Zakošek, 2008: 597–8).

Gagnon draws on extensive local data and analysis, convincingly portraying HDZ after its election in 1990 as a conservative party bent on retaining its dominant political power and on using its positions to snatch up what was most valuable of the Croatian economy. HDZ carried on the Communist legacy by ruling with democratic centralism for a decade. Ex-Communist President Tudjman was the central figure in this movement-party who balanced the moderate and far

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2 Thanks to Chip Gagnon for emphasizing this insight.
right factions in a manner somewhat reminiscent of Tito. The right faction was dominated by the Croatian diaspora and Croats from Western Herzegovina, who promoted policies that were subtly or blatantly anti-Serb, including removing Serbs from jobs in government and administration, assigning poorly trained Croatian police officers to patrol Serb-majority regions, and demanding that Croatia’s Serb police officers wear the šahovnica instead of the Communists’ traditional red star. While Croatian Serb hardliners did much to disrupt normal life in the “balvan revolucija” near Knin in Summer 1990, SDS and HDZ hard-liners engaged in violent exchanges in mixed towns, particularly in Borovo Selo and Plitvica in early 1991 on the eve of the war.

By 1992, the Croat leadership was pushing for expansion into Croatian areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina (Gagnon, 2004: 147). The HDZ’s moderate faction of former mid-level party leaders, including future President Stipe Mesić, lost a power struggle to the rightist faction at the party’s Second Congress in early 1994 on a platform of constitutional adjustments with the Serbian minority to solve the Krajina issue, restoration of the Croatian–Muslim alliance against the Bosnian Serbs, and rapid privatization (Djikic´, 2004; Cohen, 1997: 96).

In sum, the Croatian political party system was transformed by Croatia’s changing demographics and strategies of political elites into an ethnic party system, that is, a political system where each party’s support stemmed from one ethnic group and each party made appeals only to one ethnic group. These trends combined with Milosevic’s efforts to elevate the power of Serbs within Yugoslavia and to give substantial support Serbs in Croatia, and the victory of a HDZ, whose rightist faction soon dominated policy making in Croatia. These ethnically polarizing dynamics left little place for ideologically oriented parties, or any parties for that matter, capable of attracting voters of different ethnicities.

Different Communist Party successor parties

Two ethnically distinct parties that drew significant personnel from the Communist Party occupied the center-left of Croatia’s political spectrum. For the ethnically Croatian electorate and those who did not prioritize ethnicity or religion, SDP represented the social democratic party option, while the Independent Democratic Serbian Party (SDSS) provided Croatia’s ethnic Serbs with effective representation. HDZ has moved from the right side of the spectrum that it occupied throughout the 1990s toward the center right after the death of Tudjman and the departure of many of its rightist faction. One feature uniting the successor

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3 The šahovnica is a traditional Croatian symbol that had been used prominently by the Ustaša during World War II, but that had also been used during the socialist era as part of the Croatian coat-of-arms together with a red star.

4 In 2000, 95.4 percent of SDP supporters declared their religious denomination as Catholic, while 3.7 percent of SDP supporters declared their religious denomination as Other (European Values Study Group, 2004).
parties after Tudjman’s death—in fact all major parties in post-Communist Croatia—has been their maintenance of a common party organizational model of rigid structure, organizational uniformity, and low levels of internal party democracy (Čular, 2004: 44).

Consistent with the literature that argues that in most cases (the Czech republic is the exception), Communist successor parties’ loss in the founding elections compels them to undergo significant reform (Bunce, 2003), the SDP genuinely transformed itself into a European social democratic party after their defeat in 1990 (CSCE, 1992: 13). Following the SKH-SDP’s defeat in 1990, Serbs left the party in great numbers and many found a home in the nationalist Serb Democratic Party (SDS). The SKH-SDP party leadership purged hardliners, embraced its role as a specifically Croatian social-democratic party and embraced social democratic ideas consistent with their West European cousins that emerged from the Socialist International, which it joined in late 1999. SDP’s leadership of the governing center-left coalition from 2000–2003 and its reformist policies that helped move Croatia toward EU membership demonstrated its commitment to democratic principles and processes. Following the death in 2007 of its last Communist and first post-Communist leader, Ivica Račan, the SDP continued to evolve and liberalize. In mid-2004, it changed its statute and leadership in an effort to increase the percentage of young people and women actively involved in the party (European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, 2008).

The war, which lasted from 1991 until the reintegration of Eastern Slavonia into Croatia in 1998, allowed the HDZ to subordinate all political issues to national security. This allowed HDZ to serve as a “vanguard” or “leading party” of Croatian national unity—much as was the case with the SKH during the period of Yugoslav socialism. The “Homeland War” (Domovinski Rat) enabled a cult of personality to develop around President Tudjman; it permitted the HDZ to monopolize all national policy making in Croatia, although the opposition did control some significant municipalities and counties or županija. The war enabled the HDZ to make real its slogan from the 1990 election: “Our name is our program.” A national-sample survey in 2000 found that supporters of HDZ were disproportionately from rural areas—more than one third (35.6 percent) of HDZ supporters lived in towns with fewer than 2000 residents. The same survey indicated that HDZ supporters also had significantly lower levels of education than SDP supporters (European Values Study Group, 2004). HDZ was not compelled to reform until it lost the 2000 elections and faced concerted international pressure (see below).

The Independent Democratic Serbian Party (SDSS) filled the third corner of the triangle of communist party succession in Croatia as the vehicle that has provided genuine political voice to Serbs seeking to work within the Croatian political system. Unlike the mid 1990s Serb People’s Party (SNS), which was considered by many Serbs as a party tainted by its blessing by the HDZ regime, SDSS sought to independently represent diverse interests of Croatia’s Serbs.
been retired from public life, the party was formed in 1997 to aggregate the political interests of Serbs who remained in Croatia after 1990, Serbs who had left Croatia for Serbia and Republika Srpska in Bosnia, and Serbs who had been active in the “Republic of Serbian Krajina” in Serb-controlled regions of Croatia during the war. Its program was explicitly committed to social democracy, multicultural society, the right of Serb return to Croatia, and for the preservation of Serb identity in Croatia. It called for good relations between Croatia and Serbia, for “permeable and soft borders between the countries” of the former Yugoslavia, for dual citizenship, and for the idea that “minorities can and must be a factor of stability in relations between states in the region…” (Program Samostalne demokratske Srpske stranke, 2008).

It appears that the most prominent explicitly ethnic parties have found a way to work together: SDSS both supported the HDZ-led Government elected in 2004 and is now part of the governing coalition formed in 2008. SDSS leaders are all former members of the SKH. Its president, Dr. Vojislav Stanimirovic, played a prominent role in Eastern Slavonia and Baranja both during the Homeland War and afterward in integrating that region into Croatia in the mid to late 1990s. Its Vice President, Dr. Milorad Pupovac, is a professor at Zagreb University who has played a significant public role in Croatian Serb politics since 1990.

Impact of path dependence on the evolution of successor parties and policies undertaken during the transition

The after effects that long attended the purge of liberals from the Communist Party in 1971 calls into question Kitschelt’s labeling of Croatia’s Communist regime as a “national consensus Communism,” where Communist elites allowed a measure of contestation and interest articulation in exchange for compliance with the basic features of the existing system (Kitschelt, 1995). As was shown above, the Croatian silence deprived Croatia of an extended period of bargaining and compromise that Kitschelt argues is necessary for producing politicians who had learned to play according to the rules of democratic competition.

As noted above, HDZ’s governance during the “Homeland War” strengthened Tudjman’s ability to retain HDZ’s dominant political position through what Gagnon labels a strategy of demobilization, sapping support for oppositionists arguing for reform. HDZ successfully undermined democratic institutions that could have helped check Tudjman’s power: the lower house of parliament (the Sabor), an independent judiciary and press, and local governance. It is also the case that the fragmentation of the political opposition to the HDZ contributed to its own weakness. Further, HDZ’s control of much of Croatia’s valuable economic resources stunted the development of a middle class independent from the ruling party. The war allowed HDZ to label its critics as “traitors” of the Croatian nation. None of the elections held after 1990 until 2000 were considered free and fair (Freedom House, 2007).

HDZ’s domination of Croatian political life ended with the conclusion of the war and its decreasing capacity to use the threat of violence to demobilize the opposition and, finally, with the death of President Tudjman. Tudjman’s death created a power vacuum that HDZ’s substantially different factions struggled to occupy. In addition,
the political defeat of prominent former Communists and HDZ moderates, Stipe Mesić and Josip Manolić in 1994 (Cohen, 1997: 97), high-level corruption within HDZ’s inner circle, and accumulating economic troubles all helped to strengthen the SDP in its campaign for parliamentary elections in 2000. Electoral reform transformed the electoral system from a winner take all system into a multimember PR system in 1999, and this ensured that the proportion of seats in the lower house more accurately reflected the proportion of the popular vote. A politically more mature public and liberal civil society also contributed to growing demands to end the HDZ’s semi-authoritarian rule (Ottaway, 2003: 121). SDP overcame personality disputes to build the larger of two coalitions in opposition to HDZ together with the Croatian Social Liberal Party (HSLS) that was led by former dissident Dražen Budiša.

The SDP—HSLS coalition platform stressed the need for change, particularly by ending support for hard-line, nationalist Croats in Herzegovina and in tackling corruption. These parties also expressed willingness for implementation of the Dayton Accords and full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (CSCE, 2000: 6). The work of internationally-supported domestic civil society organizations also made rigging the elections in 2000 much more difficult than earlier elections held after 1990. Among these organizations, Glas mobilized voters and domestic election monitoring organization, and Citizens Organized to Observe the Vote (Gradjani organizirano nadgledaju glasanje or GONG) increased the transparency and openness of the elections. (Ottaway, 2003: 121). SDP and HSLS won 71 of 151 seats in the Sabor and formed a coalition government with four other parties: the Croatian Peasants Party (HSS), the Croatian People’s Party (HNS), the Liberal Party (LS), and the regional Istrian Democratic Assembly (IDS). The high voter turnout of 75.3 percent pointed to a significant mobilization of the Croatian electorate (CSCE, 2000: 8).

HDZ’s electoral defeat by the SDP—HSLS-led coalition ushered in Croatia’s “Second Transition” (Ottaway and Maltz, 2001). Further democratization of the second transition was made possible by the Croatian Government’s reassertion of its sovereignty over its full territory, by the capacity for Serbs to meaningfully participate in Croatian public life, and by developing institutional mechanisms that could address lingering difficulties in Serb—Croat relations, including issues of Serb return to Croatia. 6 Although the 2000 elections saw significant efforts from civil society and were followed by significant political reforms, it seems clear that they do not constitute what Bunce and Wolchik (2006) characterized as an electoral revolution. The key players in Croatian politics remained the same, with the exception of President Tudjman, who died in advance of the election. Party organizations have not been significantly altered, and many in the ethnic Croatian public remained bitter about EU pressure to cooperate with ICTY (Peskin and Boduxzynski, 2003) and improve minority rights.

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6 This does not mean that these matters have been fully solved—only that the institutions are in place to address lingering difficulties in Croat-Serb relations in Croatia.
It is nonetheless the case that President Stipe Mesić and the SDP-led governing coalition did introduce reforms that significantly improved political rights and civil liberties, moving Croatia out of Freedom House’s classification as “Partly Free” to “Free” (Freedom House, 2007). The coalition transformed Croatia into a parliamentary democracy by adopting constitutional amendments that reduced the powers of Presidency. It was no longer possible for a figure, such as President Tudjman, to accumulate authoritarian power via democratic means (Linz, 1990). President Mesić also pushed the government to adopt the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities, which expanded the special representation for national minorities from 5 to 8 mandates and which guaranteed representation for minorities at all levels of elected government, in the judiciary, and in the administration (OSCE, 2003: 2).

The SDP-led coalition, however, did not have an easy time in power. Its large and fragile coalition could not quickly stamp out the authoritarian elements that had taken root in key institutions, such as in the security services, judiciary, bureaucracy, media, and business in a comprehensive reform (Ottaway, 2003: 123). And although SDP leader Račan developed SDP as a party of decency and competence, it was “insufficient to offer answers to the country’s toughest challenges, such as unemployment” (Loza, 2007). Ottaway and Maltz (2001) have argued that the EU and the US exerted too much pressure on the SDP-led government to meet unrealistic international expectations. By doing so and by underestimating the difficulty of implementing the sweeping reforms mandated by “international standards”, the international community contributed to the weakening of popular support for the SDP by compelling it to undervalue the pocket-book issues that were viewed as essential by most citizens of Croatia.

The international election observation mission from the OSCE concluded that parliamentary elections held in November 2003 under the SDP-led coalition government were conducted generally in line with OSCE commitments and international standards for democratic elections (OSCE, 2003: 1). For the first time, the two main parties representing the Serb minority in Croatia campaigned for the diaspora constituency. This appears to have contributed to increased participation by Croatian Serbs currently living in Serbia and Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, even though confusion over voting procedures for Serbs raised the concern of international monitors (OSCE, 2003: 8–9).

The death of President Tudjman and defeat of HDZ in 2000: “…opened the door to substantial transformation” of the party (Longo, 2006: 37). The relatively modest achievements of SDP-led governing coalition’s reforms and the HDZ’s embrace of EU accession helped the HDZ win the elections held in 2003, although the party was forced to form a coalition government. A relative moderate, Ivo Sanader, narrowly won re-election as president of HDZ in 2002 following a bitter conflict with a leader of the party’s rightist faction, Ivica Pašalić. Pašalić then left the HDZ and formed a rightist party, the Croatian Bloc. In preparation for the 2003 parliamentary campaign, Sanader significantly weakened the power of the party’s Herzegovinian faction, purged many right-wing extremists, and surrounded himself with a circle of mainly young, democratic, and pro-European politicians (Longo, 2006: 37). However, Sanader’s commitment to centrist and European
norms may appear more modest when compared with his support of Croatian army generals indicted by the ICTY in 2001 (Longo, 2006: 38). In practice, Sanader has continued to include in his inner circle such rightists as Vladimir Šeks and Luka Bebić. Nevertheless, this has not prevented further departures from the party of the war veterans from Vukovar and war victims, who formed “HDZ 1990”?. Nor has it prevented one of HDZ’s founders, Branimir Glavaš, from forming a rightist regional party in eastern Slavonia at the same time that he has been under domestic indictment for war crimes. The defections were not only from the party’s right. Prominent moderates, such as former Foreign Minister Granić or President Tudjman’s Chef de Cabinet Vesna Škare-Ožbolt, also bolted from the “Tudjman-less” HDZ following his death.

These defections have not seriously wounded HDZ. In 2004, HDZ claimed more than half—432,000—of the country’s 770,000 registered members of political parties (Longo, 2006, citing Forto, 2004). In contrast, the SDP could only claim 25,000 members in that same year (European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, 2008). HDZ also displays greater loyalty from its voters than does SDP. Of the respondents in a University of Zagreb Faculty of Political Science poll who voted for HDZ in 2000, almost 67 percent voted for it again in 2003, while only 35 percent of those who voted for SDP in 2000 voted for them again in 2003 (Longo, 2006: 39). This greater loyalty reflects the HDZ’s control of the levers of power in the 1990s and could also reflect a loyalty of a more rural, religious and previously non-politicized (during the Communist era) population who now support the HDZ’s national and cultural symbols and represent one key constituency of the party.

Boosted by the EU’s decision in October 2005 to open negotiations over membership with Croatia, HDZ narrowly held onto power in the 2007 parliamentary elections (Table 1). The 2007 campaign included significant discussion of HDZ and SDP’s dispute over the issue of diaspora voting. Fearing that the HDZ’s hold over Croatian diaspora in Bosnia and Herzegovina might give HDZ a victory, the SDP argued that the party or coalition which gains the most votes only within Croatia should form the government, a position shared by some other opposition parties and much of the international community (OSCE/ODIHR, 2007: 5).

### Role of international assistance in shaping outcomes

There have been two types of international influences on the domestic politics of Croatia that have pulled Croatian politics in opposite directions: the first consisted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>HDZ</th>
<th>SDP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>47.0%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In 2000, SDP formed a coalition with HSLS. In 2003, it was in coalition with the Istrian Democratic Assembly, the Party of Liberal Democrats, and the Liberal Party.
of nationalist Croats beyond Croatia and the other featured Western actors, particularly the EU. Nationalists in the diaspora and in Herzegovina were responsible for a good many of HDZ’s rightist policies that contributed to authoritarian methods and violence in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina during the war (Cohen, 1997; Pusić, 1998; Gagnon, 2004). On the other hand, the EU initially failed to exert a moderating influence over Tudjman during the war, but has subsequently played a key role in encouraging the Croatian political party system, including the HDZ, to move toward the center and undergo a “second democratic transition.” Much like the EU, the US government failed to exert much of a moderating influence over Tudjman’s HDZ. It played an advisory role in the Croatian military’s efforts to retake Serb-held territory in Operations Flash and Storm. After Tudjman’s death, Washington enjoyed some success in reaching a more receptive SDP and its coalition partners, and eventually a reformed HDZ with the message of EU integration as the solution to a democratic, prosperous, and stable Croatia.

It was HDZ, rather than SDP, that was the target of pressure by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the UN, and the EU in order to democratize Croatia and prepare it for accession. Until 1998, UN peacekeepers remained in Eastern Slavonia in order to facilitate the reintegration of that region into Croatia. In addition, the OSCE deployed a monitoring mission to Croatia in 1996, which was intended to support the Government in dealing with the consequences of the war, the reintegration of the former Serb-controlled areas, and interethnic accommodation and reconciliation. The EU’s pressure on the Croatia Government to make substantial political and economic reforms in order to meet the EU’s criteria for accession significantly enhanced the attractiveness of the HDZ’s opposition (including the SDP) in 2000.

The EU’s formal accession requirements embodied in the Copenhagen criteria—particularly its first dimension of creating stable institutions that guarantee democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities—often compel candidate countries to democratize more fully. In the late 1990s to early 2000s, the EU singled out Croatia for its failure to establish functioning democratic institutions that protected minority rights in accordance with international human rights standards. Specific concerns revolved around the Croatian Government’s failure to cooperate fully with ICTY and to demonstrate good-faith efforts to facilitate the return of Serbs displaced from Croatia (EC, 2005). What Vachudova (2005) characterizes as the EU’s “active leverage”—the EU’s influence over domestic politics of “credible” candidate states via its pre-accession process of conditionality—enabled Croatian citizens to see that HDZ’s rightest policies were likely obstructing their chances for being accepted as “European” rather than being denigrated as “Balkan” peoples. On the other hand, many Croats have resented this pressure from the EU.

This EU pressure contributed to HDZ’s loss in the 2000 elections and to its subsequent reform into a more centrist party that accepts European norms in order to meet its citizens’ desire to integrate into the EU. For the 2003 elections, the reformed HDZ vowed to speed up Croatia’s integration into the EU. The 2003 election campaign demonstrated Vachudova’s contention that once a country
becomes a “credible candidate” to the EU, that country’s political party system converged around the need to move further toward European integration. Croatian parties across the political party system in 2003 expressed a consensus on Croatia’s intentions to fulfill its international obligations to join the EU as soon as possible (OSCE/ODIHR, 2003: 11). So the real campaign debates focused on economic policy on which there was far less inter-party agreement. Further, it was only in 2005 that the EU’s intensified pressure on the reformed HDZ-led government that it took steps to apprehend ICTY indictee General Ante Gotovina (Longo, 2006: 41). Again, President Mesić played a prominent role in meeting international expectations.

Although HDZ won the formal support of the Serbs in the SDSS in 2003 and formally included them into the Government—as one of the Deputy Prime Ministers—in 2008, it has been far less successful in achieving widespread reform, particularly at the local level of the party and the state bureaucracy, that would facilitate stable return and reintegration (Longo, 2006: 41). The difficulties over Croatian cooperation with ICTY seemed glossed over by political concerns expressed by Austria, who nudged EU members toward bouncing Croatia forward in the accession process in October 2005 when it linked its willingness to accept progress made by Turkey with the EU’s simultaneous blessing of progress made by Croatia. It is true that Croatia demonstrated increased cooperation with ICTY. But it was not until later that General Gotovina was arrested in the Canary Islands in Spain. Furthermore, other governments have been more critical of Croatia’s cooperation with ICTY, as well as of its effort in practice to facilitate the return of Serb refugees to their homes in Croatia. The EU’s 2007 progress report on Croatia (EC, 2007) concluded that implementation of the Constitutional Law on National Minorities’ presented “a mixed picture,” in practice, with problems persisting particularly in terms of under-representation of minorities in state administration, the judiciary, and the police (EC, 2007: 12–13). Despite these continuing difficulties, the decision of NATO in 2008 to accept Croatia only deepened its integration into Europe and the number of forces with which it was intertwined further encouraged the expansion of an inclusionary democracy in Croatia.

Conclusion

In summary, the dissolution of the League of Communists of Croatia after 1989 as part of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia took place against the background of Yugoslav state dissolution, war, and recovery. In these circumstances, the evolution of the Croatian party system into a multiparty system in which coalition governments have become the norm exerted an important moderating influence on politics. The most logical Communist successor party—the SDP—has contributed to this democratization by providing Croatia’s electorate with a European-oriented social democratic party option. And through their “reincarnation” in organizations of SDP, HDZ, and SDSS, former Communist party members still continue to influence the options available to the Croatian electorate and play prominent roles in Croatian party politics.
Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Chip Gagnon, Taras Kuzio, and participants in the Association for the Study of Nationalities’ 2008 convention panel on Communist successor parties for their comments on a draft of this article.

Appendix A. List of political parties’ acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPY</td>
<td>Communist Party of Yugoslavia (Komunistička partija Jugoslavije)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDZ</td>
<td>Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HNS</td>
<td>Croatian People's Party (Hrvatska narodna stranka)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSLS</td>
<td>Croatian Social Liberal Party (Hrvatska socijalno liberalna stranka)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSS</td>
<td>Croatian Peasant Party (Hrvatska seljačka stranka)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDS</td>
<td>Istrian Democratic Assembly (Istarski demokratski sabor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LS</td>
<td>Liberal Party (Liberlna stranka)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDS</td>
<td>Serbian Democratic Party (Srpska demokratska stranka)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDSS</td>
<td>Independent Democratic Serbian Party (Samostalna demokratska Srpska stranka)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDP</td>
<td>Social Democratic Party (Socijaldemokratska stranka Hrvatske)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SKH-SDP</td>
<td>League of Communists of Croatia—Party of Democratic Change (Savez komunista Hrvatske—Stranka demokratske promjene), which became the SDP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNS</td>
<td>Serbian People’s Party (Srpska narodna stranka)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SKH</td>
<td>League of Communists of Croatia (Savez komunista Hrvatske)</td>
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References


Perspectives on communist successor parties:  
The case of Lithuania

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Abstract

The successor party to the Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP) has shown amazing adaptability in weathering the transition period to remain a major political force throughout the post-communist period. The LCP severed all formal ties with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and became the independent Lithuanian Democratic Labor Party (LDLP) in late 1989. As the LDLP, the party was the governing party from 1992 to 1996. In early 2001 it merged with the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP) to become the new LSDP. The LSDP has been the major party in governing coalitions from 2001 to the present. We explore the challenges that Lithuania’s successor party has faced and the reasons for its remarkable success.

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Keywords: Communism; Democratic consolidation; Lithuanian politics; Party system; Path dependence; Successor parties; Transition

Lithuania’s communist successor party has been a major political force throughout the post-Soviet period, comprising the core of governments from 1992 to 1996 and 2001 to the present. A major reason for the party’s success is that it took an
active role in helping shape the transition period. The Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP) was involved in the country’s drive for independence. Not only were party members actively involved in the Sąjūdis government that engaged Moscow in an eighteen month standoff following the declaration of the restoration of the country’s pre-war independence by the newly installed legislature on 11 March 1991, but the LCP had done much to exacerbate tensions by declaring its independence from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and renaming itself the Lithuanian Democratic Labor Party (LDLP) in the run-up to that standoff.

We argue in this paper that the remarkable adaptability of the former communist party has its roots in the Soviet era. The LCP was a shelter for those seeking to preserve Lithuanian nationalism. While the party dealt harshly with overt opposition to Soviet rule, it harbored dissension and pluralism within its own ranks on less salient issues; and it tolerated a substantial degree of non-conformism within society. The ambiguity of the party’s position emerged into the open during the late Soviet period when nationalist elements inside and outside of the LCP seized upon the opportunities presented by perestroika to radicalize the leadership of the reform movement, Sąjūdis, and steer it toward achieving the restoration of an independent Lithuanian state, a goal which the majority of the communist party ultimately came to embrace as well. This helped forge a consensus among all salient political forces in the republic. Finding itself with few supporters within Lithuania in its efforts to stop the drive toward independence, Moscow was forced to resort to violence. While the relatively high degree of consensus did not extend to the best means for achieving independence, it nonetheless resulted in an emerging political elite that was remarkably similar in its views on a wide range of policies, from privatization to national security. Hence members of the Communist party easily found their way into leadership in a number of newly formed parties as the Lithuanian party system began to take shape.

We begin by considering the roots of the LCP. Three periods of Lithuanian history are analyzed.

We briefly sketch the emergence of the political left during the period of nationalism and trace its evolution through the inter-war period (1917–1940). The dominance of social democracy is juxtaposed with the extreme weakness of the communist movement during the period. As a consequence, there was no internal transition to Communism in Lithuania. A well-organized Communist party appeared only thanks to the direct efforts and intervention from Moscow once the Red Army occupied the republic in 1940.

We then consider the Soviet period (1945–1991). Our argument is that the LCP was never able to overcome its lack of legitimacy and remained alienated from broad segments of the population. Hence, when perestroika opened up opportunities for autonomous social activities, nationalist forces within and outside of the party were able to mobilize broad social support against the “foreign” rule represented by the LCP. Once it recognized the futility of attempting to control the nationalist upsurge, the LCP reorganized and joined the movement, ultimately spearheading the effort toward independence. We conclude by considering the impact of the legacy of Lithuania’s path to independence on the former Communist party.
The roots of the Lithuanian left

Following its political union with Poland and attendant Christianization in 1387, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania entered a long period of decline. The smaller numbers of Lithuanians in the union with Poland meant that Lithuania was relegated to the status of junior partner. The 1569 Treaty of Lublin locked in that status by merging what had been two separate sets of political institutions. By the eighteenth century, the once proud Lithuanian nation was reduced to an agrarian eastern province of Poland.

Russia’s acquisition of Lithuania in 1795 simply traded Polish political and social dominance for Russian dominance. However, Polish culture continued to dominate. While Lithuanian was spoken by common-folk and peasants, Polish was the language of discourse in the region’s largest city, Vilnius. So overwhelming was Polish cultural dominance that the first work of fiction did not appear in Lithuanian until 1775. That changed by the uprising of 1863. An earlier insurrection against Russian rule in 1830–1831 was confined predominantly to the Polish-speaking population of the cities and larger towns who demanded the reinstitution of Polish rule. The education and social reforms attending the formal declaration of the end of serfdom in the Russian Empire in 1861 created opportunities for social mobility by the Lithuanian-speaking population that contributed to the 1863 insurrection, the goal of which was an independent Lithuanian state. The event properly marks the beginning of the Lithuanian nationalist movement. As elsewhere in Europe, the Lithuanian people began to recognize themselves as a nation. The newly educated Lithuanian intellectuals played a prominent role in the process, writing the nation’s history, restoring its written language, and developing its literature.

It was during this period of national awakening that a social democratic movement first emerged. The earliest efforts to organize workers occurred among Jews and Poles in Vilnius. By 1889 these efforts were extended to Lithuanian-speaking workers throughout the territory, which culminated with the formation of the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania (LSDP) in 1895 (Sabaliunas, 1990). Following its repression by the Russian Tsar from 1897 to 1899, the party re-emerged in 1900 in a more radicalized version. If initially it had focused on obtaining workers’ rights, in its resurrected form the party committed itself to an independent national state (Sabaliunas, 1990). In 1905 it played a major role in the Great Seimas of Vilnius at which the groundwork was laid for an independent Lithuania.

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 induced a split within the ranks of the LSDP. The Bolsheviks, who had enjoined almost no organizational strength in Lithuania, now found themselves with a substantial membership for the first time. While the LSDP continued to call for incremental change within an independent Lithuania, the newly formed Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP) favored a violent revolution and union within a new workers’ state uniting the territories of the former Russian Empire (Sabaliunas, 1990). The upsurge in the fortunes of the LCP was short-lived. Following the defeat and subsequent withdrawal of Russian Bolshevik military forces, the LCP was relegated to a minor role in Lithuanian politics for the rest of the inter-war period. While it managed to gain five seats in the elections to the first national legislature (the Seimas), it lost those seats in the next election. In contrast, the LSDP, which was
a signatory to the Act of Independence of Lithuania on 16 February 1918, regularly won between ten and eighteen per cent of the vote in elections (Sabaliunas, 1990; Eidintas, 1997a), reaching its zenith in 1926, when it entered into a coalition government with the Populists. Following a military coup dissolving the legislature that same year, the LCP was officially outlawed and the LSDP was subjected to continual harassment and arrests and until it was disbanded in 1936 (Eidintas, 1997b).

Hence, on the eve of the decision to forcibly incorporate Lithuania into the Soviet Union, Moscow was faced with imposing its rule with a communist party with virtually no popular base of support and precious little organizational capacity (Senn, 2007). It may have been possible to have done so without the LCP. The Soviet Union could have mustered the assistance of a substantial portion of Lithuania’s intellectuals and political elites to remove the highly unpopular authoritarian president, Antanas Smetona, and set up a new government. The population would have supported the effort as well given the generally positive view of the Soviet Union, an image enhanced by Moscow’s decision to return the country’s capital, Vilnius, which had been seized by the Poles in the inter-war period (Senn, 2007). While the Soviets initially did rely on the general opposition to Smetona, it eventually decided to prop up the LCP as the sole ruling party in the country. Despite an established social democratic tradition that easily would have permitted the resurrection of a party with a strong social base of support, Moscow fundamentally loathed the ideology and approach to governance of Lithuania’s social democratic left. Only Bolshevik rule could be tolerated.

The LCP’s weakness forced the Kremlin to dispatch the deputy chief of the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, Vladimir Dekanozov, to supervise the process of the annexation of Lithuania (Senn, 2007). All decisions of import were taken by Dekanozov, who provided assistance to the LCP in carrying out his decisions. The LCP’s leader, Antanas Sniečkus, had to be released from jail; and its organization had to be expanded. The party became a republican affiliate of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and was declared the only legal political organization in the republic. Its membership staffed all social, economic, and political positions of import. The leadership of the Social Democratic Party was imprisoned or deported, or it managed to escape abroad where the party continued to operate as part of the Socialist International.

In retrospect, the LCP’s weakness probably served Soviet interests. The lack of popular legitimacy and poorly developed cadre meant that the party would not likely be able to establish a popular base of support and therefore would continue to rely on Moscow for legitimacy. If that was the intent, in some respects it failed. While the party, as an arm of the Soviet Union, never achieved popular legitimacy, the party as the preserver of Lithuanian culture did.

**Regime type in the Soviet era: National Communism?**

But for a brief interlude, when the Germans forced the Red Army out of the country in 1941, Lithuania was a constituent republic of the Soviet Union from 1940 to 1991. The LCP, as Moscow’s agent, was entrusted with assuring Soviet rule
throughout the period. While the Soviet Union was a highly centralized state with all political and economic power controlled by the CPSU, it delegated executive responsibility to the LCP and, as Vardys (1966, p. 515) once noted: “In trying to appease both [the CPSU and the general population of the republic], their [leaders’ of republican communist parties] general pattern [was] to seek out the limits of Moscow’s tolerance and to retreat, if not too late, in the face of an accomplished central policy directive.” Lithuania’s party bosses were particularly adept at doing so.

For certain, the LCP jealously guarded its monopoly on political power, representing any possibility of an opposition. Antanas Sniečkus, the party’s first secretary from August 1940 to 22 January 1974, organized the mass deportations of Lithuani-ans to exile in Northern Russia and Siberia. Official statistics indicate that more than 120,000 people were deported during the period of 1941–1952 (Tarptautinė komisija, 2005). Some unofficial sources claim that more than 300,000 were deported. Either figure is extraordinarily large for a population the size of Lithuania’s. While the deportations touched all levels of society, it fell particularly hard on the country’s political, economic, and cultural elite — government officials, politicians, military officers, entrepreneurs, well-to-do farmers, professors, school teachers, artisans, scientists, university students, and priests. The consequence was that Lithuanian society was converted into dependence on the hierarchical power structures, of which the LCP stood at the apex (Schopflin, 2000).

Sniečkus also ruthlessly suppressed the “forest brothers,” an armed movement that successfully impeded Soviet efforts to extend effective control over the Lithuanian countryside until 1953. Tens of thousands participated in the almost decade long partisan struggle against the Soviet regime.

At the same time, however, Sniečkus was able to stake out a certain degree of autonomy in his relations with Moscow. From 1945 to 1950, he was successful on several occasions in protecting communists with whom he had worked in the underground from being purged. In fact, thanks to his efforts, Lithuania was the only republic of the Soviet Union which avoided a mass purge of old communists. He was also able to obtain a degree of autonomy on issues of national and cultural identity. His basic strategy was to sabotage orders from Moscow while simultaneously pushing for greater freedom of action at the republican level (Urbonaitė, 2002). His most obvious success was blocking the Russification of Lithuania. Under Stalin, Russians enjoyed an elevated social status as “elder brothers” within the Soviet Union. The effort to create a single Soviet people resulted in Russian culture and the Russian language being accorded primacy (Kirkwood, 1991; Gorovsky and Rimanenko, 1991).

The primary tool for accomplishing this was industrialization, which would result in a net in-migration of Russian specialists and urbanization. In neighboring Latvia, the percentage of Russians rose from its pre-war level of 10.6 per cent to 26.6 per cent at the time of the census in 1959 (Vardys, 1966). In Lithuania the numbers of Russians increased more modestly, from an estimated 2 per cent in pre-war period to 8.5 per cent in 1959. Sniečkus accomplished this by resisting central planners’ efforts to industrialize the republic by arguing that Lithuania was an important source of
food for the Soviet Union. He also succeeded in keeping Kaliningrad region from being annexed to Lithuania, a move that would have markedly increased the Russian population of the republic.

Hence, similarly to some of the countries of the Warsaw Pact, the LCP leadership was able to carve out a “national communist” approach in its relations with Moscow. While the party toed the line on the most important political directives, it sought to ensure the maximal degree of cultural autonomy possible, to include the use of the Lithuanian language in daily discourse throughout the republic. One of the most important projects was the preservation of Trakai castle from 1951 to 1967. A medieval capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Trakai is a prominent symbol of Lithuanian national identity. The LCP was so aggressive in its efforts to preserve Lithuanian culture from Sovietization that it was often criticized not only for economic chauvinism but for educational and cultural “nationalism.” On occasion, Moscow signaled its pique with the intensity with which the LCP pursued the effort. For instance, several members of the Central Committee of the LCP, to include Kazys Preiksˇas, were removed in the 1960s for being too overtly “nationalist” (Vardys, 1966). Particular criticism was also frequently leveled at the policies of the Ministry of Culture in the secondary schools and higher education (Račkauskaitė).

In the 1950s, the rector of the University of Vilnius and number of professors were dismissed on charges of “nationalist” deviation (Račkauskaitė).2

Opposition during the Soviet era

Paradoxically, Sniečkus’ successful strategy to skirt Moscow’s directives opened up space for the dissident movement in the republic in the wake of de-Stalinization in the 1960s. Not only were his methods used by members at all levels within the LCP to promote greater autonomy in universities, enterprises, and collective farms, but the republic’s success in defending Lithuanian cultural identity and expanding it throughout the education system together with the slowing of industrialization strengthened the political hand of regime opponents. In contrast to the LCP, which both supported Soviet political power in the republic while at the same time working to reduce its influence over cultural matters, the opposition resisted Soviet power in all of its manifestations and forms.

Indeed, Lithuanian opposition to the Soviet regime was arguably stronger and more visible than anywhere else in the Soviet Union. Its clearest manifestation was the dissident movement, which expressed itself along two axes: nationalists and liberals. The nationalists comprised a disparate set of underground organizations committed to resisting cultural “genocide” (Russification) and declaring the

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1 The roots of the concept can be found in the Soviet-Yugoslav rapprochement in the late 1950s, when the 20th Congress of the CPSU promulgated the doctrine of the “national roads to socialism.” The doctrine recognized four different models of socialist construction: (1) the Soviet; (2) people’s democracy; (3) the Chinese; and (4) the Yugoslav (Morris, 1959).

2 In 1956, J. Bulavas was dismissed from his position as the rector of University of Vilnius after he refused to exclude 285 students “for anti-Soviet activities”. Two years later he was expelled from the LCP as well.
country’s 1940 incorporation into the Soviet Union to have been an illegal act. Among such groups were The Initiative Group for the Preservation of the Lithuanian Language, The Helsinki Group of Lithuania, and The League of Freedom for Lithuania (LLL). The most radical of these groups, the LLL, which was created on 15 June, 1978, demanded the re-establishment of the republic’s pre-war independence. It published and distributed two illegal publications throughout the 1980s, Vytis and Laisvės Šaudiklys (Račkauskaitė, 1998).

Closely associated with the nationalists were elements of the dissident movement supporting greater freedom of religious expression. Less concerned with political independence, these groups were identified with the Catholic Church. Their major illegal publication, the Chronicles of the Lithuanian Catholic Church, reported Soviet crimes against religious freedom from 1972 to 1988 and was arguably the single most widely circulated source of information in the entire dissident movement.

Like the nationalists, the liberals opposed Russification efforts and supported maintenance of the national culture. However, they eschewed a focus on the Soviet occupation, directing their criticism instead at the failures of the Soviet system and demanding that rights accorded to cultural minorities as well as fundamental human rights guaranteed citizens by the Soviet Constitution be honored. The primary illegal publication expressing this position was Perspektyvos (Račkauskaitė, 1998), a leftist journal promoting “socialism with a human face.” The editors were academics and members of the Lithuanian intelligentsia with ties to the LCP. The journal’s twenty-two issues arguably had the least influence among dissident publications.

Much of the cadre for the dissident organizations was drawn from the ranks of former deportees and members of the partisan movement who returned to Lithuania after they were released from the labor camps by Khruschev in the 1960s. The exact numbers are not known, but more than ten per cent of the country’s population spent time in the GULAG. Among those who later became active in the dissident movement were Balys Gajauskas, Antanas Terleckas, Viktoras Petkus, and Stasys Sungurys.

Young people were also particularly active in the dissident movement. From the late 1970s to the collapse of Soviet rule, a significant number of small, secret clubs emerged espousing either the views of the nationalists or the liberals, or both. Each had its own organizational structure, internal regulations, and a program. The youth clubs such as: “The Free Lithuania,” “The Committee for the Freedom of Lithuania,” and “Freedom for Lithuania!” (Račkauskaitė, 1998), printed and distributed anti-Soviet leaflets. They were also responsible for the continuous appearance of anti-Soviet slogans in public places. Moreover, they frequently desecrated the flags of the USSR and Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic and hoisted the banned national flag on national holidays of the pre-Soviet era calendar.

It is worth noting that the dissident movement was given substantial encouragement by international events. The crises that erupted in East Germany and Bulgaria in 1953, Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Poland in 1980–1981 were all attended by demonstrable upsurges in overt acts of opposition in Lithuania. Even more significant was the 1975 adoption of the Helsinki Final Act, in which the member states of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
(CSCE), to include the Soviet Union, committed themselves to respecting human rights. The Act paved the way for Lithuanians to report violations. This was the major impetus for the founding of the previously mentioned samizdat publications, *The Helsinki Group of Lithuania* in November 1976, as well as the *Chronicles of the Lithuanian Catholic Church*.

While the dissidents provided the most overt examples of resistance, the real threat to the regime was posed by the widespread passive resistance of the general public that was expressed in acts of non-conformism. Non-conformist resistance included avoiding participation in Soviet ceremonies, administrative posts, and social organizations. Non-conformism marked the life of the republic to a significant extent. It was particularly manifest at Vilnius University within the Philosophy Department, and it found expression as well within the very ranks of the LCP. Moreover, non-conformity significantly contributed to the distribution of illegal literature, or *samizdat*, which included the previously discussed illegal publications of the dissident movement. The circulation of these clandestine publications was a particularly pervasive phenomenon in Lithuania (Hyung-min, 2005).

This more passive form of regime opposition was further fueled by elements of the dissident movement supporting freedom of expression for the Catholic Church. Given the connection of Roman Catholicism to Lithuanian national identity (Račkauskaitė, 1998) and the official promotion of atheism by the Soviet state, religious expression not only affirmed one’s national identity, but it was an act of defiance against the regime. The Hill of Crosses outside of the northern city of Šiauliai makes the point most elegantly. Throughout the Soviet period, citizens repeatedly planted crosses on the hill despite regime efforts to stop the practice.

While non-conformity was the general rule, public opposition to the regime could from time to time flare into violence. The most prominent of these occasional flare-ups is associated with the self-immolation of nineteen-year-old Romas Kalanta on 14 May 1972 in front of the Music Theater in Kaunas. Kalanta’s protest was followed by the placement of an explosive device by young factory workers next to a statue in Šiauliai and three subsequent self-immolations and one unsuccessful attempt, which sparked two days of riots in Kaunas on 18—19 May in what was widely viewed as a protest against Soviet rule in the republic. Other politically motivated self-immolations occurred throughout the Soviet period, to include those of Mindaugas Tomonis on 5 November 1975, Antanas Kalinauskas on 10 August 1976, and Stanislovas Žemaitis in Moscow on 26 April 1990. While seldom repeated with such intensity, the widespread disorder associated with Kalanta’s self-immolation reveals the depth and breadth of the popular resistance to the regime.

Hence, by the late Soviet period, there was widespread and pervasive resistance to Soviet rule throughout Lithuania. While professional dissidents occasionally engaged in violence or overt acts of resistance, in the main, public resistance was most often expressed in the form of passive or non-conformist behavior. Such behavior extended to the intelligentsia and the LCP itself, the mainstays of Soviet rule in the republic. *Perestroika* let the genie out of the bottle.
Lithuania’s transition from Communism

One of the central claims of the literature on democratic transitions is that the break with authoritarianism is elite driven and that the mode of transition influences the ensuing regime and its institutions (Munck and Leff, 1997). Most scholars argue that a division within the ruling class opens up the possibility of political liberalization. The strength and role of the opposition is critical to the mode of transition from authoritarian rule which, in turn, shapes the institutional framework that subsequently emerges (Huntington, 1991; McFaul, 2001; Munck and Leff, 1997). The general argument is that the stronger the opposition, the more likely it is that the transition will be marked by a series of negotiated compromises, or pacts, between old regime elites and the counter-elites representing civil society in opposition to the regime. These pacts represent power-sharing arrangements, which assure that institutions are put in place that serve as checks and balances on the interests of each party (Huntington, 1991; McFaul, 2001). If, however, the opposition is so strong that it overwhelms the regime, then the ensuing transition will represent a more complete break (ruptura) from the old regime and no pacts are likely. Finally, in the absence of any serious opposition, the regime may choose to lead the transition through a series of reforms (reforma), in which case the outcome will be dominated by the interests of the old regime (Gill, 2002; Huntington, 1991).

We argue that the transition in Lithuania is best described by the first pattern, which Huntington (1991) labels transplacement. While there were no formal negotiations between ruling elites and the opposition in Lithuania, moderates within the old regime cooperated with the opposition to sustain the drive for independence until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Linz and Stepan (1996) argue that the prior regime type has implications for the path to democratic transition. We take pains to point out in the narrative to follow that there is indeed an inter-play between the two. However, contrary to their contention that totalitarian regimes do not permit the emergence of an organized opposition, which denies the possibility of pacted negotiations between it and the old regime, we argue that is what occurred in Lithuania. Hence, the Lithuanian case fits into Linz and Stepan’s model of a post-totalitarian state, in which “de-totalitarianization” was implemented by choice, not as a consequence of decay or collapse.

Our focus on the inter-play between domestic forces does not mean to imply that international factors were irrelevant. We quite agree with Linz and Stepan’s (1996) point that the speed as well as the very possibility of the transitions in Eastern Europe cannot be understood apart from the collapse of the Soviet regime. Indeed, were it not for the rapid collapse of Soviet power, regime change in Lithuania might not have been possible at all. Furthermore, the 1991 transition was not the first time that Lithuania had experienced democratization. Based on Huntington’s (1991) periodization schema, the period following Lithuania’s independence in 1918 can be considered as part of the first wave of democratization and the authoritarian rule of Smetona part of the reversal of the first wave. We have already discussed some of the events associated with both in Lithuania. This first period of democratization has
had an effect on the party system in the second, of which the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP) is the most direct evidence.

The “Opening”

An important question is: when did the transition to democracy begin in Lithuania? Several scholars have argued that democratic transition began only after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Gill, 2002). Among those holding this position Rose et al. (1998) contend that the collapse of Communism in Soviet Union was so rapid that it did not permit time for new institutions to emerge. The argument is premised on the notion that negotiated pacts between regime elites and opposition leaders must take place within formal settings or round-tables. If we accept this position, then negotiations leading to meaningful agreements between the former regime elites and opposition did not begin until then.

We reject the contention. It is true that the most visible evidence of a formal pact was the 1992 construction of a new Constitution. In May of that year, the national parliament entered a prolonged period of gridlock, which reached a point at which it literally divided into two groups of deputies working in separate locations. The crisis was resolved with the decision to write a new Constitution. The compromise document worked out between old regime elites and leaders of the opposition was ratified by the electorate in October 1992. Nonetheless, while this may be the only evidence of a formal pact, it could not have been worked out without the tacit agreements that had been reached over the course of the period prior to independence. It was during that period that regime elites and the opposition reached a very large number of tacit agreements on the rules of the game.

Our narrative marks the beginning of the transition as the decision of the regime to accept the outcome of the Third Congress of Sąjūdis. The Congress, which took place on 16 February 1989 (independence day on the pre-war calendar), declared an independent Lithuanian state as the movement’s goal. The LCP might have shut down the emerging opposition at this point, but it did not. Instead, it elected to try to influence the direction of the movement. As a consequence, the two became locked in a lengthy period of tacit bargaining during which a considerable number of agreements were reached. While negotiations between the LCP and Sąjūdis were seldom formal, the agreements that were reached were no less valid. By the time of independence, not only had many of the policies that the country would follow been agreed upon, but the patterns of interaction between old regime elites and the opposition by which these agreements had been achieved laid the groundwork for the 1992 negotiations over the Constitution. More importantly, the agreements reached on the “rules of the political game” held upon independence. Among these norms were those under-girding a competitive party system.

Sąjūdis and the former LCP emerged as the dominant political forces following independence. While neither quite liked the other, tolerance was clearly displayed in the 1992 legislative elections that gave the latter a majority of seats and the election of party leader Algirdas Brazauskas as the first occupant of the newly created office of President in early 1993. The same tolerance was once again on display in the
parliamentary victory by the remnants of Sąjūdis in the 1996 parliamentary elections. Based on the “two-turnover rule,” the 1996 elections properly marked the end of the transition.

The transition itself was made possible by the series of reforms initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev beginning in 1985. Labeled perestroika, the goal of these reforms was a reduction in the role of central planning, decentralization of decision-making, an expanded role for market mechanisms, and increased opportunities for private initiative in services and small scale production. Many of these goals were successfully blocked by the Soviet bureaucracy and the Communist Party apparat, but a number of significant political changes occurred, to include greater openness and publicity in the media (glasnost), increased pluralism of opinions, and secret elections to state bodies (Mason, 1988). None of these reforms, however, were aimed at the abandonment of CPSU rule. Quite the opposite, the intent was to strengthen and solidify CPSU rule. Nonetheless, they represented a crack in the unity of the elites.

The Lithuanian response to perestroika was quite slow in coming. The first serious efforts to organize a movement to support Gorbachev’s reform were not launched until the formation of Sąjūdis (Senn, 1990, 1995), the Lithuanian Movement in Support of Restructuring, at a meeting of party activists and academics at Vilnius University in late 1988. Part of the explanation for the delay is that Lithuanian society had long repressed active engagement in politics. Indeed, non-involvement was a part of the general attitude of non-conformity that lay at the heart of opposition to the regime. It was so deeply ingrained in the general population that even dissident organizations had not been successful in mobilizing the public. This was not easily overcome, all the more so since, by supporting perestroika, Sąjūdis would be legitimizing Soviet rule.

Not surprisingly, therefore, Sąjūdis initially was not broadly representative of society. Rather, it was an amalgam of intellectuals representing a mood for change and members of the Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP) keen to implement the reforms proposed by Moscow within the context of perestroika. Indeed, most of the Sąjūdis founding members were also LCP members. Significantly, however, the organization had the backing of the LCP leadership, which meant that the movement had access to the formal resources necessary to mobilize Soviet society: the media and places to convene meetings. The involvement of intellectuals also meant that the resources of the republican Academy of Science, Union of Writers, and Union of Artists could be mustered in support of the movement.

The value of Sąjūdis to the LCP leadership is obvious. The only other credible organized activities were too radical. Nationalist dissident groups such as the Lithuanian Freedom League (Lietuvos laisvės lyga) led by Antanas Terleckas and the clergy of the Catholic Church were fundamentally opposed to the regime, and the liberals had generally failed to gain any traction with the general public. Sąjūdis

3 Bulota (2003) refers to this as “the consciousness of withstanding.” He argues that “the consciousness of withstanding” was established in the early days of the partisan resistance.
offered a more moderate movement suitable for mobilizing the public for negotiations with the regime change. However, the LCP leadership’s hopes in Sąjūdis were short-lived.

In many ways, perestroika was a calculated risk. Political liberalization carried with it the possibility that radical elements would seize control of the agenda from the Communist Party and lead the conversation in unintended directions. This was precisely what hard-liners warned would likely happen and in fact did happen in Lithuania. An early warning of what was coming occurred on 23 August 1987 when a small group of individuals conducted a short protest against the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. The very existence of the Pact and its secret protocols called into question the official Soviet position that Lithuania had voluntarily joined itself to the Soviet Union.

Eighteen months later, Sąjūdis was thoroughly radicalized. The platform adopted at its first Congress in October 1988 was innocent enough, focusing on protection of Lithuanian culture, strengthening the teaching of Lithuanian in schools, and correcting misrepresentations of Lithuanian history (Juozaitis, 1992). However, the Congress, which was aired on television and radio ignited society’s long latent opposition. Jettisoning passive non-conformity in favor of open opposition, large numbers of new members, many of whom left the ranks of the LCP, rapidly transformed Sąjūdis into a mass movement. Within a year the movement demanded restoration of the country’s pre-war independence and elected nationalist Vytautas Landsbergis as its leader at its Third Congress (Juozaitis, 1992).

**Negotiations and pacts**

This was a critical juncture. The LCP was now faced with an opposition movement potentially capable of mobilizing the citizenry against the regime. Faced with the decision on how best to proceed, the LCP leadership under General Secretary Algirdis Brazauskas rejected repression in favor of negotiation and tacit bargaining. In an attempt to moderate the movement’s demands for full independence, the communist-dominated legislature proclaimed the republic sovereign within the Soviet Union. However, this did little to satisfy the public and in the summer of 1989 over 2,000,000 people linked hands in a human chain stretching 650 km from Vilnius to Tallinn protesting the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. The path from here on out was one of constant bargaining between the LCP and the opposition.

The interaction between the two led to fissures within the party. Orthodox communists increasingly opposed the movement, calling for its disbandment and the end of any further talk of reform. A second group — which included Brazauskas — while criticizing Sąjūdis for its more radical positions, continued to hold out the hope that the movement could be co-opted. A third group, which included party members who were also leaders within Sąjūdis (Kazimiera Prunskienė and Romuoldas Ozolas, among others) fully supported the idea of independence (Bulota, 2003). Indeed, while many dissidents from both the nationalist and liberal persuasions joined Sąjūdis, the leadership, as well as a significant proportion of the movement’s membership, came largely from within the LCP.
The growing divide within the LCP came to head in the run-up to the 1990 republican parliamentary elections. Hoping to avoid defeat, the Brazauskas faction and many in the latter group voted to declare itself independent of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and to rename itself the Lithuanian Democratic Labor Party (LDLP). Others who supported independence continued to leave the party. Those remaining loyal to Moscow formed the LCP(CPSU), which retained formal ties with the CPSU.

Despite the newly formed LDLP, Saļūsis-backed candidates won a resounding majority of legislative seats and after electing Vytautas Landsbergis as parliamentary leader, declared the formal restoration of independence, plunging the republic into an eighteen month standoff with Moscow that turned violent on several occasions. The extended confrontation with the Kremlin united both Saļūsis and the LDLP on the issue of independence, which the country achieved de facto in September 1991 when Gorbachev recognized Lithuania’s independence in the wake of the abortive August coup. International recognition immediately followed; and the country was admitted to the United Nations on 17 September 1991.

The Communist successor party

Saļūsis and the LDLP emerged as the dominant political forces in the wake of the restoration of the country’s independence. Given that the LDLP took with it the party’s infrastructure and much of the membership, its relationship with the LCP is unambiguous. The other party whose relationship was the most direct was the Lithuanian Socialist Party (LSP), which largely comprised the remnants of the former LCP who remained loyal to Moscow and the CPSU. The party was not able to sustain itself past the 1992 elections. Its members subsequently disbanded and attached themselves to a number of smaller left-of-center parties that offered them the potential for personal political gain. Among them have been the New Union/Social Liberals (NS/SL), the Lithuanian Polish Electoral Action (LLRA) and its predecessor the Union of Poles of Lithuania, and more recently the Lithuanian Labor Party (LDP).

In a peculiar way most of the other parties in the political system are also spin-offs first of the former LCP and then of Saļūsis. Their leadership cadres and members were largely drawn from the ranks of the communist party. For its part, Saļūsis was the creation of the LCP. Its founding congress was authorized by the party and its existence was protected by the LCP. Almost immediately after the movement’s victory in the 1990 parliamentary elections it began to fragment. A substantial degree of discord among its deputies led to the formation of several factions, some of which formed the basis for new parties, including the Center Union. Further fragmentation

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4 An abortive effort to reassert Soviet rule in Lithuania left fourteen dead and scores wounded in January 1991, when elements of the Red Army seized the republic’s radio and television transmission tower and its central press building. In July 1991, several Lithuanian border guards were found executed at the Medininkai post.

5 This accords with Ishiyama’s (1999) definition of a Communist successor party as one taking the preponderance of the party’s resources and personnel.
occurred in the wake of the defeats in the 1992 parliamentary elections and the 1993 presidential elections, following which the decision was taken to form a political party, the Homeland Union (Conservatives of Lithuania), from the remnants of the once unified social movement (Clark, 1995).

Most of the parties with virtually no direct or indirect ties to the LCP were small parties founded by dissidents, among them the Union of Lithuanian Nationalists (LTS), the Lithuanian Union of Political Prisoners and Exiles (LPKTS) and the Lithuanian Freedom League (LLL). The only major parties with virtually no ties to the LCP were the Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party (LCDP) and the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP). Both were pre-war parties. The LCDP was strongly influenced by the Diaspora, which provided a substantial proportion of the leadership. The LSDP re-emerged in August 1989 when 150 delegates attended a founding congress and declared their new party the heir of the pre-war Social Democratic Party. The party declared as its primary goal an independent Lithuanian state and was shortly thereafter admitted to the Socialist International. Only one of its leaders, Gintautas Iešmantas, had been actively engaged in the liberal wing of the dissident movement. Irrespective of political differences with the LDLP, the two merged into the new LSDP following the parliamentary elections of late 2000.

Despite the links that many parties had with the former communist party, it remains that only the LDLP took with it the infrastructure of the former LCP. The LCP(CPSU) and its successor, the LSP, were only able to garner those party assets that Moscow could provide. (Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the withdrawal of the Red Army, it was left with virtually no assets.) Further more, what distinguished the other parties from the LDLP and the LCP(CPSU) is that they represented an explicit rejection of the former LCP. While much of their membership was drawn from the LCP, the new members not only rejected any association with the former LCP, they eschewed any ties with its ideals and goals. In many respects, they represented that part of the membership that had always been an internal non-conformist opposition throughout the Soviet period. We are left to conclude that the sole heir of the communist party is the LDLP. Not only is its leadership drawn from the former communist party, but its lineage is directly traceable to it. Given its merger with the LSDP on 27 January 2001, the claim of being the sole communist successor party has passed to the new LSDP.

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6 While many of the ideals of the dissidents influenced the drive for independence, parties with roots traceable to the dissident movement have remained relatively unimportant in the Lithuanian political party system.

7 The LCDP later merged with the Homeland Union.

8 While the Diaspora has played a significant role in supporting the party system, for the most part very few party leaders and an insignificant proportion of party cadres have been drawn from its ranks. Indeed, despite the fact that the most prominent member of the Diaspora, Valdas Adamkus, has been elected President on two separate occasions, he has eschewed participation in party politics, as required by the Constitution. Besides the LCDP, an exception proving the general rule is the Lithuanian Christian Democratic Union (LCDS), which was founded at the initiative of, and led by, Kazys Bobelis.

9 In an interesting side note, the LDLP had been denied membership in the Socialist International given that the LSDP was already a member. The merger of the two brought the former LDLP into the Socialist International.
The impact of path dependence on the evolution of Lithuania’s party system

Scholars generally argue that a transition negotiated between the former ruling elites and the opposition (transplacement) will result in greater stability. Since both sides have agreed on the new democratic rules, a defection by either is less likely. While their participation in the process will help each to legitimate itself in the new political system, in order to succeed in electoral contests they must champion popular ideas. This is particularly important for the communist successor party, which is associated in the public’s mind with the Soviet past. We give consideration in this section of the paper to the success of the former communist party in legitimating itself during the transition period from 1989, following the Third Congress of Sąjūdis, to 1996, when elections of that year resulted in a second turnover of power. We argue that its role in the path to independence was a crucial factor in that success.

Given that most were themselves members of the LCP at one time or another, the opposition parties made a clear distinction in the transition period between those who remained in the party and those who joined Sąjūdis. They cast the LDLP as a relic of the Soviet past and the representatives of an illegal occupation by a foreign power while depicting themselves as national-patriots with roots in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and even the inter-war period of the Smetona dictatorship (Cepaitienė, 2004). This left the LDLP at a loss on how best to deal with the Soviet legacy and the party’s relationship to it. The general approach was to adopt either an idealist or pragmatist position (Cepaitienė, 2004). Those adopting the former approach argued that socialism could be implemented and represents the best path to economic and social well-being. They pointed to Sweden as a model. The latter claimed that they had been left with no other alternative than to work within the Soviet system for the practical good of the republic and that they had never adhered to idealistic socialist views.

Despite the LDLP’s apparent under-dog position given the way in which the political landscape was framed, the party did remarkably well. Much of this owes to its leader, Algirdas Brazauskas. It would be difficult to imagine that the former communist party might have been as successful without him. As the General Secretary of the LCP, Brazauskas’s ability to adapt rapidly to changing political realities and position himself on the middle ground were indispensable in his success in keeping the former communist party together as he simultaneously dealt with the challenge from Sąjūdis and led the party to break away from Moscow. His pragmatism further saved him from being associated in the public mind with illusory communist ideals. Rather, he was considered a competent manager with no particular allegiance to any set of ideological values. Consequently, it was difficult to tag him as a pawn of the Soviet regime. The worst that could be said was that he had argued initially for staying in the Soviet Union and then later for a less confrontational and more gradual path to independence. This, however, bolstered his and the LDLP’s image among those who were nostalgic about the economic security of the Soviet era. Brazauskas was able to present himself and his party as a credible supporter of both independence and Soviet-style prosperity. Furthermore, his image
as a successful manager substantially buttressed the LDLP’s argument that it could be best trusted with stewardship of the state (Vardys and Sedaitis, 1997).

The LDLP’s success also owed to the fact that the divide on the substantive issues was not that great between the parties. The hottest debates focused on symbolic issues: whether degrees granted by Communist Party schools should be considered the equivalent of a university degree, whether international women’s day or international worker’s day should be celebrated, and whether a private park displaying artifacts from the Soviet era should be legal.

What is interesting is that while the opposition frequently engaged in campaign rhetoric about how to deal with Soviet-regime collaborators, the lustration process was never seriously undertaken, even during four years of right-wing rule from 1996 to 2000. To be sure, there were high profile cases, the most famous of which is that of Kazimiera Prunckienė who ultimately cleared herself of all allegations of having been a KGB agent through a series of court cases ending in 2003. The general approach appears to have been to forget about the Soviet era. One rather suspects that this may be related to the fact that the political elites were overwhelmingly drawn from the former LCP. Indeed, no one seemed immune from the charge of having collaborated with the Soviet regime, to include Vytautas Landsbergis, the former leader of Sąjūdis and chair of the Homeland Union (Conservatives of Lithuania). There is also the likelihood as well that the decision not to deal with the issue of collaboration may have resulted from the negotiations between the LDLP and the opposition during the lengthy transition that spanned the period from the declaration of the restoration of independence to the years following international recognition of sovereignty.10

The tacit agreement on lustration extended to other substantive issues as well. Privatization, marketization, legal reform, reform of the state bureaucracy, and entry to the European Union and NATO were all undertaken with remarkably little discord. While there were disagreements on the general approach, there was substantial agreement on the goals. In fact, left-leaning LDLP-led governments took the lead in many of these areas. As with lustration, this suggests that considerable agreement between all parties had resulted from the prolonged years of negotiation on the transition. Whether those negotiations were formal or tacit, the agreements reached held. Helping to keep them in place was the recognition by the LDLP that it was in the party’s interest to implement these policies in order to legitimate itself. In fact, for that reason the communist successor party may have been more keen on doing so in some circumstances than the opposition might have been.

After more than 15 years of independence, Lithuania’s communist successor party (the LSDP since the 2001 merger with the former LSDP) remains a major party in the system. However, it is not as dominant as it once was. In fact, its unwillingness to

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10 Huntington (1991) notes that among the most serious matters for negotiation during the transition is how the members of old regime are treated.
introduce a progressive tax system and its failure to champion the labor movement have hurt it with its traditional base and opened the door to competitors, to include the Lithuanian Labor Party (LDP), the New Union/Social Liberals, and the Peasant Union (Valstiečių sąjunga). Supporting greater social equality and more willing to address worker concerns, these parties made substantial gains in the 2000 and 2004 parliamentary elections. The reluctance to stay true to social democratic values has created fissures within the LSDP as well (Tilindis, 2007). Brazauskas continues to lead the party faction that places its electoral hopes on de-linking the party from an ideological commitment in favor of competent management. A second faction within the party, led by Gediminas Kirkilas, while also pragmatic, supports social democratic values that are popular with the electorate. They are less favorable to big business than the Brazauskas faction. A third faction comprises “the old social democrats” (Alyozas Sakalas and Vytenis Andriukaitis) who are decidedly more ideologically orientated. This group is particularly keen to promote value-based social policies.

The role of international factors in the transition

The broad consensus during the transition period on major substantive issues extended to foreign affairs as well. Here the consensus was informed by a desire to “rejoin Europe.” This was understood as accession to the European Union and membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Integration in Western economic and security organizations were considered not only acts restoring historical justice, but as practical tools for undertaking fundamental reforms. The requirements to entry NATO were essential for de-linking the national defense systems of those who planned to enter the EU from Russia. The acquis communautaire were also considered essential for rapidly reforming the Lithuanian economic, social and administrative systems.

The desire to gain membership in the EU and NATO was evident in the policy discussions during the transition period. The debates that emerged did not concern strategic issues, but rather tactical issues of how to meet a given requirement. In the minds of many, this undermined the country’s hard-won sovereignty by simply replacing subservience to Moscow with subservience to Brussels. Despite this criticism, the consensus on being admitted in the EU and NATO spanned virtually the entire political spectrum. For instance, the country’s major political parties, to include the LDLP, signed a letter addressed to President Brazauskas in 1993 encouraging him to apply for membership in NATO. In 2001, the major parties signed an agreement on foreign policy goals, the “Agreement between Political Parties of the Republic of Lithuania on Defense Policy for 2001–2004;” and in 2004 this document was renewed as the “Agreement between Political Parties of the Republic of Lithuania on the Main Foreign Policy Goals and Objectives for 2004–2008”.

As was the case with so many major substantive issues, the LDLP took the lead in putting the country on the path to achieving the agreed upon goals. In fact, the
LDLP undertook the implementation of all major requirements for membership in NATO as outlined in the Individual Partnership Program, the Membership Action Plan, and the Planning and Review Process.

The singular exception to the general consensus on policy was the issue of relations with Russia. All sides agreed on the importance of joining NATO and delinking from dependence from Russia. On 8 April 1992, the national legislature overwhelmingly passed a constitutional act prohibiting formal membership in any multilateral organization on the territory of the former Soviet Union and explicitly barring entry in the Commonwealth of Independent States (Clark and Tucker, 1999). The opposition was motivated by fear of a future re-emerging “Russian threat.” However, in contrast, the LDLP de-emphasized any such threat and argued for the importance of maintaining good relations with the Russian Federation in order to assure continued access to lucrative eastern markets for Lithuanian goods, products, and services.

While all major political parties supported integration with the European economic and security architecture, Lithuania’s national minorities were somewhat more ambivalent. This was particularly the case for the Poles in the immediate aftermath of the withdrawal of Soviet forces and international recognition in fall 1991. The largest minority in the country (about seven per cent in 1991), many Poles were greatly concerned that post-Soviet Lithuania would be a nationalist state that would radically curtail the development and expression of minority cultures. These fears were fueled by the imposition of direct rule that had been instituted to counter the threat of secession in the Polish-dominated regions. The leaders of these regions, which surround the capital of Vilnius, had supported the maintenance of Soviet rule in the republic. Fearing retribution, they sought to remain within the Soviet Union. The weakness of the Soviet Union and its subsequent collapse by year’s end led them to petition Warsaw to accept them. While the Poles protested against direct rule and urged Vilnius to provide guarantees of the interests of the Polish minority, Warsaw eschewed any desire to reincorporate the Vilnius region.

Part of Warsaw’s motivation was to avoid opening up any sensitive questions, particularly related to border changes, so as not to undermine its efforts to achieve membership in NATO and the EU. While the overtly nationalist Sąjūdis leadership was unable to seize upon the common interests of the two states to rejoin Europe, the election of an LDLP majority in the legislative elections of late 1992 and the election of Brazauskas as president in early 1993 opened the doors for the renegotiation of relations between Poland and Lithuania. By 1995, several treaties had been signed between the two countries assuring the interests of the Polish minority, as a consequence of which Poland became Lithuania’s patron in its effort to gain membership in NATO and the EU, and the Polish minority resigned itself to being citizens in a Lithuanian state. The major party representing the interests of the Polish community, the Polish Electoral Action of Lithuania (LLRA), supported the drive to achieve membership in both NATO and the EU.
For their part, Lithuania’s Russian-speaking population never presented a serious threat to integration with Europe. Similarly to Estonia and Latvia, they were largely residents in urban areas; but in contrast to the other two states, their numbers were quite small. As a consequence, many were substantially assimilated, a fact that reduced the development of a sense of community across the dispersed population. Hence, in contrast to the Poles, Lithuania’s Russian-speaking community was not able to organize a political party representing its interests and mostly voted for the LDLP or other parties of the left. Since the LDLP led the drive for European integration, the Russian-speaking population was left with little hope of derailing the effort. Hence, it resigned itself to using what influence it had to urge the maintenance of amicable ties with Russia, a goal shared by major economic interests on the political right and left.

Conclusions

Moscow’s rule in Lithuania depended almost entirely on its willingness to exercise decisive force against any opposition. Even so, a latent opposition continued to exist not only within society but within the Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP). Perestroika made possible public expressions of opposition. When these initial expressions were not repressed, “the genie was let out of the bottle.” The country was quickly engulfed in a powerful social movement that would not settle for anything less than national independence. Even the LCP eventually became part of the movement, declaring its independence from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and renaming itself the Lithuanian Democratic Labor Party (LDLP). Indeed, it was the membership of the former communist party that was most consequential to the formation of the counter elite with which the LDLP found itself constrained to negotiate during the transition period. Former communist party members were at the forefront of the Sąjūdis movement as well as the emergence of new parties, both those with roots in the pre-war period as well as new ones. While dissidents provided the leadership for some of the parties, these parties tended to remain small. The same was true for parties that attracted members of the Diaspora, in particular the Christian Democrats. Hence, rather paradoxically, the LCP provided the cadre for both the successor party as well as the core of the opposition; and while the opposition initially took the lead in mobilizing the citizenry and in so doing giving birth to civil society, the communist successor party was able to compete on this dimension by the time of independence.

It is tempting to argue that the LDLP is not a true communist successor party and that the only successor party, the LCP(CPSU), met its end shortly after independence. The most compelling evidence for such a case is that the LDLP completely jettisoned Marxism–Leninism in favor of a moderate left-of-center (social democratic) pragmatic approach without which it would not have been able to undertake privatization and marketization. The de-ideologization of the party also gave it space to integrate major elements of the nationalist
project in the drive to “rejoin Europe.” At the same time, the LDLP’s moderate position on nationalism won it the support of the Polish and Russian-speaking minorities, while its role in achieving measurable progress toward membership in NATO and the EU helped establish the LDLP as a serious contender for the votes of all elements in Lithuanian society. Despite the argument for de-ideologization, the LDLP’s ties with the LCP are nonetheless clear. Unlike other parties, the LDLP maintained the leadership, organization, and physical infrastructure of the LCP. Furthermore, in the subsequent political discourse, in contrast with all other parties the LDLP was firmly associated in the public’s mind with the Soviet past.

The LDLP’s association with the past, however, did not do it harm. In fact, part of that past — that having to do with economic stability and non-ideological, competent stewardship — contributed greatly to its remaining a major political party, one that has formed the core of governments from 1992 to 1996 and 2001 to the present. Perhaps the single most important reason for the party’s success was its ability to take part in the informal pacts that gave shape to the emergence of the post-independence system. Among these were agreements on major substantive issues that resulted in a substantial consensus among the entire spectrum of the party system.

The LDLP’s active support for and its role in achieving this degree of consensus gave it legitimacy and sheltered it from much of the effort to brand it as a traitorous institution that had served the interests of a foreign occupation. Paradoxically, however, the implementation of the program necessary to achieve these goals, particularly those betraying conventional social democratic concerns, has weakened the LDLP electorally over time and opened up space on the political left for the emergence of populist parties. As a consequence, the early independence period, which was marked by a majoritarian party system, gave way to an era of multi-party politics in the wake of the 2000 parliamentary elections, which failed to return a majority party. However, the LDLP transformation to a social democratic party was so thorough by then that a merger with the LSDP to form the new LSDP was possible, as a result of which the new LSDP has remained the plurality party in every governing coalition since the 2001 collapse of the center-right government of Rolandas Paksas.

Apart from the general consensus on policy that marked the transition era from 1989 to 1996, the most important of the agreements between the former communist party and the opposition were those over the democratic rules of the game. While no formal negotiations took place, a tacit agreement was achieved before independence on the basic framework. Those rules were further worked out following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and they have remained in place. Hence, Lithuania’s path to independence most closely adheres to Huntington’s (1991) transplacement. Munck and Leff (1997) label the path as reform through extrication, which involves elements of both cooperation and confrontation. Most scholars agree that this is the path most closely associated with the best prospects for democratic consolidation.
Appendix. Names of parties and their acronyms

| Christian Democratic Party of Lithuania | LCDP |
| Communist Party of the Soviet Union | CPSU |
| Communist Party of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic | LCP |
| Democratic Labor Party of Lithuania | DLP |
| Homeland Union (Conservatives of Lithuania) | TS/LK |
| Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party | LCDP |
| Lithuanian Christian Democratic Union | LCDS |
| Lithuanian Communist Party | LCP |
| Lithuanian Communist Party (loyal to the CPSU) | LCP(CPSU) |
| Lithuanian Democratic Labor Party | LDLP |
| Lithuanian Freedom League | LLL |
| Lithuanian Labor Party | LDP |
| The Lithuanian Movement in Support of Restructuring | Sąjūdis |
| Lithuanian Polish Electoral Action | LLRA |
| Lithuanian Social Democratic Party | LSDP |
| Lithuanian Socialist Party | LSP |
| Lithuanian Union of Political Prisoners and Exiles | LPKTS |
| New Union/Social Liberals | NS/SL |
| Peasant Union of Lithuania | Valstiečių sąjunga |
| Social Democratic Party of Lithuania | LSDP |
| Union of Lithuanian Nationalists | LTS |

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The (not always sweet) uses of opportunism: Post-communist political parties in Poland

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Abstract

The author argues that political opportunism, an attitude common among communist party members before 1989, turned into both the blessing and the curse for post-communist parties in Poland. Once hopeful of secure careers in the authoritarian structures of the old regime, after the regime breakdown communists found themselves in a situation where the only chance for such a career could be associated with the party reinventing itself as a player in the field of pluralist democracy. Opportunistic attitudes of communist apparatchiks and nomenklatura members were instrumental in transforming them, individually and collectively, into effective actors in market economy and competitive politics. Yet the same attitudes doomed the post-communists once the opportunities associated with access to political power opened up widely. The same people who in the 1990s were so apt in turning the rules of democratic game into their collective advantage, in the 2000s acted with a sense of impunity and lack of any consideration for political accountability that in democracies arrives at the end of any election cycle. Plagued by corruption scandals, they lost their popular base: the economically disadvantaged groups to nationalistic populists, the urbane libertarians to liberal democrats.

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When in March 1968 — fortieth anniversary of these events has been much celebrated this year — Polish students organized a series of non-violent sit-ins and rallies in defense of basic civil rights (in particular freedom of speech), little did they know that their actions would mark the beginning of the end of the communist system in Poland. The protest was short-lived: the regime restored the “order” at Polish universities within a month. Yet the March ’68 events (as this modest protest has been commonly known ever since), along with the much more spectacular developments of the Prague Spring and the subsequent intervention of Warsaw Pact armies in Czechoslovakia, made it clear that communism in its Central-European version had lost its utopian appeal. Before 1968 people could believe — as we today know naively — that participation in the communist movement may contribute to the creation of a more efficient economy and a better society. After 1968 such illusions were no longer possible. Furthermore, the nasty anti-Semitic campaign launched by the Polish communist leadership in connection to the March events as a mean to find a scapegoat to re-direct the popular discontent away from the current leaders and toward the selected group of former dignitaries of the Stalinist (1944—1956) period, indicated an important shift in the way the communist authorities sought legitimization of their rule. From the mechanism tying their legitimacy with a utopian promise (Rigby and Feher, 1982: pp. 1—26; Holmes, 1997: pp. 44—45), they moved, quite consciously, toward exposing the alleged association between their rule and the long-term interests of an ethnically defined nation. Instead of class solidarity, the regime propaganda began to stress its own peculiar interpretation of Polish raison d’état as the foundation of foreign policy. Similarly, ethnic solidarity replaced whatever had been left of class struggle as the basis of socio-economic and cultural policies.

Those developments, subtle and unimportant as they might have seemed at the time, changed nevertheless the dynamics of relationships between the party — the rulers — and the people. In particular, they affected the patterns of political recruitment into the party ranks, party apparatus, and nomenklatura positions. Ideological motivations have been replaced by a sheer desire to advance one’s political and professional career. Sure enough, opportunists of all shapes and shades had been joining the party since the end of World War II. Their numbers were particularly high at the time of the massive recruitment effort that followed the party unification congress in December 1948, when the Polish Workers Party, PPR, merged with the Polish Socialist Party, PPS, to create the Polish United Workers Party, known by its Polish acronym as PZPR (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza). Yet for most peasants and workers who joined the party in the 1950s and 1960s or simply accepted its leading political role as an unquestionable fact, the economic and social transformation the party presided over had a real potential of bettering their collective lot. Marxism—Leninism, to which the party officially subscribed, still had some appeal as an ideology of social transformation. In contrast, after 1968 not even the pretence of one’s yearning to “change the world” was a necessary condition for party membership anymore; the proclaimed loyalty to the (current) party leadership became a sufficient standard. The newly recruited were talking quite openly about their motivations, albeit usually in negative terms: “If I
did not join, I would have had troubles in achieving important professional objectives.” Only the most scrupulous ones would have added “…and making a difference for the benefit of our country” (but never: class). Political opportunism became a social norm.

It will be argued here that political opportunism, rooted in the attitudes that became common in the 1970s and 1980s, has turned into both the blessing and the curse for post-communist parties in Poland. It allowed these parties and, even more so, their particular leaders, to survive hard times and flourish in suitable circumstances. But it also limited the parties’ popular appeal and contributed to a climate in which personal interests have been put above the party’s — and the nation’s — good, which ultimately led to a major crisis of the post-communist Left.

PZPR: toward the abyss

Linz and Stepan (1996: pp. 255–292) in their seminal work on democratic transitions and consolidations claim that among all former Soviet-bloc countries only Poland entered the transition period as an authoritarian (as opposed to totalitarian or post-totalitarian) regime, which in turn has had profound consequences for the patterns of transitional development. Whether a regime is called authoritarian or totalitarian is, of course, a matter of terminological conventions. Linz and Stepan (1996: p. 264), who apply their terminology in a disciplined and consistent fashion, obviously have a point here, even if they somewhat overemphasize the role of the military in Polish state affairs. Indeed, the Polish communist leader from 1981 to 1989, Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski, wore a military uniform, as did many of his closest associates. Also, the authority of the military as an institution (remarkably popular among Poles even during and after the martial law of 1981–1983 — see Jasiewicz, 1995: p. 145) was instrumental in overcoming the resistance of party apparatus before the roundtable negotiations in autumn of 1988. Yet much more important than who the communist leaders were (military men) was who they were not: they were not communist true believers anymore.

A series of widespread popular upheavals — in 1970, 1976, and, eventually, the “carnival of Solidarity” in 1980–1981 — exposed the true nature of the communist system in Poland. The communists could no longer claim that they ruled “in the name of the people.” Their party, the PZPR, contrary to the letter of amendments made to the constitution in 1976, ceased to play any “leading” or motivating role in the process of economic and social development. It has become, as its critics used to say it in the late-1970s, “the trade union of people in power.”

The naked desire to hold on to power as the chief motivating force of the PZPR leadership in the 1980s has been arguably best exposed in political speeches delivered periodically by Gen. Czesław Kiszczak, the Number Two in communist hierarchy. As the Minister of Internal Affairs and Politburo member, Kiszczak would occasionally speak at the forum of the Sejm or at party meetings, delivering updates on state affairs. His speeches (they still wait for a careful analyst, as Kiszczak himself awaits an able biographer) were completely free of any ideological references.
Kiszczak did not speak about socialism, Marxism, or Leninism; he hardly ever mentioned concepts such as “class struggle,” “proletariat,” or “social justice.” Instead, his speeches read as a manual in technology of bureaucratic governance, with a strong militaristic bend.

While other PZPR leaders, including Kiszczak’s mentor and boss Wojciech Jaruzelski, never removed the concept of socialism from their official vocabulary, they would typically apply it in ways revealing the shift away from the utopian and toward the nationalistic legitimization of communist rule. A phrase used as a slogan for the Ninth Extraordinary Congress of PZPR in the summer of 1981 and often repeated in official propaganda throughout the 1980s proclaimed: “We will defend socialism as independence” (meaning: we will defend socialism with the same zeal with which we would defend national independence). Nation’s independence appeared here as an absolute value, one that does not need any justification in the eye of the message’s recipient — the Polish people. Socialism’s merits, on the contrary, needed to be validated by the association with the national sovereignty, even if only in a form limited by the satellite relationship to the Soviet Union.

The demise of ideological orthodoxy was, of course, instrumental in promoting pragmatic approach of PZPR leaders to the question of dialogue with the Solidarity-led opposition and the eventual transfer of power in the late 1980s. The Polish model of transition has been symbolized by the negotiations between the government and opposition conducted in Warsaw in winter and spring of 1989 and concluded with the Roundtable Agreement (April 5, 1989). To be sure, Jaruzelski, Kiszczak, and their cohorts did not enter these talks with a vision of communists giving up power. On the contrary: their intention was to co-opt Solidarity’s leadership into, as Adam Przeworski (1991: pp. 54–66) put it, a “broader dictatorship.” They understood the necessity for economic austerity measures and were hoping that Solidarity’s re-legализation and participation in structures of governance (as small opposition in the parliament) would legitimize those measures and diminish the possibility of social unrest. Creating new institutions (presidency, senate) and accepting new electoral rules (limited competition), the communists were hoping to re-group over the period of four years and subsequently defeat Solidarity (compromised in the eyes of the public by its endorsement of austerity measures) in a more competitive election in 1993. As Jacqueline Hayden convincingly shows in her analysis of the collapse of communist power in Poland (2006), this calamity came about as a result of a series of strategic misconceptions and miscalculations made by key communist actors (Dudek, 2002; Paczkowski, 1995).

If there were any elements of true foresight by communist leaders, they could be found in the deregulation of command economy launched by the government of Mieczysław Rakowski in 1988–1989. This deregulation, in particular the January 1989 law on “commercialization of state enterprises” (Roszkowski, 2002: p. 401), allowed quasi-privatization of state assets with certain property rights acquired by factory-level managers, as well as opened up practically unrestricted possibilities to set up new companies. Particular popularity achieved the joint ventures set up by individual managers with the very enterprises they had been running. Those ventures would later become known as nomenklatura companies (Zubek, 1995: p. 276). All in
all, these actions created for the party apparatus and state nomenklatura powerful incentives to accept the new economic (and, by implication, political) order. Individuals for whom loyalty to the party was once the way to secure their lot, now could see better opportunities in taking advantage of privileged access to scarce resources in an emergent market.

The golden parachute received by the many nomenklatura members contributed to the perception that the leaders of PZPR and Solidarity made at the Roundtable negotiations a secret deal, in which the latter guaranteed the former political and economic security in exchange for a peaceful transfer of power (Kurski and Semka, 1992; Zybertowicz, 1993). Allegedly, this deal was made at informal meetings of certain key Roundtable participants in a Warsaw suburb of Magdalenka (Dubinski, 1990). The actual participants of those meetings, from both sides, deny that any such deal was ever made (Geremek and Zakowski, 1990; Wałęsa, 1991; Rakowski, 1991; Bereś and Skoczylas, 1991; Hayden, 2006; Friszke, 2002). Also party documents of the period (Perzkowski, 1994) indicate a widespread confusion among the party top leadership rather than any clever scheming or cunning on their part. Above all, however, any conspiracy theories do not take into account the scale of the enormous surprise with which both the political elites and the public greeted Solidarity’s sweeping victory at the polls on June 4, 1989. The elites had negotiated a limited power-sharing agreement; the voters transformed it into the beginning of a peaceful regime transition.

In an analysis of Polish communists’ considerations, one should also remember that they faced a truly formidable foe. The strength and depth of Polish democratic opposition was a factor important in shaping a peaceful, negotiated transition. Polish opposition was well-organized already in the late 1970s and since 1980 it was united under the Solidarity umbrella. Its leadership was composed of people who were either seasoned politicians, or top Polish experts in their respective fields (law, economy, social policy), or both. In addition, in the final decade of the communist system (between 1976 and 1989), the general level of political activism in Poland was much higher than anywhere else in the region, “perhaps by a factor of 100,” in Padraic Kenney’s assessment (2002: p. 15). In short, Polish communists, unlike their comrades in other Soviet-bloc state, faced at the end of their tenure both counter-elites generated by dissident movements and civil society existing and operating completely outside of party control. Yet even this powerful opposition appeared overwhelmed by the speed and scale of communist system disintegration in 1989—1990 (Zubek, 1995: p. 279).

**SdRP: neither Phoenix, nor ashes**

Mieczysław Rakowski, once a party liberal hated by the hard-line apparatus, then a hardliner despised by Solidarity, eventually became not only the last prime minister of the People’s Poland, but also the last First Secretary of the PZPR. In this capacity, he presided over the XI Congress of the PZPR and, on January 28, 1990, uttered, in breaking voice, the line: “Post the colors of the Polish United Workers Party [out of
the congress hall!]” On the same day most of the delegates to the Congress voted to establish a new party, the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej or SdRP). A splinter group of delegates, lead by Tadeusz Fiszbach, a popular party secretary from Gdańsk, left the Congress and created the Polish Social-Democratic Union (Polska Unia Socjaldemokratyczna, or PUS). PUS, initially an honest attempt to create a left-wing party that would not carry any post-PZPR legacy, was nevertheless haunted by internal quarrels, and it officially dissolved itself in July 1991, without ever contesting a national election (Paszkiewicz, 2004: pp. 87–88).

Besides SdRP, PUS, and their subsequent permutations (SLD, UP and SdPi — see below) no other party of any significance emerged from within the former PZPR membership. A group of hardliners who had opposed the Roundtable Agreement (and the very idea of negotiating with the “counterrevolutionary” Solidarity) established the Union of Polish Communists Proletariat (Związek Komunistów Polskich Proletariat), based mostly in Warsaw and Silesia. The party joined the SLD coalition, but played there a marginal role. There were also some attempts to organize alternative post-PZPR groupings locally (for instance in the Wielkopolska region), but also those would eventually either end up under the SLD umbrella or quickly cease any activity.

Unlike in Serbia, Romania, or Russia, in the post-1989 Poland communists did not generate (or even attempted to) a nationalist party. This outcome may be seen as a surprise, given the developments during the time when PZPR was in power. As mentioned above, Poland’s national interests, as interpreted by the communists, were, at least since the 1960s, the major vehicle through which the party tried to legitimize its authority. Also earlier, in the years immediately following WWII, the defeat of Nazi Germany by the Soviet Union and Poland’s acquisition of the formerly German Silesia, East Prussia, and Pomerania were pointed out by communist propaganda as sources of regime’s legitimacy. Paradoxically, the anti-German resentments, particularly strong in times of Władysław Gomułka (the party’s leader from 1956 to 1970, for whom the alleged German threat was a true obsession), coupled with pro Russian/Soviet orientation and overt (1967–1868) or covert anti-Semitism, made Polish communists the executors of foreign and domestic (ethnic) policies advocated before WWII by their then ideological mortal enemies, National Democracy (commonly called Endecja). It was not a coincidence that during the 1968 anti-Semitic campaign several writers associated with Endecja, who had been barred from Polish press since 1945, reappeared in print, as did their old ideas, now articulated by card-carrying members of PZPR (Eisler, 1991; Stola, 2000; Ośka, 2008). The national communists organized themselves, albeit not as a party (Zjednoczenie Patriotyczne “Grunwald,” Patriotic Union “Grunwald”), and loudly articulated their ideas during the 1980–1981 period, when the popular unrest led not only to the creation of Solidarity, but also to an unprecedented openness in public debates and virtual suspension of state censorship. But the national communists, whose ideas remained attractive to many PZPR members throughout the 1980s, soon found themselves in a trap. In 1981, they had enthusiastically supported Jaruzelski and his imposition of martial law — only to become bitterly disappointed by
his decision to enter the dialogue with Solidarity in 1989. By supporting Jaruzelski as a “true patriot,” they completely undermined any nationalistic credentials they could have enjoyed among the public, which, by and large, saw in Solidarity the embodiment of centuries-long Polish longing for national independence. In 1989 national communists could in no way compete with Solidarity in the realm of patriotism; in the years that followed they could not outdo parties such as Confederation for an Independent Poland (Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej, KPN), Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland (Ruch Odbudowy Polski, ROP), and more recently League of Polish Families (LPR) and Law and Justice (PiS), in expressions of Polish nationalism. Of these, the LPR has openly presented itself as an ideological successor to the Endecja. On the level of popular attitudes, Polish nationalism has traditionally been associated with anti-communism and this connection was only reinforced by the developments of the 1980s and 1990s. Hence, in the Polish political arena of the late 20th – early 21st century there was no demand for anything the “national communists” could have offered.

On the genuine Left, but outside the old PZPR membership, there were attempts to revive the Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, or PPS), an important actor in late 19th – early 20th century, then in the inter-war Poland the dominant party of the Left (with the popular following many times stronger than that of the communists), and finally one of the pillars of Polish government-in-exile during WWII. The exiled leadership never accepted the fusion of the domestic PPS (led at the time by leaders subservient to Soviet interests in Poland) with the communist PPR into PZPR in 1948. Yet the four decades of institutional absence from the national political scene did to PPS damage that could not be offset even by its lasting image of an effective left-wing alternative to communists. Endorsements from surviving venerable émigré leaders notwithstanding, the restored PPS, marred by internal quarrels, failed to attract any significant following. One of its wings joined the SLD coalition for the 1993 and 1997 elections (see below).

As a result of these developments, the SdRP established itself for over a decade as a virtual monopolist in two ways: as a successor party to the communist PZPR and as a voice of the broadly understood Polish Left (united under the Democratic Left Alliance umbrella – see below). The so far only serious challenge to the latter function came after the turn of the century from the Self-Defense (Samoobrona), a radical populist party without, however, any overt claims to the institutional or ideological communist heritage.

The SdRP’s name was a paraphrase of the Social Democracy of the Polish Kingdom and Lithuania (SdKPiL), the party of the late 19th – early 20th century that was the direct predecessor of the Communist Party of Poland (KPP). The SdRP claimed not only the ideological legacy but also the assets of the PZPR, including its infrastructure, such as the buildings. Eventually most of the buildings had to be relinquished since they were state property; the PZPR had never bothered to acquire legal titles. After lengthy legal wrangling, the SdRP had to reimburse the state treasury for other assets as well. What was left, however, proved to be a most valuable source of party financing. Equally if not more important were the human and organizational resources (Grzymała-Busse, 2002).
The SdRP departed from the mass-party model utilized by PZPR, which membership stood in 1970 at over three millions and in 1985 still at over two millions (Grzymała-Busse, 2002: p. 43). Most of the former PZPR members ceased any political activity in post-1989 Poland. According to Jarosław Pawłak (1997: p. 312) among all Polish party leaders in 1993 only 17% had ever belonged to the PZPR; for economic elites this number stood at 52%. The estimates of the card-carrying/dues-paying membership in the SdPR oscillated in the 60,000-to-90,000 range (Grzymała-Busse, 2002; Gebethner, 1996; Szczerbiak, 2001). In Aleksander Kwaśniewski’s apt formulation “it’s better to have 100,000 members and one million voters then vice versa” (Grzymała-Busse, 2002: p. 103).

Nonetheless, the new party, mindful of its legacy, did not contest national elections under its own name. Instead, it became the core element of the Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, or SLD). This alliance first emerged in July 1991 as an electoral bloc of various post-communist and other left-wing organizations getting ready for the October 1991 general election. It renewed its status in July 1993 in order to participate in the September 1993 election (Paszkiewicz, 2004: p. 241).

SLD (the coalition) was joined at various times and for differing lengths of time by the All-Poland Trade Unions Accord (Ogólnopolskie Porozumienie Związków Zawodowych, or OPZZ), an organization of pro-communist trade unions created in 1983; a faction of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), the Union of Polish Communists Proletariat, and various national, regional, and local non-governmental organizations representing women, youth, the unemployed, the retired, and others.

Throughout the 1990s, the SLD functioned as a loose electoral bloc and never developed any specific organizational structures. Decision-making took place within the SLD parliamentary faction — the sign of domination of “party in public office” over “party in central office” or “party on the ground” (Katz and Mair, 1994). The SLD became a catch-all quasi-party, attracting supporters from all social classes and strata. Over the course of two years it more than doubled its popular support (from more than 1.3 million votes in 1991 to over 2.8 million in 1993 — see Fig. 1), while the number of its seats in the Sejm increased from 60 to 171 and in the Senate from four to 37. It was able to shed the ex-communist stigma and to present itself as a modern, West European style social democracy. Within the national leadership, however, the old PZPR apparatchiks never ceased to dominate. These included Aleksander Kwaśniewski, Chairman of both the SdRP and the SLD until his election as president of the Republic in 1995; Leszek Miller, SdRP’s Secretary General; Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, presidential candidate in 1990; Józef Oleksy, Prime Minister in 1995–1996; Izabella Sierakowska; and Józef Wiaderny (leader of OPZZ).

In the 1997 general election the SdRP-led SLD, despite gains (see Fig. 1) in both the absolute numbers (to 3.5 million) and the share of votes (to 27.1%), which brought it 164 seats in the Sejm and 28 in the Senate, still lost to the Electoral Action Solidarity (AWS). The major factor in this defeat was related to the electoral mechanics. In 1991 and 1993, the post-Solidarity Right was deeply fragmented (many of its parties failed to clear the 5% threshold introduced in 1993), but for the 1997 election it managed to unite under the AWS umbrella and, without any
significant increase in the number of votes, win a plurality of seats in each house. In addition, Polish Peasant Party (PSL), the SLD’s 1993–1997 coalition partner, did not fare well in this election. The 1997 debacle, along with changes in the electoral law giving certain advantages to entities registered as parties (as opposed to coalitions) contributed to the decision of registering the SLD as a single political party and thus terminating the life of the SdRP. This action took place in April 1999.

In their programmatic statements both SdRP and SLD (first a coalition, then a party) focused on issues of economic and social policy. While endorsing the reforms aimed at the introduction and strengthening of the market economy, they emphasized the need to preserve the social safety net, to limit unemployment, and to protect the economically weaker segments of population (young families, and pensioners). Nevertheless, during its first four years in power (1993–1997), the SLD did not attempt to overhaul the overly bureaucratic and financially bankrupt institutions of the welfare state inherited from the communist system, such as public health care system or social security fund. On ideological and cultural issues, both the SdRP and the SLD stood firmly in favor of separation between state and church

and voiced strong support for pro-choice legislation, but again did little to amend Poland’s restrictive abortion law when the circumstances (command of a parliamentary majority) were seemingly favorable to such action. Obviously, the post-communists vehemently opposed any policies aimed at de-communization or lustration (vetting of former communist officials), although the way such policies were, until the most recent (2006) legislation, legally framed and implemented made them much more dangerous to former opposition members who could have had any real or fabricated covert ties with secret police than to former party members, apparatchiks, or even overt secret police officers themselves. Finally, in foreign policy, in a spectacular turnabout from the position of their predecessors, the SdRP and SLD opted in favor of Poland’s entry to both NATO and EU.

It seems quite fair to characterize the actions and policies of the SdRP throughout party’s existence as opportunistic. On the one hand, the party did its best to avoid exposure of its communist legacy and to create an impression that its goals were of a most noble nature. After the victory in 1993 election, the party offered the Prime Minister position to the leader of its junior coalition partner, Waldemar Pawlak of PSL, to remove any impression of being hungry for power. On the other hand, it also evaded decisions that could alienate either significant segments of its constituency or important institutional actors, such as the Roman Catholic Church. The easiest to accomplish were arguably decisions to shed the communist legacy in the field of foreign policy: there were no serious anti-Atlantic or anti-European resentments among the public and the Soviet Union was no more either. The anti-American or anti-NATO phraseology of the late communist period was, even among party apparatchiks, more of a ritual expression of loyalty to the Soviet Union than any genuine negative feelings. Consequently, the post-communist had no problems in satisfying the pro-Atlantic and pro-European sentiments of the public — along with their own vested interests. Since most of them had joined the PZPR motivated by expectations of perks (symbolic as much as material), the demise of the USSR and the growing role of NATO and EU in Central Europe meant for them only the change in frame of reference and opening of new opportunities. To put it metaphorically, the cookie jar has been moved from Moscow to Brussels — and they have always known how to get their hands into it.

The successful comeback of Polish post-communists was also facilitated, to a great extent, by the ease with which they were able to establish good rapport with their Western left-wing counterparts. Once they re-invented themselves as social-democrats and chose a pro-integration stand vis-à-vis both NATO and the EU, the former communists without much effort cast themselves as the genuine Left, in both cultural and socio-economic sense. As such, they had no problem in finding a common language with socialists and social-democrats of Western Europe. In contrast, many former Polish anti-communist dissidents have been often looked at with a lot of suspicion by the Western cultural liberals (of socialist or liberal-democratic orientation), because of the close ties to the Roman Catholic Church, and by Western conservatives because of the trade-unionist (Solidarity) background (a phenomenon foreseen already by Timothy Garton Ash in his history of Solidarity, 1983).
Throughout the 1990s the only competition the SdRP/SLD could face on the Left came from the Labor Union (Unia Pracy, or UP). This party was established in June 1992 by former Solidarity members who claimed a socialist identity and were active in various small groupings, such as Solidarity of Labor (Solidarność Pracy, or SP), Polish Socialist Party (PPS), or the Democratic Social Movement (Ruch Demokratyczno-Społeczny, or RDS), as well as a group of former reform-minded communists, at the time mostly associated with the PUS. It has been the only major Polish party whose leadership and membership came from both Solidarity and the PZPR. Ideologically, the UP placed itself firmly on the left in both socio-economic and cultural dimensions. Its leadership took a stand highly critical of pro-market reforms of the entire post-1989 period, which put the party to the left of the SLD. The UP electoral base, however, was more supportive of these reforms and located closer to the center of the political spectrum. Former Solidarity activists such as Ryszard Bugaj and Karol Modzelewski, a veteran of the pre-Solidarity democratic opposition, and members of the PZPR who stayed within its ranks till the very end, such as Wiesława Ziolkowska and Marek Pol, were among founding fathers and leaders of the UP (Czerwiński, 2004: pp. 76–93). In 2001, the UP joined an electoral coalition with the SLD.

Aleksander Kwaśniewski: a success story?

Aleksander Kwaśniewski joined PZPR in 1977, as a student at Gdańsk University. A year earlier, workers in several Polish cities had launched massive protests against price hikes and, in general, government’s economic policies. The government responded with brutal repressions; in turn, a group of intellectuals established the Committee for the Defense of the Workers, which became known internationally by its Polish acronym KOR. Many students, also from Gdańsk, volunteered to work for KOR, accepting various forms of police harassment as a price. A year later, a group of manual laborers founded in Gdańsk (the site of workers massacre by the military in 1970) the Free Trade Unions of the [Baltic] Coast, the underground predecessor of Solidarity.

Kwaśniewski’s decision to join PZPR was at the time perceived by his teachers and fellow students as an act of political opportunism (Chróścicka, 1995: p. 19). Kwaśniewski was not known among his friends for any ideological commitment; he was well known for his political ambitions. He considered party membership as a necessary step in his political career — and what a career it was! Between 1977 and 1982 he held several positions in the university, regional, and national leadership of the Socialist Union of Polish Students. From 1981 to 1984 he was the Editor-in-Chief of itd, a popular student weekly magazine, and from 1984 to 1985 he held the same post in Sztandar Młodych, a national daily newspaper catering to young readers. In 1985, at the age of 31, he became the youngest minister in the Polish government and held a portfolio of youth affairs and sports (which actual name changed a couple of times during his tenure) until 1990. From 1988 to 1991 he was the Chairman of the Polish Olympic Committee. A very active participant of the
Roundtable negotiations, Kwaśniewski is often credited (Chróścicka, 1995: p. 51; Hayden, 2006: p. 99) with the idea of resurrecting the Senate as a chamber elected, unlike the Sejm, in a fully open contest. He subsequently contested the 1989 Senate election in his native region of Koszalin and lost, albeit gaining a higher percent of votes (38) than any other PZPR candidate in this election. He made amends in 1991, when in the Sejm election he won more votes (148,533) than any other single candidates nation-wide.

In 1989–1990 Kwaśniewski found himself on political sidelines, as many of his older comrades in the PZPR leadership held him at least co-responsible for the party’s defeat. Yet the party itself — still a member of the coalition government — was undergoing a process of profound generational change. PZPR had been led by the generation that came of age in the 1950s; now the much younger leaders, once hopeful of secure careers, found themselves in a situation where the only chance for such a career could be associated with the party reinventing itself as a player in the field of pluralist democracy. For them, this reinvention equaled the end of the PZPR and the establishment of a new party. Kwaśniewski sided with the young reformers and soon became their leader. He was chosen the SdRP’s Chairman, and led the party to a decent showing in the 1991 general election and to its surprising victory in 1993. Two years later, he challenged the incumbent Lech Wałęsa in a presidential race.

Kwaśniewski took the lead in the pre-election polls from the onset, and did not relinquish it till the election day. His conduct of the presidential campaign — in particular when contrasted with that of Wałęsa’s — illustrates very well how effectively this former apparatchik was able to adjust to the formal and informal rules of democratic political process. Kwaśniewski, whose carefully created public image of a smooth, educated, and modern man was designed to contrast with the image of the rough-edged, plebeian Wałęsa, made perhaps only one potentially damaging mistake, when he claimed to have earned an M.A. degree he had never received.

The slim margin of Kwaśniewski’s victory in the first round (just by two percentage points) left the runoff contest wide open, with the momentum apparently on Wałęsa’s side. Before the runoff, however, two live TV debates between the candidates took place. Both candidates, regardless of enormous differences in individual styles, had in fact established good records as speakers and debaters. But these two debates were an uneven contest: the tight, incoherent, and rude Wałęsa was not even a shadow of himself of yesteryear, in contrast to the relaxed, focused, and seemingly conciliatory Kwaśniewski. For him, unlike for his foe, the debates had been planned as the logical climax of his whole, almost-a-year-long campaign, designed by a renowned French public relations firm. Wałęsa, on the contrary, came to the TV studio without a consistent plan and well-defined objectives. The recurring theme of his monologues was, as it had been throughout the campaign, “Only I, Wałęsa, can save Poland from return to communism.” In 1995 such a slogan was nothing but an anachronism: nobody, neither Kwaśniewski’s supporters nor his foes, believed seriously that his election would mean a restitution of the communist regime. Wałęsa campaign, as amateurish as his opponent’s was professional, failed to respond adequately the changing mood of the public. On the runoff day,
Kwaśniewski won by a three percent margin. The issue of Kwaśniewski’s doubtful education credentials became the object of an unprecedented number of almost 600,000 formal protests questioning the legality of his election. The Supreme Court ruled that, while Kwaśniewski indeed misrepresented himself in the official election documents, it wouldn’t be possible to prove that this misrepresentation influenced the final outcome of the election, and therefore his election should be considered valid. After the election, Kwaśniewski relinquished not only the leadership, but even the membership in the SdRP — he aspired to be the President of all Poles.

When five years later Kwaśniewski run for re-election, his outright victory in the first round (he won gathering 54% of the vote, to 17% collected by the runner-up) was hardly surprising. His popularity rankings were high throughout the entire first term (1995–2000) and he consistently led by a large margin in the pre-election opinion polls. On election day, he captured virtually all votes among supporters of the SLD/SdRP, yet his popular base exceeded that of his old party, perhaps by as much as twofold. Such enormous support for a former communist apparatchik in a country where the communists were swept from power by a landslide electoral victory of Solidarity only eleven years earlier obviously puzzled observers, Polish and foreign alike. Kwaśniewski’s popularity escapes sociological interpretations, as the demographic and social composition of his constituency was exactly the same as the composition of the whole society. He was rejected only by those for whom the overriding consideration was the condemnation of communism on moral and/or ideological grounds — still, at over 40%, a substantial part of the electorate. Among factors explaining the “Kwaśniewski phenomenon” one may point out to a widely shared belief that he was a moderate, a true middle-of-the-roader; on the one hand a leader committed to the continuation of political and economic reforms but on the other also a politician who never lost the plight of an ordinary man from his sight.

This perception was created no so much by spin doctors (although, as noted above, Kwaśniewski pioneered the use of political campaign professionals in Poland) as by Kwaśniewski’s actual actions. Since he and his party remained isolated from the post-Solidarity camp on the level of political elites, he more or less consciously tried to reach out directly to the voters. In this, he was remarkably successful, despite being a court-certified liar and despite persistent rumors of alcohol abuse and other indiscretions. Ordinary citizens, aware of their own imperfections, were willing to forgive him, since he never attempted to create around himself an aura of moral superiority, as did his predecessor (and also his successor has been trying to do more recently). Furthermore, the Polish public became weary of the never-ending debates about the past and accusations of who had done what in old communist days. Older people did remember that life under communism was often, well, complicated; younger, by and large, preferred to look into the future. Kwaśniewski and his comrades, having little in their past to brag about, were obviously willing to cater to this expectation.

Also, unlike both his predecessor and his successor, Kwaśniewski was hardly an activist president. Contrary to fears articulated in 1995 by Wałęsa, Kwaśniewski never attempted to reverse any of important reforms of the post-communist period. Only once did he use president’s constitutional powers in a way potentially harmful
to the economy, when in 1999 he vetoed a government-sponsored bill on personal income tax reform, apparently to please the SLD (then in the opposition) on the eve of his re-election campaign. But he also did little to introduce or promote any specific solutions to the many economic and social problems Poland faced during his tenure.

Only in the area of foreign policy was Kwaśniewski acting with a true vigor and often not without foresight. He was instrumental in securing Poland’s entries to NATO and EU and in promoting the image of Poland as a consolidated democracy. Doing this, he might have been thinking about a future position in international institutions for himself (he would leave the presidency at the age of 51 — a very young age for a statesman, indeed). But his motivations notwithstanding, he became a walking proof that former communists can reform themselves into respectable social democrats — and that Poland indeed was a pluralist democracy with a plenty of room for anybody, regardless his political past.

Kwaśniewski’s approval ratings were stellar also throughout his second term, at the level of over 70%. They began to decline in 2003, in a fashion somehow parallel to the plummeting ratings of the SLD-led government, but never fell below the 45% mark (see Fig. 2).

SLD: the fall of the house of Miller

The SLD-led government of Leszek Miller ascended to power as a result of the 2001 parliamentary election. The election ended in a landslide victory for a coalition formed by the SLD with Labor Union (UP). The coalition won 41% of the votes (see Fig. 1), well ahead of the runner-up, the Civic Platform (PO), but still short of securing an outright majority of seats in the Sejm. In order to form a majority government, the SLD/UP coalition expanded to include the Polish Peasant Party, PSL. This spectacular victory came in the wake of the accumulation of negative

![Fig. 2. Public Opinion on President Kwaśniewski, 1998–2005.](image-url)
effects of social welfare system reforms, undertaken by the AWS/UW government in 1998–1999 (long overdue, as they were never attempted by SLD during its first tenure in government, 1993–1997) and a series of corruption scandals plaguing the AWS government in 2000 and 2001. The SLD learnt its lesson and avoided socio-economic reforms also during its second tenure. It did not, however, avoid corruption scandals of its own.

In euphoria after the 2001 electoral sweep, the SLD leaders at all levels not only rushed to share postelection spoils, but also did it in an apparent conviction that their rule would last, unchecked, for years to come. Early warnings, like poor SLD showing in the 2002 local elections (Alberski, 2007: pp. 87–88), were ignored. By 2003, several blatant cases of abuse of power and corruption turned into open scandals; some, involving SLD leaders of national stature, received wide publicity. Among these, the so-called Rywin Affair (from the name of its central character, Lew Rywin, a film producer) gained arguably the highest notoriety and become the focus of an inquiry by a special Sejm committee (the first ever such inquiry in Poland) as well as several criminal investigations (for a collection of materials on this affair see Skórzynski, 2003). But perhaps another case, involving central- and provincial-level party leaders associated with the Świętokrzyskie province (among them Zbigniew Sobotka, the last member of the former PZPR Politburo still active in Polish politics at the time), in which those officials tipped local organized crime bosses of impending police actions, best illustrates the nature of the problem. This case exposed the local SLD in Świętokrzyskie as a virtual private fiefdom of a few “party barons”, the term already commonly used at the time in reference to provincial leaders of the SLD (Tomczak 2007: p. 95). There were several criminal convictions in this case; Sobotka received a three-and-a-half year sentence. Yet Sobotka never went to jail: President Kwaśniewski, just hours before his term was to expire, pardoned him.

All these affairs made up only the proverbial tip of the iceberg, as many more cases of corruption, nepotism, and cronyism were reported by the media. In addition, there were also other factors contributing to Miller’s and SLD’s fall. The SLD/UP government failed to resolve (or even to address in a consistent way) the major socio-economic problem of post-Communist Poland: unemployment (which fluctuated slightly throughout the Miller tenure at the 20 percent level). The National Health Fund, the Miller government’s cure for the much-criticized health care reform of its AWS/UW predecessor, proved to be more lethal than the disease. Last but not least, the SLD/UP coalition managed to alienate the left-wing core of its catch-all electoral base by neglecting to undertake any significant changes in culturally determined social policies, such as regulations of access to abortions, which are among the most restrictive in the EU.

Miller’s fate was sealed on March 25, 2004, when several deputies, led by the Sejm Marshal (speaker) Marek Borowski, left the SLD caucus to form a new party, the Polish Social Democracy (Socjaldemokracja Polska, usually abbreviated as SdPl). The next day, Miller announced his resignation, which would become effective on May 2, 2004, just one day after Poland officially had become an EU member, when corks were still popping from champagne bottles across the country. This resignation
was by no means unexpected; in fact, it would have occurred much sooner, had it been not for the consensus that Prime Minister Leszek Miller and his cabinet deserved to stay until the formal conclusion of the long and laborious accession process, over which he and his ministers presided and to which they made an undeniably positive contribution. Yet, regardless of this achievement, the approval ratings in public opinion polls of the PM and his government, as well as the support for his party (SLD), sank to rock bottom, reaching single digits in March and April—the worst rating recorded by any Polish government since the birth of democracy in 1989 (see Fig. 3).

As a care-taker PM, President Kwaśniewski chose Marek Belka, a member of the SLD, an experienced economist, a former Deputy PM and Minister of Finance. The SLD attempted to reinvent itself by purging its old leadership and selecting new one, composed of very young activists (in their twenties or early thirties), untainted by accusations of corruption.

The first test of the re-grouped post-communist Left came in the elections to the European Parliament in June 2004. They did not do well at all: the SLD/UP coalition collected 9.4% of votes and the new Polish Social Democracy 5.3%. The outcome of this election indicated, in addition to the rapid decline in popularity of the ruling SLD/UP coalition, the growth of the moderate, strongly pro-EU center (liberal-democratic PO and UW), but also the consolidation of the Euro-skeptic Catholic conservatives (LPR) and the radical populists (Self-Defense). These developments, coupled with the absence of an heir-apparent to President Kwaśniewski, indicated a possibility of a forthcoming major realignment in Polish politics.

Indeed, the sequence of national elections in the Fall of 2005, parliamentary on September 25 and presidential on October 9 (first round) and October 23 (the runoff), resulted in such major realignment of the political scene, which was different
from all previous realignments. On the one hand, the parliamentary election returned to the Sejm the same six parties that had won any seats in 2001. This perfect continuity contrasted dramatically with the high level of party turnover in all previous elections and seemed to indicate a growing stability of the party system. On the other hand, voter volatility not only remained very high, but this time, unlike in any previous elections, was an outcome of a massive swing of voters from the left to the right side of the political spectrum. In the Sejm election, two right-of-center post-Solidarity parties did best: Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, or PiS,) with 27.0% of votes and 155 seats, and Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, or PO) with 24.1% of votes (133 seats). The SLD/UP coalition (11.3 percent, 55 seats; see Fig. 1) was also outdone by the populist Self-Defense 11.4 percent. The SdPl did not clear the 5% threshold. Results of the Senate election were similar. SdPL’s leader Marek Borowski contested, as the only candidate of post-communist (or of moderate…) Left, the presidential race, finishing a distant fourth (10.3%), behind not only Lech Kaczyński of PiS (the eventual winner) and Donald Tusk of PO, but also Andrzej Lepper of Self-Defense.

This way, over the course of barely three years, the SLD managed to virtually destroy not only itself, but the entire post-communist-turned-social-democratic political field. Its leaders, on central, regional, and local levels, saw their access to political power not as a civic responsibility, but as a set of opportunities for personal gain. The same people who in the 1990s were so apt in turning the rules of democratic game into their collective advantage, in the 2000s acted with a sense of impunity and lack of any consideration for political accountability that in democracies arrives at the end of any election cycle.

LiD and beyond

The post-communist Left did not do any better in the hastily organized 2007 election. The early election was, more than anything else, a referendum on the policies of the PiS-led government. PiS ruled since 2005 either as a single-party minority government or in coalition with the populist Self-Defense and the League of the Polish Families (Liga Polskich Rodzin, or LPR), a party of Catholic fundamentalists and radical nationalists. PiS’s inept governance faced a growing criticism from the opposition and large segments of the public.

The post-communists again failed to capitalize on popular discontent. They contested the election as the Left and the Democrats (Lewica i Demokraci, or LiD), a coalition in which the three post-communist parties, SLD, SdPl, and UP, have been joined by the tiny Democratic Party, the successor to the Democratic Union and Freedom Union, once dominant actors of the post-Solidarity field. Aleksander Kwaśniewski attempted a political comeback of sorts, campaigning actively on LiD’s behalf. To no avail: LiD collected only 13.2% of votes, less than the sum for all four parties in 2005 (17.6%) and far behind the PO (41.5%) and PiS (32.1%). Obviously, for the post-communist Left the need to reinvent itself has become as urgent as may be never before.
But this time political opportunities do not line up for the Left in a convenient way. To understand the dilemmas the Left presently faces, we need to examine briefly the spectrum of party competition in Poland today (for analytical frameworks and in-depth analysis see Kitschelt, 1992; Kitschelt et al., 1999; Evans and Whitefield, 1993). The Left–Right cleavage, that so conveniently organizes West European politics, reflects at least two parallel dimensions: the socio-economic, delineated by the options in favor of either free market regulation of the economy or redistributive policies of an interventionist (welfare) state, and the cultural, where one end of continuum is defined by an libertarian, inclusive, and cosmopolitan political philosophy and the other by its authoritarian, exclusive, and particularistic opposite (Kitschelt, 1992).

Not so in Poland. The communist regime’s approach to the economy and social policy was not simply redistributive, but carried the state intervention in the economy to the extreme (command economy); its political philosophy, while paying lip service to universalistic values, was since at least 1968 based on ethnic particularism; its political practice was authoritarian. No wonder that democratic opposition to communism evolved, over the course of 1970s and 1980s, toward the negation of this redistributive–particularistic–authoritarian syndrome: it accepted the universalistic–libertarian position on the cultural dimension, but, after communism’s collapse, even more strongly articulated its support for free market regulation of the economy, as the only possible antidote for the accumulated ills of communist misdirection and mismanagement.

Hence, the voter identification and party competition in post-communist Poland has been organized according to patterns in some ways similar to those known in the West, but also significantly different in other manners. As in the West, the space of political competition is defined by two cross-cutting dimensions, socio-economic and cultural. The former represents the discord between support for neo-liberal free market/free enterprise policies and support for state intervention in the economy and welfare state-type social policies. The latter manifests itself chiefly as a conflict between confessional (particularistic/authoritarian) and secular (universalistic/libertarian) approaches to politics and policies, and is closely related to contrasting assessments of Poland’s communist past and opposing stands on the issue of de-communization (Jasiewicz, 2006).

It should be noted that positions of particular parties are usually strongly articulated in relation to only one of these cleavages, and more ambiguous in relation to the other. In effect, and contrary to commonsensical expectations, political competition in Poland, at least during the 1990s, was driven not so much by the socio-economic considerations, as by the cultural ones. In the rivalry of the post-communist and post-Solidarity camps voters made their choices based not on alternative socio-economic policies, but on parties’ position on culturally defined issues, such as women’s right to abortion or role of the Catholic Church in public life. Consequently, religiosity was a much better predictor of voting behavior than one’s position in class stratification (Jasiewicz, 2003; Fodor et al., 1997; Grabowska and Szawiel, 2001).

The situation has changed somehow during the 2000s, in connection to the process of European integration. The pro- and (much weaker) anti-EU stands
adopted by particular parties allowed to organize these parties and their voters along a single continuum. Still, the differences with West European politics remained in place, as this continuum runs not in a parallel, but in perpendicular manner to the traditional Left–Right dimension. Those opposed to EU tend to be motivated by particularistic values, of religious (the EU as the epitome of Western materialism and secularism) or nationalist nature, but they also demand state intervention in the economy to protect local producers and consumers against foreign interests and what they see as unfair competition within the common market. Such ideas are common among the core constituency of PiS. Conversely, the EU proponents’ rejection of this economic nationalism has been motivated not only by their universalistic and libertarian values, but also by their genuine commitment to the principles of free market. This way of thinking dominates among supporters of PO.

In their search for voters, the post-communist parties may either move to the left or try to establish themselves more solidly in the political center. They can apply each of these strategies in either the socio-economic or in the cultural dimension. If the Left were to seek a stronger support among socially and economically disadvantaged, it would face a stiff competition from PiS and other populist parties, since in Poland those who are disadvantaged (less educated, poorer, older) tend to be also socially and culturally conservative. Such voters are concentrated mostly in the devoutly Catholic, traditionalist rural communities in central, eastern, and southeastern Poland — the stronghold of Solidarity (in the 1980s and 1990s) and PiS (since 2001). If the Left were to accentuate its libertarian/inclusive position on the cultural dimension, it would be forced into competition with the PO, whose urban, young, well-educated constituency may be receptive to universalism and inclusiveness, but is also strongly committed to market economy. If anything, the latter strategy — but only if it were to include Left’s reaffirmation of support for free market policies — seems to carry some hope, and only in a long run. Such was apparently the meaning of the LiD coalition, where the post-communist SLD, SdPl, and UP cooperated with the UD, a party committed to neo-liberal economic reforms and still led by the veterans of the Solidarity movement. Finally, post-communists may also apply both drive-to-the-left strategies simultaneously, but likely with disastrous results, at least in a short run: they would have to compete with both PO and PiS at the same time...

But that is exactly what the SLD leaders seem to be doing these days. On March 29, 2008, Wojciech Olejniczak, the SLD Chairman, announced that “the formula of SLD’s cooperation with UD within LiD has been exhausted.” This proclamation (inspired, as a rumor circulating in Warsaw has it, by advice received from Spanish socialists) surprised not only UD and other coalition parties, but also some members of the SLD leadership. Nonetheless, centro-left (Center-Left) is no more: in the Sejm, in the place of the LiD, three new caucuses were established in the spring of 2008: the Left (Lewica; 42 deputies, mostly from the SLD), the SdPl—New Left (SdPl—Nowa Lewica, eight deputies), and Democratic Deputies Caucus (three deputies from the PD). The Left has been re-grouping also outside of the parliament: in May 2008 the SLD Congress elected new party leadership (Olejniczak was replaced by Grzegorz Napieralski), while a few weeks earlier the former prime minister Leszek Miller established a new party, the Polish Left (Lewica Polska).
Conclusions

In the 1980s, the communist leadership ruled Poland in an authoritarian (not totalitarian or post-totalitarian) fashion, having abandoned any attempts of ideological domination. The party membership was composed mostly of people who joined the party mindful of boosting their career opportunities. The party faced a formidable foe: a well-organized, broad opposition movement, led by Solidarity.

Polish negotiated transition, symbolized by the Roundtable Agreement, became a model emulated across East-Central Europe. The opportunistic attitudes of communist apparatchiks and *nomenklatura* members were instrumental in transforming them, individually and collectively, into effective actors in market economy and competitive politics. Post-communist political parties had no problems in recasting themselves as social democrats and accepting a pro-Western orientation in foreign policy.

Yet opportunistic attitudes doomed the post-communists once the opportunities associated with access to political power opened up widely. Plagued by corruption scandals, they lost their popular base: the economically disadvantaged groups to nationalist populists, the urbane libertarians to liberal democrats.

Polish post-communist parties are presently at the crossroads. Their current troubles are, at least in part, the fruit of the ease with which they have adopted to liberal democracy.

Appendix A

**Gazetteer:** Polish political parties.

Communist, post-communist, and other left-wing parties:
- KPP: Komunistyczna Partia Polski (Communist Party of Poland, 1919–1938)
- Lewica Polska (Polish Left, 2008–)
- LiD: Lewica i Demokraci (The Left and the Democrats, 2006–2008)
- PPR: Polish Workers Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza, 1942–1948)
- PPS: Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (Polish Socialist Party, 1892–)
- Samoobrona (Self-Defense, 1992–; current official name: Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej = SRP = Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland)
- SdKPiL: Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy (Social Democracy of the Polish Kingdom and Lithuania, 1983–1919)
- SdPl: Socjaldemokracja Polska (Polish Social Democracy, 2004–)
SLD: Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (Democratic Left Alliance, 1991–1999 coalition, 1999– political party)
SP: Solidarność Pracy (Solidarity of Labor, 1991–1992)
UP: Unia Pracy (Labor Union, 1992–)

Other parties referred to in the article:
KPN: Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej (Confederation for an Independent Poland, 1979–)
LPR: Liga Polskich Rodzin (League of the Polish Families, 2001–)
Endecja (ND-cja): Narodowa Demokracja (National Democracy, political movement that generated several political parties since the late 19th century)
PD: Partia Demokratyczna (Democratic Party, 2005–; also known as demokraci.pl)
PiS: Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice, 2001–)
PSL: Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (Polish Peasant Party, 1893–)
PO: Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform, 2001–)
ROP: Ruch Odbudowy Polski (Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland, 1995–)
UD: Unia Demokratyczna (Democratic Union, 1990–1994)

References


A party for all seasons: Electoral adaptation of Romanian Communist successor parties

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Abstract

This article analyzes the reasons for the remarkable adaptability and electoral success of Communist successor parties in post-1990 Romania. The first part develops a three-dimensional classification scheme to identify Communist successor parties on the basis of their institutional, personnel and ideological continuity with the defunct Communist Party. The second section traces the political evolution of Communist successor parties, and argues that their remarkably strong and consistent electoral performance is primarily due to their ability to appeal to voters beyond the traditional base of East European ex-Communist parties on the left of the ideological spectrum. The final section uses survey data to suggest that the continued electoral appeal of Communist successor parties in Romania is due neither to Communist nostalgia or lack of democracy but to the complicated legacy of the Ceaușescu regime and the 1989 revolution.

Keywords: Communist successor parties; Nationalism; Romania; Elections; Ideology

During a televised debate in the days prior to the second round of the 2004 Romanian presidential elections, Traian Băsescu, the candidate of the center—right
Justice and Truth Alliance (Dreptate și Adevăr DA), rhetorically asked why the Romanian people were cursed with having to choose among two former Communists: himself and the outgoing Prime Minister Adrian Năstase. Given that the DA’s campaign theme during the 2004 elections borrowed heavily from Ukraine’s Orange Revolution, Băsescu’s question was as poignant as it was surprising. While Băsescu was primarily referring to the fact that both he and his opponent had not only been Communist Party members but had done quite well under the Communist regime, his comment actually captures a deeper and more troubling aspect of Romania’s post-communist political development; Băsescu and Năstase represented political parties originating from two former factions of the National Salvation Front (Frontul Salvării Nationale FSN), which had emerged in 1990 as the unofficial successor to the Romanian Communist Party. The country’s first elections for the European Parliament in November 2007 further confirmed that after almost two decades of democratic elections the Romanian political scene has come full circle; thus, the two former FSN factions, now competing as the center—right Democratic Party (Partidul Democrat PD) and the center—left Social-Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat PSD) jointly captured more than half the votes and almost two-thirds of the seats. This performance not only established them as the country’s two most important political parties but it almost matched (at least in terms of seats) the commanding victory of their common ancestor in the 1990 elections.

While Communist successor parties have successfully dominated the center—left part of the ideological spectrum in many ex-Communist democracies (including Bulgaria, Hungary, Albania and Poland), the PD’s emergence as the dominant center—right party in Romania after 2004 is unique among the region’s democracies and requires further explanation. However, even before the PD’s remarkable ideological reorientation, Romania stood out as the only East European democracy where representatives of Communist successor parties have been represented in virtually every government since the fall of Communism despite three genuine power turnovers between 1990 and 2004. These puzzling developments raise a series of interesting questions not only about the nature of Romanian party politics but more broadly about how to conceptualize and analyze Communist successor parties. In the first part of the paper, I define the Romanian Communist successor parties and discuss the peculiar brand of Romanian Communism. Combined with the ambiguous nature of its collapse in December 1989, it complicates the usually straightforward task of defining post-communist successor parties and requires a multi-dimensional definition, which differentiates between institutional continuity, personnel continuity and ideological continuity. Next, I document the remarkable dominance of Romanian post-communist politics by parties linked by at least one of the above dimensions to the Communist Party. In the final part of the paper I evaluate three possible explanations of this successor party dominance: (1) a democratic deficit in Romanian politics, (2) popular support for Communism, (3) the legacies of the Ceaușescu regime and the 1989 revolution.
Defining successor parties: the Romanian challenge and its theoretical payoffs

Communist successor parties can be identified along three dimensions (1) institutional continuity, whereby political parties trace their lineage directly to that of the Communist Party; (2) leadership and personnel continuity and (3) ideological continuity. Despite their theoretical distinctiveness, these three dimensions are often highly correlated in practice, which makes the task of identifying Communist successor parties fairly straightforward in most of the former Soviet bloc: following the collapse of Communism, the former ruling parties either continued to operate under their former names and with relatively minor ideological changes, as in the Czech Republic and in many former Soviet republics, or they changed their names and ideological orientations to socialist or social-democratic, as in Hungary, Poland or Bulgaria. While the reform process usually involved considerable ideological struggles, the replacement of the party’s top leadership (at least among the emerging East European democracies) and sometimes an open split between the reformers and the hard-liners, the institutional continuity was never contested, much of the leadership of the reformed parties came from the middle echelons of the former Communist parties (Machos, 1997; Pop-Eleches, 1999) and these parties usually chose left-of-center political platforms. By contrast, in the Romanian case the situation is much more ambiguous with respect to both institutional and ideological continuities and has not been fully resolved by subsequent scholarship on the question (Innes, 2002). Therefore, in the remainder of this section, I will discuss each of these dimensions separately and analyze the extent to which the main Romanian successor party candidates fulfill these criteria.

Institutional continuity

From an institutional continuity perspective, the peculiar nature of the December 1989 revolution considerably complicates the task of identifying successor parties, because the Romanian Communist Party (PCR) was outlawed immediately following the fall of the Ceaușescu regime, and initially no other political party claimed its highly compromised legacy. However, the institutional void left behind by the PCR’s demise was filled by the Council of the National Salvation Front (CFSN), which was formed immediately after Ceaușescu’s overthrow, and took over many of the state powers previously exercised by the Communist Party. Initially, its leaders denied that they intended to transform the CFSN into a political party, in part because Ion Iliescu advocated an original democracy based on competition between different political currents within the movement rather than between political parties. However, following its registration as a political party in February 1990, the National Salvation Front (FSN) became the subject of intense criticisms by both domestic opponents and outside observers, who feared that despite its official claims of being the political outgrowth of the anti-communist revolution, the FSN was rapidly taking over the Communist party-state under the leadership of several former high-ranking Communist officials. However, it is crucial to keep in mind that whereas elsewhere in the region one of the major debates at the time was whether the
ideological conversion of the Communists was genuine/significant, in Romania the
debate focused on whether or not the FSN was a successor to the Communist Party. Judging by the Front’s commanding electoral victory in May 1990, Romanian voters seem to have largely believed the FSN’s version of the story despite the widespread opposition protests with “FSN = PCR” banners. On the other hand, most analysts of post-Communist parties were not as easily persuaded, and have classified the FSN as a Communist successor party (Ishiyama, 1995,1997; Pop-Eleches, 1999).

Institutional continuity assessments in the Romanian case are further complicated by the FSN’s split in March 1992 following months of bitter conflicts between factions backing President Ion Iliescu or the former Prime Minister and erstwhile Iliescu-protégé, Petre Roman. Even though Roman’s more reformist faction won the intra-party vote, it was Mr. Iliescu’s hard-line splinter party — the Democratic National Salvation Front (FDSN) that won the subsequent national elections and emerged as the dominant leftist party in Romania. Therefore, the FDSN, which later changed its name to PDSR and eventually to PSD, is consistently identified as a Communist successor party in the literature. By contrast, opinions diverge about how to classify what was left of the original FSN, which despite its social-democratic platform and affiliation to the Socialist International chose to ally itself with the anti-communist opposition instead of its erstwhile party comrades.¹ However, from the point of view of institutional continuity, the FSN, despite its later name change to Democratic Party (PD) and recently to Democratic Liberal Party (PD-L) arguably qualifies as a successor party, given that it initially kept the party name and still uses its electoral symbol (the Rose). This argument is further reinforced by the fact that the FSN MPs from the 1990–1992 legislature, who were elected to Parliament in 2004, were almost evenly split between the PSD and the PD, and actually represented a higher proportion of PD MPs (15 percent) than for the PSD (9 percent).

Among the other political parties in post-communist Romania, the only other candidate for institutional continuity was the Socialist Work Party (PSM), founded in November 1990 by a former Communist Prime Minister, Ilie Verdeț. Unlike the FSN and its offshoots, the PSM openly proclaimed its links to the defunct Communist Party but did not inherit any of its assets, which had been taken over by the state in the aftermath of the revolution.

Leadership and personnel continuity

Due to the Communist Party dissolution in January 1990, none of the post-Communist parties directly inherited its membership base. Since Romania had the highest proportion of Communist Party members in Central-Eastern Europe (Janos, 2000), former Party members were involved in all post-Communist parties² and while their concentration was probably higher in the FSN and its successors,

¹ For example, Timmermann (1994) classifies it as a successor party, while Ishiyama (1995) does not.
² Examples include Emil Constantinescu, the presidential candidate of the staunchly anti-communist CDR in 1992 and 1996.
simple Party membership is at best a blunt measure of continuity in the Romanian context.

Therefore, the more important aspect of personnel continuity concerns the role played in a given party by individuals with leadership functions in the Communist Party and state apparatus. In this respect, despite the decisive purge of the Ceaușescu clan and its closest associates, the prominent role of several high-ranking former Communist officials in the top FSN leadership in the immediate post-revolutionary period, combined with the rapid and acrimonious departure of most anti-communist dissidents from the FSN leadership by January–February 1990, led to vehement complaints by the opposition that the Romanian revolution had been stolen by a Communist cabal (Tismaneanu, 2003). However, some of the most controversial leaders (including Mazilu, Brucan and Chițac) were quietly dropped from the FSN leadership in 1990, and even though several remaining leaders (including Iliescu, Roman, and Năstase) had close personal and family ties to high-level Communist circles, none of them had played a significant role in the Ceaușescu regime during the 1980s. Moreover, even the more hard-line faction of the FSN, which aligned itself with Mr. Iliescu against Roman’s reformers, actually had lower levels of personnel continuity with second and third-echelon Communist Party officials than their Hungarian counterpart (Pop-Eleches, 1999).

Once again, the links to the Communist past were the strongest for the PSM, which was composed primarily of former Communist Party activists, and whose leadership, included not only Ilie Verdet but also another unapologetic defender of the Ceaușescu regime, the former court poet Adrian Păunescu. After a rather disappointing series of elections, the PSM eventually sidelined Verdet to a ceremonial position, and was eventually absorbed into the PSD in 2003.

The last party worth mentioning in this context is the Greater Romania Party (PRM) founded in mid-1991 by the editor of the extreme nationalist weekly România Mare, Corneliu Vadim Tudor. While the party was not a direct institutional heir of the Communist Party, Vadim was another former court poet and apologist of Ceaușescu and the PRM was the most vocal opponent of President Băsescu’s initiative to condemn Communism in Romania.

I ideological orientation

Whereas Communist successor parties elsewhere in Central-Eastern Europe have generally espoused various gradations of leftist ideological appeals ranging from the intransigent stance of the Czech KSČM to the more centrist messages of the Polish SLD and the Hungarian MSZP, in Romania political parties with ties to the former Communist Party have shown an even greater ideological flexibility, which has allowed them to occupy much of the political space in successive post-communist elections. Not surprisingly, the dominance of former Communists has been the clearest on the left of the political spectrum, ranging from the openly anti-market rhetoric of the PSM and the PRM, to the gradualist reform approach advocated by the PDSR in the early to mid-1990s, and to the market-embracing
social-democratic approach of the PD after 1992 and the PSD starting in the late 1990s. Given how densely populated the left side of the political spectrum was for most of the 1990s, it is perhaps not surprising that the non-Communist Social-Democratic Party (PSDR) failed to make significant electoral inroads and eventually agreed to merge with the ex-Communist PSD in 2001.

The second crucial facet of the Romanian ex-Communists' electoral appeal — the reliance on ethnic nationalist appeals — sets them apart from many of their East European counterparts (including in Poland, Hungary, Croatia and Macedonia) and places some of them in uncomfortably close proximity to their Russian and Serbian “comrades.” Whereas in Russia and Serbia, this elective affinity between Communism and nationalism is arguably due to the trauma of post-communist territorial disintegration, in Romania the secessionist threat of Hungarian-majority parts of Transylvania was not nearly as credible, even though it definitely lent itself to similar rhetoric. Instead, the trend was rooted in Ceaușescu’s peculiar brand of national Communism, which combined a highly popular emphasis on foreign policy independence (Janos, 2000) with significant ethno-nationalist rhetoric, directed primarily at the country’s Hungarian minority. In this respect, the Romanian case has certain parallels to Bulgaria, where Zhivkov’s nationalist campaign against the Turkish minority also reverberated in the post-communist period, though with somewhat weaker intensity. Therefore, while reliance on ethnic nationalism is by no means sufficient to categorize a political party as a successor party, in the Romanian context such an orientation is at least compatible with continuing the political legacy of the Communist regime.

The most visible “heir” of the nationalist dimension of Ceaușescu’s legacy was undoubtedly Corneliu Vadim Tudor’s PRM, which took Ceaușescu’s occasionally shrill discourse to its (il)logical extreme and tended to blame most of Romania’s post-communist ills on a combination of foreign plots and ethnic minorities (including not only Hungarians but also Jews and Roma). Despite a brief period of moderation after 2000, when Vadim publicly renounced his former anti-Semitism and the PRM tried to reinvent itself as a popular, Christian Democratic Party, the party’s primary electoral appeal has been extreme ethnic nationalism. The track record of the other successor parties was more mixed; thus, the FSN used nationalist appeals to discredit the anti-communist opposition both before and after the May 1990 elections. Following the 1992 split of the FSN, Petre Roman’s rump FSN (and later the PD) abandoned the use of nationalism, a decision which facilitated its membership in the Socialist International and its collaboration with the anti-communist opposition. Meanwhile, Iliescu’s FDSN/PDSR continued the use of opportunist nationalism during its 1992–1996 stint in government, in part because its minority government needed the support of several minor “red-brown” parties (including the PRM and the PSM). However, following a bizarre and ultimately unsuccessful nationalist outburst during the 1996 elections, in which Iliescu warned about the coming “Yugoslavization” of Romania, the PDSR ultimately abandoned nationalism after 1997 in search of greater domestic and international respectability. This reorientation was confirmed by the fact that after its electoral victory in 2000, the party governed
with the Hungarian minority party UDMR instead of going back to its erstwhile coalition partner PRM.

While the various shades of leftist and nationalist appeals are if not typical then at least not unprecedented by regional standards, the Romanian successor parties stand out in their ability to adopt ideological orientations which are completely unrelated — and in fact largely opposed — to the country’s Communist legacy. The most remarkable example in this respect is the aforementioned ideological U-turn of the PD in 2005, which underwent a swift and apparently painless transformation from being a member in the Socialist International at the time of the November 2004 elections, to joining the European People’s Party less than half a year later and becoming the main supporter of President Băsescu’s effort to condemn the crimes of Communism in Romania. Nor was the PD the only party with institutional roots in the former Communist Party to abandon leftist ideology altogether; thus, following a failed attempt to reform the PDSR after its 1996 electoral loss, a group of disaffected MPs under the former PDSR foreign Minister Teodor Meleşcanu founded the Alliance for Romania (ApR), which eventually joined the liberal, anti-communist PNL in 2001 after a failed attempt at running for Parliament independently in 2000.3

Post-communist electoral performance of successor parties

Even a brief look at the parliamentary election results (Table 1) reveals the consistency with which Communist successor parties have dominated Romanian politics in the last two decades. Following the crushing victory of the FSN over a variety of hastily assembled and poorly organized opposition parties in 1990, the 1992 elections represented a significant step towards democratic normalization, and assuaged the justified initial fears that Romania could slip towards renewed authoritarianism along the lines of many former Soviet republics. Even though Iliescu’s FDSN/PDSR emerged as the largest parliamentary faction, it commanded less than half of the vote and seat share of the FSN in 1990, and its subsequent performance (marked by decline in 1996, followed by a significant boost in 2000 and 2004 and a renewed decline in the 2007 European Parliament elections) is quite similar to that of the main Communist successor parties in such countries like Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria.

Therefore, the Romanian party system stands out not because of the electoral dominance of its main Communist successor party but because of the surprisingly good performance of several smaller political parties, which also traced their institutional, personnel and/or ideological roots to the Communist Party but found alternative electoral niches that allowed them (at least temporarily) to survive. In this respect, it is worth emphasizing the electoral trajectory of two parties, the PD and the PRM. Following its disappointing electoral loss in 1992 against its former “comrades” in the original National Salvation Front, the PD contested the following

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3 Meleşcanu, who worked as a diplomat under the Ceauşescu regime and has been accused of collaborating with the Securitate, is currently one of the vice-presidents of the PNL.
two elections as the more moderate and internationally palatable leftist alternative to Iliescu’s PSD, and even though it never succeeded to challenge the latter’s dominance among transition losers, it managed to survive as a parliamentary party even after its participation in the disastrous center–right coalition government of 1996–2000. In 2004 the PD managed to stage an impressive comeback as part of the Truth and Justice (DA) alliance with the liberal PNL, and by 2007 it rode the coattails of President’s Băsescu’s popularity to become the strongest Romanian political party.

Meanwhile, the PRM’s electoral fortunes were almost a mirror-image of the PD’s trajectory; thus, the PRM barely squeezed into parliament in 1992 and 1996 thanks to Romania’s rather low 3 percent electoral threshold, but then it scored a stunning electoral success in 2000, when it emerged as the second largest parliamentary party with almost 20 percent of the vote, largely fueled by Vadim’s personal popularity, which earned him 30 percent of the first-round presidential vote in the same elections. While part of this success was due to the PRM’s ability to capture most of the previously fragmented nationalist electorate along with a hard core of Communist nostalgia, the unexpected surge in Vadim’s popularity in the two weeks prior to the elections arguably reflected a wave of protest voters disenchanted with the country’s mainstream parties and attracted by Vadim’s effective and colorful anti-establishment rhetoric during a televised presidential debate (Pop-Eleches, 2001). However, by 2004 the party’s support declined significantly (albeit to a still fairly healthy 13 percent) and the decline continued during the 2007 EP elections, when the PRM failed to reach the 5 percent threshold. Therefore, it is conceivable that in the upcoming elections the PRM could meet the fate of its ideological “cousin,” the PSM, which managed to squeeze into parliament in 1992 (with barely 3 percent of the vote) but then failed to pass the electoral threshold in subsequent elections and was eventually absorbed by the PSD in 2003.

Despite the changing electoral fortunes of individual Communist successor parties, this brief overview of post-1989 election results suggests a remarkable stability in the combined vote share of Communist successor parties. As illustrated in Table 2, these parties consistently managed to attract the support of between half and two-thirds of Romanian voters and just as consistently outperformed the explicitly anti-communist
and non-Communist parties. However, unlike in many former Soviet republics, the dominance of successor parties has not been due to the ability of the “party in power” to shut out any potential political challengers. Instead, successor parties did well at least in part because they managed to diversify in both institutional and ideological terms. In doing so, they ensured that parties with direct links to the previous regime were never completely out of power after 1989 but their ideological “flexibility” and political pragmatism paved the way for governing alliances with anti-communist reformers (for example, PD’s participation in the 1996–2000 CDR government and in the 2004–2007 DA alliance) and thereby contributed to the country’s initially uncertain political liberalization. Nevertheless, this remarkable ability of Communist successor parties to dominate post-communist politics requires further explanation. Therefore in the final section of the paper I will consider a number of potential explanations for this outcome and discuss their implications for our understanding of successor parties and post-Communist politics more broadly.

### Explanations for the diversity of Romania’s successor parties

According to a political anecdote, Argentina’s populist leader, Juan Peron, was asked during his exile in Spain to explain the often confusing political landscape in his country. He replied that Argentina was not all that different from other countries, in that it had its share of rightists, centrists and leftists. When the reporter asked him where the Peronists fell on this spectrum, Peron famously replied “Of course, they’re all Peronists!” The present analysis suggests a comparable story for post-communist Romania, in the sense that the last two decades have seen the rise of leftist, nationalist and more recently Christian Democratic parties, which could ultimately trace their lineage to the defunct Romanian Communist Party. However, unlike Argentina, post-communist Romania did not have a Peron-like populist leader,
whose personal charisma could help reconcile such disparate ideological tendencies under one institutional umbrella. Therefore, this section will focus on three potential explanations for the remarkable adaptability of Romanian ex-Communists and their somewhat puzzling cross-ideological appeals.

**Lack of democracy**

A quick glance at the countries where Communist successor parties have dominated post-communist politics (the Central Asian republics, Azerbaijan, and until recently Serbia and Georgia) suggests a straightforward interpretation along the lines of McFaul’s (2002) argument about non-cooperative transitions — namely that the initially dominant Communists cemented their political power by rigging the rules of political competition in their favor to exclude non-Communist challengers. Indeed democratic prospects did not look very promising during the first few months of 1990, which were marred by ethnic clashes, flawed elections and government-condoned violence against anti-communist demonstrators. However, after a slow start, Romania’s democratization trajectory gradually converged with the region’s front-runners, and achieved the Freedom House “Free” status after 1996, thereby becoming the only transition country to achieve full democracy after a decisive ex-Communist victory in the initial elections (McFaul’s, 2002, p. 237). While Romanian democracy certainly suffered from a number of hiccups along the way — with accusations of government attempts to interfere with media freedom and opposition claims of electoral fraud as recently as 2004 — such blemishes were not sufficiently severe to explain the consistently strong overall electoral performance of Communist successor parties. While questions persist about the fairness of the 1992 elections (Carey, 1995), subsequent electoral contests were widely sanctioned as free and fair by international observers and in both 1996 and 2004 resulted in electoral defeats of the ex-Communist incumbents (PDSR/PSD), who accepted defeat and turned power over to coalitions dominated by non-Communists.

**Popular support for Communism**

Given Romania’s difficult economic legacies, large agricultural sector, and prior experience with austerity during the 1980s, Romanians were understandably reluctant to endorse further economic sacrifices required by the drastic market reforms proposed by the anti-communist opposition prior to the 1990 elections (Daianu, 1997). As Tismaneanu (2003) argues, while Romanians had rejected the Ceaușescu regime in 1989, large parts of the population still favored key elements of the Communist welfare state. The FSN’s spending spree in early 1990 combined with assurances about a more gradual approach and painless approach to economic reforms undoubtedly contributed to the ex-Communists’ broad popularity and resounding electoral success. However, while such gradualist preferences were clearly visible in 1991, when Romania was the only East European country where a majority of respondents (57.7%) thought that a market economy was wrong for their country, by the following year 73% of Romanians favored a free
market economy and pro-market attitudes in the country have been above the regional average ever since. Nor did the economic hardships and political disappointments of the transition result in a substantial popular reorientation towards Communism; as illustrated by survey data presented in Table 3, the share of self-declared Communists among Romanian voters was minimal in 2000–2004 (2–3 percent). Moreover, even though Social Democrats constituted the largest voting block and provided the backbone for the ex-Communist PSD’s strong electoral showing, they only accounted for one-third of the electorate, a proportion roughly in line with the regional average (Table 3).

The political legacy of the Ceaușescu regime and the 1989 revolution

While a more detailed discussion of the complicated legacy of Ceaușescu’s rule and demise is beyond the scope of this paper, I will focus on a few aspects that are crucial for understanding Romania’s post-communist electoral dynamics. First, Ceaușescu’s skillful use of nationalism in both foreign policy and domestic ethnic relations had an important impact on the post-Communist uses of nationalism in Romania. The country’s relative foreign policy independent from the Soviet Union had become an obstacle to political liberalization by the late 1980s as it allowed Ceaușescu to resist Gorbachev’s glasnost and therefore precluded a nationalist mobilization. Instead, the ex-Communists “owned” the subject and this deprived the anti-communist opposition of one of the most potent ideological weapons in post-communist politics (Tismaneanu, 1998). Thus, nationalism in Romania was not harnessed in the service of national liberation and democratization as in the Baltics, Slovenia and even Moldova and Western Ukraine (Kuzio, 2001; Bunce, 2003) but was instead focused on internal conflicts about the threats to territorial integrity posed by the autonomy claims of the Hungarian minority. While the Hungarian–Romanian dispute about Transylvania obviously predates Communist rule, it was used to shore up regime support not only by Ceaușescu in the 1980s but also by the less reformed elements of the former Communist Party in the early 1990s.

Second, Ceaușescu’s totalitarian regime and its brutal repression of anti-communist opponents resulted in a weak and fragmented anti-communist opposition, which did not have the organizational capacity or the potential leadership reservoir of many other East European countries, especially Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia (Ekiert, 1996). Furthermore, the thorough politicization of the state apparatus meant that most bureaucrats and experts were likely to be integrated in Communist political structures. This lack of anti-communist political leaders and experts became painfully obvious during the 1996–2000 period, when the lack of political and governing experience of the anti-communist opposition exacerbated the country’s serious economic problems and thereby cemented the ex-Communists’

4 Figures are based on author’s calculations based on data from the Central and Eastern Eurobarometer (1990–1997).
reputation of managerial superiority. The widespread popular disappointment with Romania’s first non-Communist-led government contributed to the implosion of the Christian Democratic National Peasants Party (PNT-CD) in 2000 and created a political vacuum on the non-nationalist right of the political spectrum and thus offered the political opportunity for the PDs unexpected but tactically brilliant ideological transformation.

Third, even though Gorbachev-style Communist reformers were also marginalized under Ceausescu, their marginalization actually conferred them a significant degree of political legitimacy and enabled them to distance themselves from the highly unpopular legacy of the Ceausescu dictatorship, while at the same time appropriating many of its political themes. This legitimacy was further enhanced by the central and highly visible role of several Communist “dissidents” in the 1989 revolution and thereby blurred the line between victims and perpetrators. At the same time, however, such Communist reformers were not persecuted to nearly the same extent as anti-communist dissidents, which put them at a significant organizational advantage compared to the atomized anti-communist dissidents and contributed to their ability to take over power during the chaotic early days of the Romanian revolution.

Finally, Ceausescu’s personal dictatorship weakened the institutional capacity of the ex-Communist Party, and thereby limited the degree of rank-and-file input into

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|                      | 2004               |
|----------------------|                    |
| B — 2004 elections   |                    |
| PSD                  | 2                  | 68                   | 2           | 4                       | 1               | 12    | 11      |
| PNL/PD               | 1                  | 13                   | 52          | 10                      | 2               | 6     | 15      |
| PNTCD                | 5                  | 5                    | 0           | 59                      | 3               | 23    | 5       |
| PRM                  | 9                  | 14                   | 5           | 11                      | 21              | 21    | 20      |
| UDMR                 | 0                  | 13                   | 4           | 4                       | 12              | 16    | 50      |
| Other                | 5                  | 27                   | 2           | 43                      | 18              | 0     | 5       |
| Undec                | 1                  | 26                   | 13          | 9                       | 3               | 13    | 35      |
| NV                   | 0                  | 15                   | 15          | 2                       | 3               | 18    | 47      |
| Total                | 2                  | 34                   | 20          | 8                       | 4               | 12    | 21      |
party elite political decisions. In line with Grzymala-Busse’s (2002) argument, such political autonomy of party elites facilitated the, sometimes excessive, flexibility of ex-Communists in adapting their electoral appeals to situational opportunities. This autonomy explains the fairly limited political fallout of even dramatic ideological orientations, such as the PD’s shift from Social Democracy to Christian Democracy or the PRM’s shift from extreme nationalism to Christian Democracy and back over the course of less than two years. Moreover, these opportunistic reorientations have so far carried minimal electoral costs as neither the PSD nor the PD were punished by voters following their respective ideological shifts, even though the public opinion data from the 2000 and 2004 elections (see Table 3) reveals a surprising ideological continuity and consistency among Romanian voters. Given the tension between the relative stability of popular attitudes and the fickleness of party ideological platforms, we should expect voters to begin to hold political parties more closely accountable for their electoral promises. Therefore, the electoral fortunes of Communist successor parties are likely to become even more dependent on their ability to produce political leaders with greater popular appeal than their non-Communist opponents — not exactly a long-term recipe for political success.

Conclusions

This paper has analyzed the tortuous but ultimately very successful transformation of Romania’s Communist successor parties, which were able to adapt to the extremely complicated political legacy of Ceaușescu’s highly unpopular rule and spectacular downfall. Unlike in other East European countries, where Communist successor parties had straightforward institutional and personnel ties to the Communist Party and pursued broadly leftist electoral strategies (albeit displaying varying degree of ideology and pragmatism), the dissolution of the Romanian Communist Party created greater competition among its potential political heirs. Such competition redundant given the use of promoted afterwards promoted greater diversity among successor parties, which adapted different facets of Ceaușescu’s political legacy and therefore expanded their political reach beyond the traditional confines of ex-Communist parties. This diversity highlights the multi-dimensional nature of Communist successor parties, and therefore hopefully contributes to a more nuanced definition and theoretical understanding of these parties.

The implications of the remarkable diversity and adaptability of Communist successor parties for Romania’s democratic development are mixed; on the one hand they allowed parties associated with the old regime to dominate post-communist politics to a greater extent than if they had been confined to the left of the ideological spectrum, and their frequent ideological shifts probably contributed to the pervasive public distrust in political institutions and particularly political parties. On the other hand, given the weakness of Romania’s anti-communist opposition, the political diversity of successor parties arguably fostered greater political competition in a manner reminiscent of the transitologists’ discussion of the importance of rifts between hard-liners and reformers in authoritarian regimes (O’Donnell and Schmitter, 1986). While such competition among ex-Communists obviously raises
concerns of collusion and cartelization, the significant personal rivalries among individual leaders, along with the growing ideological differences in their platforms have so far precluded such an outcome and, according to Frye (2002), Romania is actually among the ex-Communist countries with greater partisan policy swings.

Finally, it is worth briefly to consider the theoretical implications of the present discussion for our understanding of the impact of Communist successor parties on post-communist politics. While several earlier studies have emphasized that the relationship to the Communist past constitutes a crucial cleavage in post-Communist Party politics (Tucker, 2006; Grzymala-Busse, 2007), the Romanian case suggests a somewhat more complicated relationship due to the uneven and multi-dimensional nature of the political continuity between the Communist Party and its post-communist successors. On the one hand, the prominent role of institutional heirs of the Communist successor National Salvation Front on both sides of the debate about condemning the crimes of the Communist regime suggests a gradual dilution of the ideological legacies which initially set former Communists apart from their anti-communist opponents. On the other hand, what still sets successor parties apart from their non-Communist counterparts — especially from pre-Communist “historical” parties like the PNL and the PNT-CD — is their greater ideological flexibility and opportunism and their heavier reliance on individual leader appeals. Given the relative weakness of the non-Communist parties, this practice, which is reinforced by the frequent instances of party switching, splits and mergers, has resulted in a type of political dynamics that still resemble the personality-based factionalism of Communist-era politics at least as much as the democratic ideal of programmatic party competition.

References


List of party acronyms

ApR: Alianța pentru România (Alliance for Romania).
DA: Dreptate și Adevâr (Truth and Justice).
FDSN: Frontul Democrat al Salvării Naționale (Democratic National Salvation Front).
FSN: Frontul Salvării Naționale (National Salvation Front).
KSČM: Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy (Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia).
MSZP: Magyar Szocialista Párt (Hungarian Socialist Party).
PCR: Partidul Comunist Român (Romanian Communist Party).
PD: Partidul Democrat (Democratic Party).
PD-L: Partidul Democrat-Liberal (Democratic Liberal Party).
PNL: Partidul Național Liberal (National Liberal Party).
PSD: Partidul Social Democrat (Social-Democratic Party).
PSDR: Partidul Social Democrat din România (Social-Democratic Party of Romania).
PSM: Partidul Social al Muncii (Socialist Work Party).
SLD: Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (Democratic Left Alliance).
Slovakia’s Communist successor parties
in comparative perspective

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Abstract

The contrast between Slovakia’s primary Communist successor party—the Party of the Democratic Left—and its own successor—Smer—offers considerable insight into the interaction between party ideology, organization and electoral success in post-Communist Europe. The Party of the Democratic Left and Smer offered relatively similar programmatic positions, but Smer managed to replace—and far outpace—its predecessor by offering a more charismatic public face, a smaller and more tightly centralized organization and an ideological flexibility that permitted it to take advantage of a shifting electoral environment.

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Keywords: Communist successor parties; Political parties; Slovakia; Public opinion; Party organization

Slovakia since 1989 has seen the rise—and in most cases the fall—of at least five parties that could plausibly claim the label of “Communist successor party.” The cyclical ebb and flow of Slovakia’s parties is noteworthy not only as a compelling drama of success and failure, but as a source of insight into broader trends shaping
the success or failure of political parties in post-Communist countries, especially regarding the relationship between party organization, ideology and electoral support.

Slovakia’s initial Communist successor party, the Party of the Democratic Left (SDĽ), sought to transform itself into a Western-European-style social democratic model only to find itself with a large but divided membership and a limited electorate. Tensions produced a series of splinter parties which tried various combinations of organization and ideology, but without sustained success, until one of those offspring, called Direction (Smer) abandoned traditional notions of mass party organization and ideology in favor of a flexible, centralized structure and loose, center-left programmatic commitments.

Building on Grzymala-Busse’s early work on Communist successor parties (Grzymala-Busse, 2002), this study looks at organizational and electoral variables to understand why Smer, succeeded where SDĽ and the others did not. The emergence of multiple parties over a 15 year period provides a useful context for weighing rival hypotheses about party success, while a focus on Communist successor parties narrows the number of other variables. By succeeding where SDĽ failed, the case of Smer further reinforces the importance of the relationships between party leaders and party organization, and the basis of political competition highlighted previously by Grzymala-Busse, Haughton (Haughton, 2004) and others. Smer benefited both from an externally-driven change in party competition and from a centralized, flexible structure that allowed it to adapt quickly and effectively to those changes. The party’s success calls attention to changes in the political landscape of Slovakia—and perhaps more broadly—that favor such parties as well as to factors that may limit their long-term success.

A brief history

The specific history and dynamics of Slovakia’s post-communist parties through the early 2000s has been amply documented elsewhere (Grzymala-Busse, 2002; Bozóki and Ishiyama, 2002; Haughton, 2004; Rybár, 2006) and needs little elaboration. It is important, however, briefly to consider the relevant players and the relevant aspects of their formation, organization, ideology, and (in most cases) their collapse before introducing the broader comparative perspective that forms the basis of this paper’s argument. Toward that end, it is also useful to introduce three figures that graphically depict the development of Slovakia’s Communist successor parties:

- **Fig. 1**, an institutional timeline showing the organizational and personal continuities among the various parties over time and their status in government or opposition;
- **Fig. 2**, an electoral timeline showing the relative electoral strength of Communist successor parties and other parties (grouped by ideology);
- **Fig. 3**, a public opinion timeline showing polling results for Communist successor parties and other relevant parties.
Together these displays show several broad overall patterns: a moderately successful and stable successor party that faced periodic splintering and electoral competition from those splinters until the early 2000s. Most of the splinter parties also experienced only short-term success. The exception is Smer, which not only
quickly surpassed SDĽ but ultimately dwarfed its competition and achieved the highest sustained levels of popular support in Slovakia’s 20-year post-Communist history. It is helpful to attach some names and dates to this pattern through a very brief narrative of party development that applies the typology developed by Pop-Eleches which defines the degree of “Communist succession” along three axes: institutional, ideological, and personal (Pop-Eleches, this issue).

- *Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC)* held a constitutional and practical monopoly on political decision-making in Czechoslovakia from 1948. Except for a period of independence during the Second World War, Slovakia’s Communist Party enjoyed little meaningful autonomy from KSC. It did, however, face
somewhat different societal responses. In the interwar period and early postwar period it consistently received weaker electoral support than its counterpart in the Czech lands. However, after the Communist Party takeover in 1948 and especially after the invasion of Warsaw Pact troops in 1968, Slovakia’s party faced lower levels of political dissatisfaction and dissent than in the Czech Republic in part because of lower levels of repression, the creation of some “federal” structures that satisfied the “national” aspirations of some Slovaks, and strong economic development of rural areas (Leff, 1997). Some dissent did occur, particularly around religious and ecological questions, and as in the Czech Republic, Slovakia’s Communist party faced mass rallies in 1989 and relinquished power in December to representatives of a mass anti-Communist movement, (Public Against Violence). Although the handover had more aspects of “negotiated transition” and fewer aspects of ‘rupture’ than in the Czech lands (Szomolányi, 1999), and allowed a softer landing for some Communist era officials, it produced an equally open and democratic system of party competition. Slovakia’s Communist Party (unlike its Czech counterpart) quickly moved to make fundamental changes in its internal organization and political orientation and became a key supporter of the new democratic regime. The party symbolized these significant changes by adopting the appellation “Party of the Democratic Left.”

- **Party of the Democratic Left (SDL)** exhibited strong successor party aspects in terms of institutions, personnel and to a lesser degree, ideology. In late 1991 party leaders dropped the title “Communist” altogether and sought to transform itself into West-European-style social democratic party. For the first 10 years of its existence the party achieved a moderate level of success and stability, hovering between 10% and 20% in most public opinion polls and averaging about 13% in elections (Mikovič, 2004). After 1992 the party tended to reject partnership with parties that held national and authoritarian orientations and instead supported more democratic alternatives, particularly in the mid-1990’s when it sought to limit the encroachments of the governments of Vladimír Mečiar. Toward this end the party formed coalition governments with pro-market parties, joining the government of Jozef Moravčík in 1994 after successfully voting no-confidence in Mečiar, and joining the government of Mikuláš Dzurinda from 1998 to 2002 after the electoral defeat of Mečiar’s coalition. In both coalitions, however, SDL suffered a loss of popularity and faced significant competition from its own splinter parties. In 2000 party support began to ebb and by late 2001 the party had fallen well below the 5% threshold for parliamentary representation. Further splintering exacerbated the situation and the party attracted only 1.3% of the vote in 2002 (Mikovič, 2004). After failed attempts to unite with other small parties with similar programmatic positions, in 2004 SDL followed the lead of those other parties and transferred its property and (on a case-by-case basis) its membership to Smer, which had splintered from SDL 5 years before.

- **Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS)**, despite adopting the name of its pre-1989 predecessor, exhibited successor party’s aspects primarily in terms of ideology and personnel rather than in institutions. KSS emerged in August of 1992 as the
unification of two splinter groups: the Union of Communists of Slovakia (UKS) and the Communist Party of Slovakia ‘91 (KSS 91) that left SDL during its transformation in 1991. The new KSS drew its leadership from marginalized mid-level functionaries of the former Communist Party, adopted a program of state ownership and rejection of capitalism and European integration. For more than a decade the party’s support hovered around 2–3% in elections and public opinion polls; in 2002 it managed to capitalize on the implosion of SDL and crises in other parties to enter parliament with 6% of the vote (Haughton and Rybár, 2004). Once in parliament, however, KSS lacked partners and faced internal disarray. Party support dropped back to its former 3% in 2006, and once out of parliament the party faced further decline (FOCUS, 1990–2007).

- **Association of Workers of Slovakia (ZRS)** exhibited successor-party aspects in ideology and, to a far lesser degree, in personnel and institutions. ZRS chairman Jan Ľuptáč, a parliamentary deputy for SDL and head of a loosely associated “Workers’ Association,” refashioned that association as an electoral list with a strongly pro-redistributionist program in early 1994 in response to SDL’s decision to enter into a governing coalition with the Christian Democrats. Ľuptáč’s newly established party entered parliament with 7% in the September 1994 elections and subsequently entered into a government coalition with the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) and the Slovak National Party (SNS). ZRS frequently found itself politically outmaneuvered, however, and with little organizational basis and no clear successes within the government, the party’s support fell below the electoral threshold. The party received only 2% in the 1998 election and less than 1% in 2002.

- **Direction (Smer)** initially exhibited continuity with the pre-1989 Communist Party and its successor, SDL, primarily through its founder, Róbert Fico, though it gradually developed programmatic continuity with SDL and later developed institutional linkages through acquisition of property and members after the dissolution of SDL at the beginning of 2005. Smer began with Fico’s departure from SDL in 1999 as a result of disagreements with other party leaders. Fico’s new party targeted those who were weary of polarization between the authoritarian and pro-democratic forces and sought an alternative to both. His party supported economic redistribution but also put high emphasis on law-and-order issues and corruption and later adopted the appellation “Third Way.” In 2002 the party campaigned against both of the previous governments, prominently claiming “As they stole under Mečiar, so they steal under Dzurinda.” (Pisárová, 2002). While Smer’s 13% in the 2002 elections fell short of its expectations and the party did not find a place in government, the results were sufficient to make it the third largest party in parliament and to give it a prominent platform for publicly opposing government reforms and the party changed its name to Smer-Social.

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1 When the SDL entered the government in 1998, seven out of eight party leaders received important executive or legislative positions. The only exception was Róbert Fico, not only the youngest but also the recipient of the largest share of preference votes among the SDL leadership. In 1999 Fico unexpectedly left the SDL parliamentary party group and set up his new party.
Democracy in 2005. In the 2006 elections, the party more than doubled its share of electoral support to 29%, far ahead of any competitor. Like ZRS in 1994, Smer in 2006 entered into government with the HZDS and the SNS; unlike ZRS, Smer took the leading role in the coalition and its government proved popular. By 2008 the party’s support in polls regularly exceeded 40%, more than any party in Slovakia had ever received on a sustained basis (FOCUS, 1990–2007).

- **Social Democratic Alternative (SDA)** emerged in April of 2002 as an initiative of former SDĽ leaders including the former chair Peter Weiss, who rejected SDĽ’s shift toward a more statist and nationally-oriented programmatic position. SDA contested the 2002 elections but remained below the 5% threshold in almost every survey and ultimately received only 1.8% (which exceeded, however, the 1.3% received by SDĽ). SDA dissolved at the end of 2004 with a significant share of its members joining Smer.

- The **Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS)**, while sometimes mentioned as a Communist successor party, does not fit with the other parties on this list. Although HZDS included among its ranks prominent individuals who had been members of the pre-1989 Communist Party, the party possessed no institutional continuity with the Communist Party and little personal continuity.2 Despite frequent references to HZDS leader Vladimir Mečiar as a “former-Communist” (Carpenter, 1997), most of the prominent HZDS officials with Communist Party ties were “reform Communists” of the 1968-era who were expelled from the party or distanced themselves from it during the period of normalization and participated actively in the anti-Communist VPN in 1989. Nor did HZDS exhibit significant programmatic continuity, focusing heavily on national issues in the mid-1990’s and gradually abandoning programmatic positions altogether in favor of reliance on Mečiar’s (waning) personal appeal.

By 2005 Slovakia no longer possessed a Communist successor party. The remaining parties in the field—Smer and KSS—can at best be understood as one step removed from the primary successor party, SDĽ. Although the term “Communist-successor-successor party,” verges on absurd and offers few conceptual advantages, it is nevertheless useful to compare these parties as a way of understanding the broader developments in party organization, party programmatic appeals and their relationship to party support.

**Organizational difference**

From an organizational perspective, Slovakia’s Communist successor parties are studies in political extremes. Whereas SDĽ inherited the extensive organization and

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2 Surveys conducted by Central European University between 1992 and 1996 show a level of self-reported pre-1989 Communist Party membership among supporters of HZDS, the Slovak National Party, the Hungarian Coalition was slightly lower than for the population as a whole by one to three percentage points. Pre-1989 membership among successor parties was considerably higher: 5 percentage points for ZRS, 22 percentage points for SDĽ, and 33 percentage points for KSS (FOCUS, 1990–2007).
membership of the pre-1989 Communist Party, *Smer* quickly achieved similar levels of public support with virtually no membership or organization beyond a small group of prominent politicians and “electoral professionals.” *Smer*’s founders, furthermore, sought consciously to avoid what they perceived as SDĽ’s internal disagreements that complicated intra-party mechanisms (Chmelár, 1999). The parties differed dramatically in the reach of party organizations, and the degree of centralization of decision-making within the party, and the level of consensus within the party leadership.

In December 1989, a reform-oriented group of Slovakia’s Communist Party gained the upper hand at an extraordinary party congress and embarked upon the process of social-democratization of the party. Faced with an enormous organizational structure, and mass-membership, the new leadership (after some delay) initiated a process of party re-registration, obliging all members to sign a declaration of support for the principles of democratic government and rejection of the totalitarian past. The new leaders also abandoned the traditional principle of democratic centralism, in which lower organizational units possessed considerable formal powers but the leadership maintained control over final decisions. Unlike their counterparts in Poland and Hungary, however, the new leaders did not dissolve and re-establish the party’s formal organization, and thereby allowed local party leaders to retain significant influence within the party and exercise political constraints over the party leaders (Grzymala-Busse, 2002). Party leaders persuaded party congresses in 1992 and 1993 to accept large-scale privatization, foreign investment and even membership in NATO, but only with great hesitation and after long discussion. The poor showing of the SDĽ in the 1994 parliamentary elections returned the initiative to the more conservative local party bosses. Under their pressure the SDĽ founding party chairman, Peter Weiss, did not run for re-election in 1996, and the party congress elected a new chairman, Jozef Migasť. Unlike that of Weiss and the other reformers, Migasť’s power base rested in the district party units that held relative autonomy over the candidate selection, campaign activity and even the level of membership fees and their distribution between the local and national party levels (Mikovič, 2004: 66). The powers of the party’s chair and vice-chairs were further limited at the expense of the broader party leadership in which the middle-level cadres from the district organizations took the upper hand. The control of the lower levels of party over the leadership was enabled by frequently-held party congresses and by divisions even within the leadership between reformers and more traditional socialists.

Within its upper echelon the SDĽ retained the image of a party led by a broad team of competent professionals and in 1998 the reform faction, although in minority, helped steer the SDĽ toward coalition government with market-oriented parties. The conflict between elite efforts at reform and the more traditional position, supported by lower level party organizations, subsequently intensified in the party’s debates over two vital questions: what stance the party should take when its coalition partners pressed a pro-market agenda (Haughton, 2004), and how to respond to the emergence of *Smer* (which competed effectively for SDĽs voters). Their conflict culminated in 2001 when the party congress elected a new party chairman who tried to remove the party-nominated reformers from the government and supported a vote
of no-confidence in his own party’s government, moves that split and provoked the departure of SDA from the already weakened party.

Fico created Smer in response to disagreements with SDL’s leadership, and Smer’s organization reflects Fico’s strong aversion to SDL’s decentralization and internal discord. From its beginning, Fico’s project elevated the leader and his message over membership and organization. Whereas SDL’s local and regional party units enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy, Smer, from its outset, kept power in the hands of the party founder and president Fico and his close associates. Fico served as the unrivaled public face of the party, announcing party positions, and determining the role and visibility of other party leaders; Responsibility for approving of electoral lists, election manifestos, and regional party functionaries fell to the small party presidium, strongly loyal to Fico, rather than to party congresses or regional organizations (Orogváni, 2006). Indeed until 2006 decisions of the party congress could be overruled by a majority of the party’s 34 “founding members” (Rybář, 2004).

Smer also limited the autonomy of its territorial units and was the only parliamentary party in Slovakia whose internal organization did not include municipal-level units. Smer’s 90 district organizations, unlike the district organizations of SDL or other parties, do not coincide with Slovakia’s administrative districts, and the party took a long time to establish party units in every one of the country’s administrative districts. Compared to its voting base, Smer also possessed a relatively small membership, with only two members per every hundred of party’s electoral support in 2002, at the time the second lowest rate among any of Slovakia’s parliamentary parties (Rybář, 2004). As with “electoral professional” parties in other countries (Pannebianco, 1988) members and local officials played a smaller role than groups of media and public opinion strategists, and even occupied electable positions on party lists along with a variety of political novices and, in 2002, a pair of university students who won a party-organized essay contest.

A useful summary measure of the differences between SDL and Smer can be found in surveys conducted during various periods. Fig. 4 locates Slovakia’s parties according to their centralization according to several distinct but not inconsistent measures: a 1996 survey of party organizational secretaries (Krause and Malová, 1996) based on the model of Janda (1980) and expert surveys conducted by Rohrschneider and Whitefield in 2003 and 2007 (Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2003–2004, 2007) and Enyedi and Borz in 2007 (Borz and Enyedi, 2007). The figure shows a dramatic difference between SDL’s low degree of centralization (the result both of an extensive, autonomous organization and the absence of a single dominant leader and Smer’s combination of leader-dominance and weak organization that made it among the most centralized parties ever to gain parliamentary representation in Slovakia. While less data is available, KSS’s relatively low centralization shows similarities to SDL, while the centralization of ZRS bears some resemblance that of Smer a decade later.

Smer’s 2004 absorption of the property and some institutional remnants of SDL revealed substantial differences between the two and highlighted Smer’s deliberate attempts to avoid what it saw as SDL’s mistakes. An influx of former SDL members (as well as some from SDA and other small parties) expanded Smer’s party
membership significantly between 2003 and 2005 and increased the density of party organization. Smer was careful to take administrative steps to ensure that the assets of the smaller parties were transferred en bloc; the individual members of the smaller parties had to register anew as Smer members. Nor were new members guaranteed membership since (because of a related change in Smer’s statutes) all membership applications to the party had to be approved by the party presidium; Smer’s leaders openly acknowledged that they did not welcome as members many of the top politicians active in the acquired parties. In this and other ways, Smer sought to limit the changes that might be wrought by an influx of new members from another (and former rival) party and to prevent a shift in the balance of party power toward the membership and away from the center.

**Programmatic similarity**

Unlike its internal organization, Smer’s external face—its appeal to voters—did not differ radically from that of SDĽ. Over time both SDĽ and Smer functioned as Slovakia’s main political representative of moderate redistributive sentiment and economically-oriented opposition to pro-market reforms, though evidence suggests that during the 1990’s SDĽ moved away from the socioeconomic left while Smer during the 2000’s moved toward the socioeconomic left while shifting its other programmatic appeals.

Of course, identifying a party’s programmatic position is a complicated matter; parties may send different messages through different channels and voters may
respond to those messages in unintended ways. Nevertheless, data from a variety of sources points to the same patterns:

- **Party manifestos.** Party manifesto offered a relatively stable basis for conclusions, but they are also notoriously difficult to interpret, especially for the early years of post-Communism when parties had not yet internalized the common “language” of such manifestos that allows them to be treated as easily comparable documents. Manifesto Project data, however, shows a reasonable amount of consistency on economic questions (Klingemann et al., 2007) and closely resembles the results of Grzymała-Busse’s specific coding for the mid-1990s (2002). Fig. 5 traces the relative positions of Slovakia’s parliamentary parties on economic issues between 1990 and 2006. SDL stood consistently on the anti-market side of the mean, but shifted over time from exclusively anti-market positions in 1990 to a mix of market and anti-market positions in 1994. Although the manifesto data does not permit closer analysis, ZRS took over SDL’s position as the most anti-market party in 1994 but did not survive to be re-elected in the next cycle, leaving SDL again at the extreme, though by a small margin. Replacing SDL in more ways than one, Smer in 2002 offered a nearly identical mix of anti-market and market positions before moving in 2006 to a slightly more distinctive anti-market position: the authors’ preliminary coding of the Smer’s 2006 electoral program shows a slight shift away from markets (from 0.41 to around 0.33) driven by the party’s specific critiques of market-oriented government reforms.

- **Parliamentary and expert surveys.** A 1993 survey of parliamentary deputies found SDL parliamentary deputies identified their party’s position on “what to do about income difference” as closer to the redistributive end of the scale (though only 11 percentage points higher than the mean and only 5 percentage points higher than the next nearest party) (University of Amsterdam, Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, and FACTUM, 1993). They likewise ranked their own voters preferences and their own personal preferences higher than those of any other party (8 and 22 percentage points, respectively). A survey of 22 deputies in Slovakia’s parliament in 1998 found that other deputies positioned SDL closer to the “state intervention” end of a scale anchored on the other side by “liberal market economics” by approximately 15 percentage points; for ZRS, by contrast, the corresponding figure was 41 percentage points (Krause, 1996–1997). No available parliamentary surveys include Smer deputies, but surveys of experts about the party can offer useful (if not first-hand) evaluations. While these surveys do not provide an independent basis for conclusions—experts’ views may well rely on other authors’ reading of the same material—they do offer a useful summary of perceptions regarding party positions. As Fig. 6 shows, these results of the various expert surveys conform quite closely to one another (since the pool of Slovakia experts is quite limited, elite

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3 Manifesto coders recorded 44% of the sentences in ZRS’s idiosyncratic program “un-codable” as compared to only 4% for the next most opaque program.
survey pools overlap) and to the party programs (experts have easier access to programs than any other source). In 2003 and 2004 experts placed Smer quite close to the mean (around 10 percentage points) with KSS much further (around 40 percentage points) and the remnants of SDĽ and SDA (already near dissolution by this point) in the middle. In 2007, however experts placed Smer significantly further from the mean, closer to the position of KSS than to its own position in 2002.

• **Supporter attitudes.** SDĽ voters stood consistently on the redistributive side of Slovakia’s economic spectrum, slowly shifting from the edge of that spectrum toward the middle. Between 1990 and 1994 the party’s average voter differed from the average voter in the country by about 10 percentage points on economic

![Diagram showing the share of pro-market economic content of party manifestos in Slovakia, 1990–2006. Source: Klingemann et al., 2007.](image-url)
questions, further out than any other elected party (Central European University, 1992–1996). By 2002 the party’s voting base had come to occupy a more central position on this and related issues, differing from the mean by less than 5 percentage points, while voters with more extreme positions opted for ZRS, KSS or even the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia and the Slovak National Party. Smer voters also stood on the redistributive side of the mean, though quite close to the center, rather reminiscent of the SDL voters of the late 1990’s and early 2000’s. Fig. 7, which shows party supporters’ responses on the question of personal v. state responsibility for individual economic wellbeing—one of the few economic-related questions asked consistently over time—shows SDL and Smer voters occupying a similar band about 5 percentage points away from the societal mean in favor of state responsibility, a relatively moderate position compared to ZRS (especially in its later years) and to KSS.

Until 2006, at least, these three methods tell essentially the same story: moderation on economic questions by SDL leaders and members, with Smer leaders and voters exhibiting considerable continuity. Beginning around 2006 the story is more difficult to interpret, as Smer’s own statements (and the experts attending to them) see a shift in the direction of redistribution that is not as easily apparent among the party’s mass-level supporters. Whether this reflects a discontinuity, a lag, or a misreading of party rhetoric is a question that bears watching, but at least by late 2007 the economic opinions of Smer’s voters still showed considerable continuity with those who had previously voted for SDL.

Of course economic questions are not the only or even the most important issues, particularly in Slovakia. On other questions, however, Smer’s appeals and the
opinions of its voters also differed little from those of SDĽ. On cultural issues, both Smer and SDĽ supported secular politics over religion and tradition. The 1997 parliamentary survey located SDĽ 10 percentage points away from the mean in the direction of “modernity” and SDĽ voters consistently expressed a resolutely secular outlook (Central European University, 1992–1996). Likewise, the Rohrschneider and Whitefield surveys rated Smer’s position far from the “religiosity” pole—by 29 percentage points in 2003 and 24 in 2007—and Smer voters occupied one of the most secular positions on Slovakia’s party spectrum (FOCUS, 1990–2007).

On national questions the parties also exhibited similarities, but the complexity of these questions makes direct comparison more difficult. Grzymała-Busse and others note that on the inter-related questions of national identity and national minorities, SDĽ initially took a mix of positions, supporting Slovakia’s declaration of sovereignty but opposing many other overt expressions of national identity (2002). In the mid-1990’s, SDĽ reacted negatively to nationally-oriented positions taken by the Mečiar government and in the aforementioned 1997 survey of parliamentary deputies, the closest available surrogate for an expert survey, SDĽ ranked below the mean on “national feeling” by about 16 percentage points although some of its leaders also expressed reservations about inviting the Hungarian party into its 1998 government coalition (Grzymała-Busse, 2002: 159). SDĽ voters, for their part, consistently tended to score at or slightly below the country mean on national feeling and anti-minority sentiment (Central European University, 1992–1996). Smer in its early years occupied a similar (and in some cases similarly inconsistent) position, with occasional tough rhetoric concerning Roma and occasional controversial statements about Hungarian irredentism (Hynčica, 2007). Nevertheless, the party did not go far in this direction. According to the expert survey conducted by Rohrschneider and Whitefield in 2003 (Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2003–2004), Smer occupied a position 2 percentage points above the mean on support for ethnic rights and fell 9 percentage points below the party mean on support for nationalism. By the 2007 survey, however, experts placed Smer 3 percentage points below the mean on ethnic rights 13 percentage points above the mean on nationalism. As with economic questions, however, this shift was not reflected in Smer’s voting base which consistently occupied a position near the population little different from SDĽ voters in the previous decade (FOCUS, 1990–2007).

Organization, issues and voters

Given the relatively small shift in its voters’ attitudes, Smer’s increasing support after 2002 does not appear to be related directly to its more pronounced redistributionist and nationalist positions. The relationship is almost certainly more complex. Indeed the relationship between programmatic position and vote maximization has produced voluminous debates both in academic and professional literature on parties and there is no consensus on the optimum position for a party to take even in extremely simple one-dimensional contests with a limited number of competitors. Slovakia, by contrast, exhibited at least two strong competitive
dimensions and at least six competitive political parties in every election since the end of Communism. With too many variables and too few cases to study, arguments about the connection among them, it is difficult to make any ironclad argument about the reasons for a party’s success. Nevertheless, a variety of forms of evidence gives support to the argument that Smer’s tighter centralization and decreased “historical burden,” that enabled it to react flexibly and occupy political positions, would magnify its electoral potential. Also Smer benefited from a series of external circumstances that made task considerably easier and more sustainable.  

The first potential explanation relates to differences between SDL’s and Smer’s main opponents. Although defining specific “opponents” is a difficult task in a multiparty system, there are reciprocal patterns in the support for SDL, Smer and other parties with redistributionist appeals that suggest a causal pattern. As Grzymała-Busse notes, SDL could make at least a plausible claim to “own” the issue of socioeconomic redistribution (2002), but on that issue in 1994 it faced dynamic rivals: not only from ZRS which challenged it from the redistributionist left but also from HZDS, whose parliamentary deputies took an explicitly centrist position on economic matters (University of Amsterdam, Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, and FACTUM, 1993) in the early 1990s but later drifted—along with party voters—toward redistribution (Ibidem). SDL thus faced both a small upstart on its left flank and a large, powerfully institutionalized party with considerable institutional momentum on only slightly to its right.  

Smer initially emerged in an even more difficult electoral environment, facing both the tacitly (if not always explicitly) redistributionist HZDS as well as SDL itself, but Smer emerged out of Fico’s dissatisfaction within SDL and he successfully attracted many SDL voters who were dissatisfied with the part that their party played in an otherwise market-oriented coalition. Smer’s climb in 2000 mirrors SDL’s drop, and the slowdown in SDL’s decline corresponds to a slowdown in Smer’s climb. In fact, in 2002 Smer’s support sank back toward 10%–15% (the traditional range of SDL) until the summer of 2002, when HZDS began to face internal struggles of its own: a series of defections by second-tier party leaders and a softening of the party’s criticisms of government in the hope of restoring its position as a potential coalition.

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4 As the successor to a Communist successor party, Smer occupied the position without either the benefits or burdens of a direct Communist legacy. On the one hand, this meant the loss of the “cache” of those committed specifically to the Communist Party as an institution, but this was a relatively small share: only 5% of those who claimed to have voted for SDL in 1998 shifted to KSS in 2002 (compared to 17% for previous supporters of ZRS). In exchange, Smer appears to have gained increased access to those with redistributionist attitudes but with a negative memories of Communist Party rule before 1989. Evidence here is weak, but a 2006 survey indicates that those who agreed that “The Communist Regime committed crimes” were less likely to have voted for SDL in 1998 by a margin almost 50%, even controlling for attitudes about socioeconomic redistribution. Smer support was also lower among those who believed in Communist-era criminality, but by a margin of less than 33% (IVO, 2006).

5 The disintegration of ZRS appears to have eased this situation, coinciding in Fig. 2 above with SDL’s recovery after 1995.
partner. The inability of other redistributionist parties to mount a meaningful opposition had left Smer an almost completely open field among moderate redistribution-oriented voters without strong national feeling; the unraveling of HZDS before and after the 2002 election also opened space among voters oriented both toward the redistribution and the nation. Smer’s ability to capture these voters had much to do with the effectiveness of its organization and strategy but was also related to the otherwise unrelated internal weaknesses of its nearest rivals.

The second potential explanation for Smer’s growth relates to the issues for which parties competed. In addition to facing a weaker opposition in critical issue areas, Smer also benefited significantly from an increase in the salience of issues on which it held competitive advantages. Despite its erratic shifts in its position, SDL depended on its explicit concern for remedying the ills of the market economy as its most distinctive issue position, but as Grzymała-Busse’s argues, “issue-ownership” contributed relatively little to electoral success (2002: 157–159). Indeed, subsequent research shows that economic questions were the least important of Slovakia’s major issue splits and exhibited only a weak relationship to voter choice throughout the 1990’s (Deegan-Krause, 2006). Instead, Slovakia’s political debates and the choices of its voters focused primarily on questions about national identity and democracy, issues on which SDL positions were indistinct or even incoherent.

By the 2000’s, questions of democracy and national identity had lost some of their salience, and socioeconomic issues began to play a larger role in political appeals and voter decisions. SDL’s, however, had already surrendered its ownership of the issue by forming a coalition with market-oriented parties. Smer faced no such constraints, and although the party did not put economic questions at the center of its early campaigns—focusing instead on corruption and “law and order” (Marušiak, 2006)—Fig. 7 above indicates that it nevertheless occupied a relatively-distinctive “center-left” position on socioeconomic policies.

The emergence of a relatively homogeneous market-oriented government in 2002 and its pursuit of significant economic reforms further increased the salience of the economic issue divide against all others. Surveys show that the average correlation between support for individual political parties and national questions (majority v. minority rights) declined significantly between 1999 and 2006 (from 0.28 to 0.08 for all parties, from 0.33 to 0.11 for those parties represented in both periods) whereas the correlation with economic questions (state v. personal responsibility) increased (from 0.08 to 0.15 for all parties, and from 0.11 to 0.14 for

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6 The Slovak National Party (SNS) spent much of this period healing a major split that had kept the party out of parliament between 2002 and 2006 and so found it difficult to compete effectively even though expert and mass surveys showed that it had moved significantly in the direction of the redistributionist left.

7 Grzymała-Busse rightly notes that SDL stood in the “pro-democracy” camp, but its stated policy of “independent, left-wing, oppositional politics” did not explicitly exclude coalition with HZDS, as evidenced by its willingness to contemplate government with HZDS (albeit under strict conditions) in 1996 (Deegan-Krause, 2006). For those who sought to remove HZDS from government, the parties that formed the Slovak Democratic Coalition offered less ambiguous positions.
parties with continuity) (FOCUS, 1990–2007). The expert surveys conducted by Rohrschneider and Whitefield, which ask about the importance of particular issue dimensions, show a similar shift: according to respondents, parties in 2007 were less likely to ascribe importance to questions of democracy, nationalism and ethnic rights than they had been in 2003, while they were no less likely to ascribe importance to economic questions, thus putting those clearly out in front. Questions to experts about “the importance of an issue in defining a party’s political orientation,” show a similar shift from 2003, when national issues led slightly over economic ones in weighted averages of party scores, to 2007, when economic ones took a slight lead.

Smer did not engineer this shift—the economic reforms were significant enough to do that on their own—but the party encouraged it and took quick advantage of the change, rebranding itself from Smer-Third Way to Smer-Social Democracy in order to present its criticism of the government in predominantly economic terms. Furthermore, with party competition more firmly anchored around economic competition, and government parties firmly entrenched in support for economic reforms, Smer took advantage of the freedom allowed by its low-intensity organizational base to compete with HZDS and KSS by shifting its stated position further to the left on the socio-economic axis and to adopt more clearly “pro-Slovak” positions on the national axis.

In the absence of true panel surveys for Slovakia during this period, it is necessary to use other methods to infer whether the correlations patterns above actually correspond to Smer’s draw. The best available survey data in this regard consists of retrospective accounts by voters of their own past choices. While this method must be used with care—voters may forget or, worse, “remember” something that reflects their present preferences rather than their past behavior. Nevertheless, other work suggests that retrospective questions in Slovakia produce relatively accurate accounts of past behavior (Deegan-Krause, 2006). While there have not been any large-scale ecological analyses of Slovakia’s voting shifts, less sophisticated correlation analysis tends to reinforce the shifts found in surveys (Deegan-Krause and Haughton, 2008). On this basis it is possible to construct the maps of party ebb and flow found in Fig. 8a–c. These indicate with some precision that while there was not a 1:1 correspondence between SDĽ and Smer voters, the voters who shifted from SDĽ to Smer represented the largest single group (about 2.6% of the voting population or 1/5th of the party’s electorate). A considerably smaller share of SDĽ voters went to smaller left redistributionist parties (KSS received a small but measurable share; SDA received very little) and to nationally-oriented parties (HZDS and the two Slovak National parties) while a larger share than all of these together went to SDĽ’s market-oriented coalition partners in the 1998–2002 government. Voters shifting to Smer in 2002, by contrast, came from across Slovakia’s political scene. Just over 4% of all voters moved to Smer from the self-

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8 The same survey shows little change in the relationship between party preference and political authority, but compared to an earlier study conducted in 1997. The salience of authority had already dropped considerably by early 1999.
declared “left,” mainly from SDL but also from the ideologically ambiguous Party of Civic Understanding. Smer also drew strongly from the two other main ideological streams present among ethnic Slovak voters: 2.3% from the pro-market right and 2.4% from parties emphasizing the Slovak nation. Smer managed a similar feat in 2006, holding nearly all of its 2002 voters and then drawing an additional 1.8% from what remained of the “left” (almost all remaining voters in this sphere) and an even larger, roughly equal shares from the “right” (3.6%) and “Slovak national” streams (4.1% including 2.4% from HZDS alone). Looking inside these figures for
programmatic preferences offers clear evidence of the effectiveness of Smer’s shifting appeals between 2002 and 2006. The voters who moved to support the party during that period were more likely than the average Slovak to express concerns about poverty; the few voters who left the party in the same period evinced a less-than-average concern for poverty and economic issues. Likewise, whereas Smer’s 2002 voters were more likely than the average Slovak to see the party as modern and uncorrupted, the party’s 2006 voters were more likely to see it as the champion of the poor against the rich. Government reforms and the failures of other parties opened a broad field of voters with increasingly economic concerns and Smer quickly moved to stake out the territory. SDL never had the advantage of such a field—certainly not without active competition. Even if it had, its complex organizational structure might have prevented it from benefiting from a similar opportunity.

Organization and issues in the long run

The success of Smer highlights the advantages of new beginnings, but this is a lesson that was already apparent quite early after the fall of Communism of the leaders of the Polish and Hungarian Communist parties who succeeded in re-founding their parties and leaving behind much of the troublesome baggage of their past without abandoning what was most useful. Smer, in that sense, simply reflects the same lessons learned much later. If the Hungarian and Polish cases are useful analogs, then Smer’s subsequent success is the entirely predictable of its adaptations: both the Hungarian MSZP and the Polish SLD enjoyed significant pluralities in the late 1990’s. If so, however, Smer must be conscious of related challenges: the sharp rise of Poland’s SLD was followed by near collapse as the result of corruption scandals in 2004; likewise, scandals have dropped support for Hungary’s Socialists from above 40% to below 20%. In shedding deeper ties that limited their potential support, these parties have also shed the loyalties that might protect them in harder times, in the manner of the Czech Republic’s Communist Party and the Christian Democratic parties in both Slovakia and the Czech Republic (Hanley, 2001; Linek and Pecháček, 2006; Kopeček, 2005). In that sense, the transformations have simply allowed these Communist successor parties to find themselves in the same, rather volatile boat as other charisma and program driven parties depending on media and message. Indeed Smer, having transformed later, has taken the transformation even further, abandoning even the pretense of organization or internal discussion and placing its fortunes in the hands of a capable and adaptable leader and his trusted associates. They have thus far proven extremely successful at identifying electoral messages and changing emphasis as necessary. In government they have demonstrated an ability to satisfy popular demand and, so far, to avoid the scandals and corruptions that have sundered other parties. Indeed, this is important because it is absolutely necessary for the party’s survival. Having shifted resolutely to a new model of party organization, the party becomes absolutely dependent on the legitimacy of its leader. Smer has reached heights not dreamed of by SDL, but must beware the precipice.
### Appendix A. Political Parties in Slovakia 1990–2006

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<td>ANO</td>
<td>New Citizen’s Alliance</td>
<td>New party, 2001</td>
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<td>DS</td>
<td>Democratic Party</td>
<td>Pre-1989 party</td>
<td>4.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>DU</td>
<td>Democratic Union</td>
<td>Split from HZDS and SNS</td>
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<td>HZDS</td>
<td>Movement for a Democratic Slovakia</td>
<td>Split from VPN, 1991</td>
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<td>KDH</td>
<td>Christian Democratic Movement</td>
<td>New party, 1990</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>10.1</td>
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<td>KSČ</td>
<td>Communist Party of Czechoslovakia</td>
<td>Pre-1989 party</td>
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<td>KSS</td>
<td>Communist Party of Slovakia '91</td>
<td>Split from SDĽ, 1991</td>
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<td>KSS 91</td>
<td>Communist Party of Slovakia (reconstituted)</td>
<td>Merger of KSS 91 and ZKS</td>
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<td>MK/MKP</td>
<td>Hungarian Coalition/Hungarian Coalition Party</td>
<td>Electoral coalition (later merger) of Hungarian parties</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
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<td>PSNS</td>
<td>Real Slovak National Party</td>
<td>Split from SNS, 2001</td>
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<td>SDA</td>
<td>Social Democratic Alternative</td>
<td>Split from SDĽ, 2002</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDK</td>
<td>Slovak Democratic Coalition</td>
<td>Coalition of KDH, DU, DS, and others, 1998</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDKÚ</td>
<td>Slovak Christian and Democratic Union</td>
<td>Split from SDK, 2000</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SDĽ</td>
<td>Party of the Democratic Left</td>
<td>Renamed from KSS, 1990</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Smer</td>
<td>Direction</td>
<td>Split from SDĽ, 1999</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SNS</td>
<td>Slovak National Party</td>
<td>Renewed party, 1990</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>11.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOP</td>
<td>Party of Civic Understanding</td>
<td>New party, 1998</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SV</td>
<td>Common Choice Coalition</td>
<td>Coalition of SDĽ and other parties</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SZ</td>
<td>Party of the Greens</td>
<td>New party, 1990</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>VPN</td>
<td>Public Against Violence</td>
<td>New party, 1989</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ZKS</td>
<td>Association of Communists of Slovakia</td>
<td>Split from SDĽ, 1991</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ZRS</td>
<td>Association of Workers of Slovakia</td>
<td>Split from SDĽ, 2004</td>
<td></td>
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University of Amsterdam, Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, and s.R.o. FACTUM, 1993. Questionnaire for Deputies [Computer file].
Unfriendly takeover: Successor parties in Ukraine

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Abstract

Research on successor parties in the former Soviet Union has mostly focused on leftist parties and paid little attention to their interplay with centrist forces which equally have their roots in the Soviet system. This article examines the development of both leftist and centrist successor parties in post-Soviet Ukraine. After consideration of the role of legacies of the old regime as well as the current legal and societal framework, the evolution of leftist parties and the so-called parties of power is explored. The analysis shows that the leftists were weakened by internal splits and a partial inability to modernize. But equally important was the logic of power preservation in the Leonid Kuchma regime, which promoted the formalization of the party of power and crowded out the leftist competitors.

Keywords: Ukraine; Successor parties; Party system; Regionalism

Introduction

The 2006 parliamentary and 2007 pre-term elections in Ukraine marked a serious defeat for the leftist parties. In March 2006, the Communist Party received 3.66 percent of the popular vote, the Socialists 5.7 percent. In September 2007, the
Communists entered parliament (5.4 percent) while the Socialists failed to surmount the 3 percent threshold. After a strong and convincing electoral performance in the 1990s when they gained up to forty percent of the seats in parliament, the major leftist parties have declined. Successor parties in Ukraine, however, comprise a wider range of parties than the ideological heirs to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (KPSS) including groupings usually labeled as “centrists”. Ishiyama (1999) defined successor parties as “those parties which were formerly the governing party in the communist regime and which inherited the preponderance of the former ruling parties’ resources and personnel”. Accordingly, we conceptualize various expressions of the party of power as successor parties to the KPSS.

This article addresses the development of several successor parties in Ukraine. We argue that the development and mutual relationship between centrist and leftist successor parties in Ukraine are affected by the interplay of three factors: (1) the legacies of the communist regime, including regime type, opposition strength and the mode and dynamics of transition; (2) the electoral law; (3) the “regional factor”, that is, the spatial segregation of the electorates. These factors were initially advantageous for leftist parties but eventually contributed to their decline, which was affected by the strengthening and formalization of centrist forces that became the left’s main competitor and pallbearer. In presenting the successor parties we start with the leftists and then turn to centrist parties of power: the People’s Democratic Party (NDP) and the Party of Regions as paradigmatic cases. We trace the formalization (and “rejuvenation”) of this originally informal circle of nomenklatura actors and conclude with a summary of the findings and future prospects.

The Communist era: Regime type and opposition strength

Assuming path dependency of institutional development, Kitschelt (1995) argued that the institutional characteristics of the former (communist) regime significantly shaped the nature of party development in the new system. He distinguished three types of communist regimes: patrimonial, bureaucratic-authoritarian and national consensus. Soviet Ukraine was a “patrimonial communist regime”, featuring hierarchical patron-client relationships and a low degree of bureaucratic professionalization. According to Jowitt (1983) the late Soviet regime was afflicted by neotraditionalist corruption. The KPSS had lost its organizational integrity and become a stratum of careerists whose interests were primarily of a personal and material nature. For the nomenklatura, the preservation of their own position was tied to the preservation of the system, so that the interests of individual actors did not go against the system (Tatur, 1995). The relationships between different institutions were not regulated by a constitution or laws in the narrow sense but by informal practices, bargaining and patron-client relationships (Harasymiw, 1996; Matsuzato, 2001). Although clientelist networks were constantly fought by the central bureaucracies, they were a central element of the system (Hughes, 1996; Rigby, 1981), in which political power was fragmented and personalized (Easter, 2001; Matsuzato, 2001). The nomenklatura system made party functionaries at the republican and
oblast level important actors (Hough, 1969) and guaranteed the KPSS’s monopoly of power (Easter, 2001).

After Stalin’s death in 1953 the nomenklatura system was decentralized by the reform measures taken by Nikita Khrushchev (1953–1964), leading to the proliferation of regional cliques that deepened during the Leonid Brezhnev “era of stagnation”. Despite re-centralization the regional principalities remained entrenched. Informal practices compensated for the growing weaknesses of the economic system (Tatur, 1995), and despite official criticism, they were tacitly accepted. The weak professionalization of the state apparatus offered opportunities for clientelism, but during the Soviet period the power of the party apparatus limited the opportunistic behavior of subordinate actors (Solnick, 1998).

In Ukraine, these developments occurred under the surface of an ideologically conservative party leadership. After World War II, Ukraine’s communist elites were among the most conservative of the Soviet Union (Haran’, 2001) and strictly controlled by Moscow because of Ukraine’s vital importance for the USSR.

In the 1960s Ukrainian Communist Party secretary Petro Shelest (1963–1972) attempted to widen the scope for autonomous action for the Ukrainian party leadership, but he never pursued separatist aims. Shelest has been defined as a national communist when compared to his successor, Volodymyr Sherbytskyi, because Shelest remained convinced that the Soviet project in Ukraine could only succeed by meeting Ukrainian economic and cultural needs (Kuzio, 2000; Subtelny, 2000). Small dissident circles emerged in the 1960s and 1970s (Wilson and Bilous, 1993) and although numbering not more than 1000 people (Subtelny, 2000), it was nevertheless proportionately one of the largest dissident movements in the USSR (see Kuzio, 2008). Despite the fact that dissidents were repressed under Shelest, in 1972, he was removed from office. From 1972 until 1989 Shcherbytskyi led the KPU and political repressions were accompanied by intensified Russification, which likewise signified loyalty towards Moscow (Hrytsak, 1996).

During perestroika the Soviet leadership continued to prefer stability to reform in Ukraine (Sochor, 1997) and the majority of the nomenklatura members retained their positions (Kappeler, 2000). A split into hardliners and soft-liners—as assumed by the transitional approach to authoritarian regimes (Karl and Schmitter, 1991; O’Donnell and Schmitter, 1986)—occurred in Ukraine only after Shcherbytskyi’s replacement as KPU leader in fall 1989 (Sochor, 1997).

First popular fronts emerged in 1987–89, including the most prominent, the Ukrainian Movement in Support of Perestroika (Rukh). Unlike the popular fronts in the Baltic states, it was not initiated by the Communist Party (Clark and Pranevičiute 2008) but in opposition to the party leadership (Sochor, 1997). When Rukh held its inaugural congress in September 1989 in Kyiv, a quarter of the delegates were Party members (Paniotto, 1991). However, the opposition raised more moderate demands than their counterparts in the Baltic states. The Ukrainian opposition was a colorful mix of nationalists, democratic reformers within the KPU, human rights’ activists and coal miners. The relations between the workers’ movement and the national-democratic forces developed from distance in 1989 to cooperation in the spring of 1991, when the miners’ movement began to support independence. But as
the national democratic movement mainly consisted of members of the ethnic Ukrainian intelligentsia (Rusnachenko, 1993). RuKh could not mobilize the population to a similar degree as the Baltic popular fronts could. Moreover, RuKh moved from a generally democratic to a more nationalist program, alienating part of the population, especially in Russophone Eastern Ukraine, although it mainly advocated territorial and not ethnic nationalism.

The March 1990 republican elections were semi-competitive and took place according to the majoritarian system in 450 electoral districts. During the election campaign, the Democratic Bloc was formed, which comprised RuKh, Ukrainian Helsinki Union, and several other NGO’s. The KPU managed to delay the formation of a multi-party system until after the elections, so that it dominated the new parliament (Kuzio, 2000). The Democratic Bloc gained 117 of 450 seats while 248 were won by members of the apparatus (Birch, 1997). The communist hard-liners formed a caucus “For a Sovereign Soviet Ukraine”, known as the “group of 239” (Arel, 1990), led by Oleksandr Moroz, the future leader of the communist successor Socialist Party.

Gradually, power was transferred from the KPU to state structures (Sochor, 1997). Following Shcherbytskyi’s dismissal in 1989, the Communist Party divided into three groups, pro-Soviet imperial, (national) sovereign and democratic platform communists (Kuzio, 1998), but there were few system reformers in the leadership of the KPU (Sochor, 1997). In mid 1990, Shcherbytskyi’s successor, Volodymyr Ivashko, was promoted to a position in Moscow leaving the KPU in further disarray and under mounting criticism by the opposition. On July 16, 1990 perturbations in the KPU led to the Ukrainian parliament proclaiming a declaration of sovereignty of the Ukrainian SSR.

Institutional pluralism emerged when Leonid Kravchuk became chairman of parliament and Stanislav Hurenko first secretary of the KPU. Kravchuk increasingly shielded the parliament from party influence and adopted key points of RuKh’s program (Kappeler, 2000). In fact, the collapse of central institutions and the survival strategies of republican elites led them to falling back on national communism to remain in power but unable to become fully national communists in the same manner as in the Baltic states (Kuzio, 2000). After the abortive putsch in August 1991, parliament declared independence on August 24, 1991, which was confirmed by a referendum on December 1, 1991 with turnout at more than 80 percent and support for independence at 92 percent (Motyl and Krawchenko, 1997).

With perestroika and the introduction of quasi-market mechanisms, the central, vertically organized planning and control system began to collapse (Schroeder, 1989) and informal relations in the communist old boy network proliferated. The reforms did not spawn the self regulation of bureaucracy and the economy, but merely the freeing of particularistic interests and the dissolution of order, because by applying

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1 With the elimination of Article 6 from the Ukrainian constitution in October 1990 (which had protected the KPU from competition), political parties were officially recognized and a multiparty system could develop.

2 The latter founded the Democratic Platform evolving into the Party of Democratic Revival of Ukraine and then NDP (Kuzio, 1994, 2000; Potichnyi, 1992).
strategies based on what Staniszkis (1991) labeled “political capitalism”, individual actors reaped great economic advantages; they looted the state and its resources by “privatizing” it (Tatur, 1995).

“Transition” from Communism in Ukraine: Hijacked by the nomenklatura

Ukraine’s transition from the USSR was a path-dependent process. Those elite groups which were influential at the time of “regime change” could mold the new institutional framework in compliance with their ideas and interests. Linked to these actors were institutional legacies which were translated into a specific form of state-building. The fact that independence was not the outcome of a revolution against the Soviet power center had fundamental consequences. Independence was a compromise between the three relevant groups mentioned above: Rukh, the coal miners’ movement in Eastern Ukraine and the old KPU nomenklatura-turned-national communists (Wittkowsky, 1998a,b). Subsequently, the Ukrainian opposition, mainly intellectuals and representatives of Rukh together with some of their programmatic issues, were partially co-opted by the ruling elite, which could bestow legitimacy to its new power (Prizel, 2002). Wittkowsky (1998a) labeled this temporary “coalition” a “historic closing of ranks”, masking the divergent interests and expectations tied to the period following independence.3 The compromise among the groups did not evolve through negotiations but by default and it was not based on a joint reform program, as was the case in Lithuania (Clark and Praneviciute, 2008). In fact, the opposition and national communists lacked a program for Ukraine’s economic and social transformation (Rusnachenko, 1993). Simultaneously, new opportunities for individual and group-wise enrichment developed and were exploited extensively (Kravchuk, 2002; van Zon, 2000; Wittkowsky, 1998a).

When the KPU was banned in August 1991, most relevant actors had already left the party and taken along their knowledge and their contacts to pursue their interests as non-partisan actors. The Communists had tacitly agreed to the banning of the party in exchange for individual retention of key positions in the bureaucracy and economy (Bojcun, 1995). The “old-new” political elite typically flocked around the executive structures and formed party-like associations or informal political groupings —the so-called “party of power” —which continued to control the executive structures and the interfaces between the various domains. In the first half of the 1990s two thirds of senior political positions were occupied by representatives of the “old-new” KPU elite showing a strong sign of continuity from the Soviet era (Harasymiw, 1996).

Institutional setting and changes

In addition to Soviet regime legacies, the development of the successor parties was and continues to be shaped by two factors: the regional segregation of electorates and the electoral law. Since its independence, the Ukrainian state has held five

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3 Splits between the miners and the national-democratic forces re-emerged in 1992 (Rusnachenko, 1993).

The first free elections were not held until March 1994. Therefore, parliament continued to be dominated by former Communist Party members who were now often without any party affiliation as the KPU was illegal from 1991 to 1993. In addition, the prolongation of the Soviet-era parliament shielded parliamentarians from the electorate and did not stimulate the establishment of grassroots organizations and parties (Birch, 1998). The 1994 parliamentary elections took place under the same rules as in 1990. The former KPU establishment, including powerful regional actors, strove to maintain existing electoral regulations for majoritarian elections that favored individuals over parties (Birch, 1995; Grotz et al., 2003) and encouraged clientelist behavior. The 450 seats in parliament were filled according to the majority principle in single mandate constituencies. The right for nominations was given to work collectives, groups of voters and political parties with the procedure for parties the most cumbersome (Birch, 1997). The “party of power” fielded candidates as “independents” (Bojcun, 1995) and they predominated in parliament with the second largest group belonging to the re-legalized KPU.

In 1997, a new electoral law was introduced according to which half of the deputies were elected from national party lists in a proportional election with a 4 percent threshold and the remaining half of deputies elected in majoritarian districts. Hence, politicians and businessmen established new centrist parties for the 1998 elections (Birch et al., 2002). Following the 1998 elections, “independent” deputies quickly aligned with centrist forces (Harasymiw, 2005). The 2002 parliamentary elections were held using the same mixed electoral law. With the 2006 parliamentary elections Ukraine shifted to a full proportional system with a lower 3 percent threshold with deputies elected on party lists. In the 2007 pre-term elections the same electoral rules applied. The shift to a full proportional system aimed to strengthen parties as a locus of political decision-making. Prior to the change in election legislation in spring 2004 centrist parties had feared the shift to a proportional system as the majority of their deputies were traditionally elected in majoritarian districts. Leftist and center-right parties, on the other hand, supported electoral reform as their deputies were primarily elected in party lists. The 2006 and 2007 election results showed that the new electoral legislation did not hinder the Party of Regions which came first in both elections.

Regional diversity

Ukraine is regionally diverse, a factor that inevitably impacts upon politics as region of residence plays an important role in determining voters’ choice (Birch, 2000;

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4 The barriers were very low because the nomination by a work collective only necessitated the signature of a single representative. Nominations by groups of voters were accepted if they were supported by 10 persons. Candidates nominated by parties, however, had to go through a bureaucratic process. Thus, the share of candidates nominated by parties was only 11 percent in 1994 (Grotz et al., 2003; Wittkowsky, 1998a). But often, party members preferred a different method of nomination, so that in the end there were more party representatives in parliament than the initial lists of candidates suggested.
Kravchuk and Chudowsky, 2005). As several scholars have shown, both historical and socio-economic factor play a role (Harasymiw, 2005). Even if related factors (such as ethnicity, language use) are controlled for, “region” is still relevant in itself. A detailed discussion about the origin of these regional cleavages is beyond the scope of this article and we will merely refer to the political consequences of the regional cleavages.

The Ukrainian party system is fragmented along regional lines (Birch, 2003). A significant divide between the South-East and that of the West-Center of Ukraine has persisted in every election held since 1990 (Wilson and Birch, 1999) and regionalized voting was discernible in the 2006 and 2007 elections (Hesli, 2007). The elections in 1990 showed that regional differences rather than sociological cleavages accounted for voting patterns. The East continued to be the strongest recruitment base for the KPU as well as bureaucrats and economic managers, whereas the Democratic Bloc received most of its support in the Western regions (Arel, 1990; Potichnyi, 1992). In 1990s, political parties had penetrated Ukraine’s regions to different degrees, but basic patterns persisted. In the 2002 elections Our Ukraine (the electoral bloc led by former Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko) was successful in the West and the Right Bank regions, the KPU and the pro-Kuchma electoral bloc. For a United Ukraine in the East and the South, whereas the Yulia Tymoshenko bloc and the SPU were most popular on the Left Bank (Harasymiw, 2005). The spatial segregation of voters of different parties means that regional electoral bases only partially overlap and competition between leftist and rightist parties was and continues to be low (Birch, 1998; Haran’, 2001).

Successor parties in Ukraine 1: The Ukrainian Left

In the Ukrainian political lexicon, the term “Left” usually refers to parties that are to the left of both, social democracy in its traditional understanding and to the left of several Ukrainian social democratic parties. In fact, Ukrainian politics lacks a genuine and strong social democratic party; the formerly influential but marginalized since the orange revolution Social Democratic Party of Ukraine united (SPDUo) represents oligarchic interests while three other social democratic parties are insignificant. The main leftist parties after 1991 were the Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU), re-legalized in 1993, the Socialist Party of Ukraine (SPU) established in fall 1991, the Communist and Post-Communist Studies 41 (2008) 541–561


6 In the 1998 elections region of residence was not a significant factor for only the NDP. Wilson and Birch (1999) hypothesized that the new centrist parties crosscut the electoral cleavages established before 1998. As my analysis of the formalized parties of power reveals, this was not correct. Cospéy (2008) observed a possible change in the 2007 elections with the Tymoshenko bloc capturing votes in Eastern and Southern Ukraine. Whereas the Party of Regions and Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine-People’s Self Defence remained regionally bound, the Tymoshenko bloc seems to transform gradually into Ukraine’s first “national” party.

7 In December 2001, just before the opening of the electoral campaign for the 2002 parliamentary elections, the Ukrainian Constitutional Court invalidated two decrees, which had banned the KPU in 1991. Trochev (2003) assesses the lifting of the ban a symbolic victory, which however did not include the restitution of property.
Peasant Party of Ukraine (SelPU) established in 1992 and the Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine (PSPU) that broke away from the SPU in 1996. The SelPU and Progressive Socialists had become marginalized by the 2002 elections leaving only two successor parties on the left, the KPU and SPU with a total of 200,000 members, representing a small proportion of the 3.5 million members of the KPU in 1985.

All parties of the Ukrainian left are connected historically and, to a great extent, ideologically to the KPU which was an organic part of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (KPSS). Comparing the situation on the left flank in Ukraine with that in other former Soviet republics the KPU had a strong partner and rival in the SPU which also emerged as a communist successor party but which is politically to the right of the KPU (Sekachev, 1997). There are no leftist parties with historical roots: that is, no parties that were destroyed by the Soviet regime and then reemerged, making Ukraine more typical of other Eurasian countries than the Baltic States or Central-Eastern Europe. All four leftist successor parties had their base within the banned Communist Party, but the term “successor party” can only partially be applied to them because material and organizational resources of the former KPU went to that part of the nomenklatura that turned into the non-institutionalized “party of the power” and transformed into centrist parties in the late 1990s (see next section). The Ukrainian left can be systematized according to Kitschelt’s classification (Kitschelt, 1995): SelPU, a clientelistic party; the Progressive Socialists, a one-leader party; and the KPU, combining both ideological (party program) and clientelistic types. A similar combination characterizes the SPU although ideological principles were not clearly outlined for a long period while the SPU had a charismatic leader, Oleksandr Moroz, who was parliamentary speaker from 1994 to 1998.

Organizational and programmatic issues

In contrast to newly founded parties, the KPU did not have to create from scratch local branches which to a certain extent remained intact despite the ban (Sochor, 1997). Hence, it enjoyed the advantage of not having to engage in a simultaneous development of both ideology and organization (Ishiyama and Bozóki, 2002; Timmermann, 1994). Moreover, the left’s electoral successes in the 1994 and 1998 (during a period of massive economic downturn) contributed to the fact that unlike the forced reform of the leftist successor parties in Romania and Bulgaria following their electoral defeats in 1996 and 1997 the KPU remained ossified in its ideological orientation, a factor that contributed to its decline in the 2006 and 2007 elections.

The KPU and the PSPU adhere to Marxism—Leninism. But the Progressive Socialists in espousing a national Bolshevik ideology appeared to be even more ideologically orthodox than the KPU. The KPU, in spite of its own program supporting small and medium business, places emphasis on safeguarding the state ownership of basic branches and land and on the monopolizing of foreign trade. Only in its 1999 election campaign platform was its stance on “nationalization of the banking system” removed (Holos Ukrainy, August 31, 1999).

The ideologically amorphous SelPU, although not formally rejecting privatization, nonetheless emphasized preserving the system of collective farms and opposed
the sale of land (as does the entire left). The SPU’s position was always the most flexible and de facto stipulated economic pluralism.

The KPU adheres to the traditional Leninist interpretation of the relationship between national self-determination and class struggle. Yet only a small number of extreme leftists in the KPU called for the restoration of the USSR. The majority leaned de facto toward a union of Eastern Slavic countries supporting the Belarus—Russia union that began to be developed in the mid 1990s.

SPU leader Moroz’s statement on the eve of the 1994 presidential elections succinctly explained the fundamental difference between the derzhavnyk (in favor of Ukrainian statehood) SPU and Soviet revivalist KPU: “Those who do not have a care as to the disintegration of the USSR do not have a heart—those who advocate its restoration do not have brains” (Tovarysh, no. 25, 1997). During the 1999 presidential election campaign Moroz did not openly advocate strengthening the CIS but instead emphasized Ukraine’s nonaligned status, drawing the SPU closer on this geopolitical question to Ukraine’s centrists (Tovarysh, no. 23, 2000).

In contrast to the KPU, the SPU has experienced some “social-democratization”, beginning in 1993, after the more radical actors had left the party creating PSPU. Wilson (2002) claims that social-democratization came after nationalization, that is, after the SPU’s commitment to Ukrainian statehood, which became obvious during the adoption of the 1996 constitution. Unlike the KPU, the SPU opted to expand its social base at its 2000 congress where it adopted a new version of its program where the SPU described itself as a “left-centrist” force. The SPU claimed that it was in solidarity with entrepreneurs and managers who work “on legal grounds” (Tovarysh, no. 23, 2000). By its own self-identification, the SPU placed itself in an intermediate position between the orthodox KPU and European social democratic parties, tending more towards “democratic socialism” than “social democracy” (Wilson, 2002).

Electoral performance of the Left

During the 1998 parliamentary elections, the first elections under the new mixed system (225 seats by party lists, 225 single member districts), the KPU received 24.7 percent, the SPU-SelPU bloc 8.6 percent, and the Progressive Socialists 4.05 percent (close to the 4 percent threshold). However, the left’s success was not reinforced in majoritarian districts where they received only 48 mandates out of 223 (21.5 percent). In Western Ukraine the left failed to win a single seat. In voting for party lists, the electorate supported the left’s slogans for “social protection” (Chotiner, 2002). In majoritarian districts, however, “independent” candidates (mostly businessmen or state bureaucrats) had access to state administrative resources and promised material gains for the inhabitants of the given district. “Independents” gained 101 out of 223 mandates and became the kernel for centrist party factions loyal to President Kuchma (Table 1).

During the 1999 presidential elections leftist candidates together obtained 44.5 percent of the vote in the first round. In the second round Kuchma achieved a landslide victory over Communist leader Petro Symonenko attracting many
negative voters against the “Communist threat” (56.25 percent against 37.8 percent). Kuchma did well in large and medium size cities (even in those located in “red” regions) and he won in 22 out of 25 oblast centers. On the whole, these regional peculiarities repeated the pattern seen in the 1994 elections. Then incumbent President Kravchuk in 1994 and Kuchma in 1999 collected more votes in the Center and in the West. But in 1999, Kuchma added oblasts in the South and East such as Donetsk, Dnipropetrivsk, and Odessa.

The KPU claimed to advocate ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in Ukraine. In the 1999 elections, however, ethnic Russians were almost equally divided between Kuchma and Symonenko (48 to 46 percent) but Kuchma led with a large advantage among ethnic Ukrainians (63 to 32 percent) and minority nationalities (62 to 35 percent). A comparison of sociological polls conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology on the eve of the 1998 and 1999 elections showed that following the 1998 parliamentary elections the center-left electorate had included as many young people as the center-right, making the center-left different to the KPU whose electorate was dominated by the elderly (Oates et al., 2001). In the center-left electorate the ethnic Ukrainian group was growing and its ethno-political characteristics were becoming indistinguishable from that of the center-right electorate.

The main base of the KPU was Eastern Ukraine, the industrial and urban core of Soviet Ukraine while for the SPU it was rural and small town Central Ukraine. Thus, the regional bases of the KPU and SPU overlap only partially. According to Wilson (2000: 122–140) this factor partially explains why the KPU’s modernization was hindered as a drift to the right would have created a vacuum and strengthened ultra-radicals, such as the Progressive Socialists, within and outside the party.

Initially, the KPU benefited from the Ukrainian electoral system. In 1994, the preservation of single mandate voting and in 1998 the mixed system with a four percent barrier proved to be advantageous as “Red Directors” entered parliament within the KPU. This changed by the 2002 elections when local economic directors

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<tr>
<td>Communist Party of Ukraine</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>19.98%</td>
<td>3.66%</td>
<td>5.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>84</td>
<td>+ 37</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>+ 6</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist Party of Ukraine</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>6.87%</td>
<td>5.69%</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(together with Peasants’ Party)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>+ 6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>+ 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For a United Ukraine electoral bloc</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>11.77%</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
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<tr>
<td>People’s Democratic Party (NDP)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>5.01%</td>
<td>Part of For a</td>
<td>0.49%</td>
<td>0.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>+ 12</td>
<td>United Ukraine</td>
<td>0 seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party of Regions</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Part of For a</td>
<td>32.14%</td>
<td>34.37%</td>
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<td>–</td>
<td>United Ukraine</td>
<td>186 seats</td>
<td>175 seats</td>
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had largely joined various emerging parties of power and later the “presidential majority” in parliament.

In the 2002 parliamentary elections all leftist forces received a combined 32 percent of the vote. For the first time the KPU lost its first place in the parties and blocs who made it into parliament to Our Ukraine which obtained 24 to the KPU’s 20 percent, equaling 65 seats. The Communists only won in 6 single member districts, down from 37 in 1998. The SPU gained 6.87 percent, resulting in 22 seats, including two in single mandate districts. Many voters who had supported the Socialists as the only viable opposition in the past, voted for Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine bloc instead. So, while Moroz was trying to move his party more to the political center he nevertheless had to simultaneously win votes on the left.

Nevertheless, in the first round of the 2004 elections Moroz for the first time received a greater number of votes than KPU leader Symonenko, and the SPU came ahead of the KPU in the 2006 elections (fourth compared to fifth place). The KPU attracted only between 3—5 percent compared to its 20 percent in 2002.

The Left during the Kuchma regime and the Orange era

In 2000, Moroz publicized the audiotapes allegedly confirming Kuchma’s involvement in the murder of journalist Georgi Gongadze enhancing Moroz’s image as an “honest” politician and true oppositionist. In contrast, the KPU continued de-facto to support the Kuchma regime over the opposition, for example during the April 2001 vote of no confidence in the Yushchenko government (unlike the SPU which did not support the vote). The KPU also gave only ambivalent support to the “Ukraine without Kuchma” movement in 2000–2001 and to the “Arise Ukraine!” protests of 2002–2003, both of which the Socialists supported. In reality, the KPU was prone to choose what it viewed as the “lesser of two evils” (Kuchma and the Party of Regions) over the “nationalist”, pro-NATO Yushchenko and his national democratic allies.

During the 2004 campaign, Symonenko backed up claims by the Yanukovych campaign of a US conspiracy supporting Yushchenko. The KPU formally did not support any candidate in the repeat second round but most KPU members campaigned for Yanukovych. The SelPU and PSPU openly supported Yanukovych’s candidacy.

Following the first round of the 2004 presidential elections in which Moroz came third, Yushchenko and Moroz signed a political agreement: in return for support in the run-off, Yushchenko agreed to increase the role of the parliament and the SPU received ministerial posts in an Orange government (Hessl, 2007). The KPU followed hard line centrists (the Party of Regions and SDPUo) into opposition to the orange regime. Following the 2006 elections the SPU suddenly defected from the orange coalition, over its insistence that Moroz become parliamentary speaker, to the 2006–2007 “Anti-Crisis coalition” composed of the Party of Regions and the KPU. As a result of this “betrayal” the SPU failed to enter the 2007 parliament when it received only 2.86 percent (Herron, 2008).
**What is left of the Left?**

The current crisis of the Left is more related to organizational questions than to a lack of societal interest in social-democratic ideology. The reasons for slow progress in the evolution of center-left parties are the loss of social democratic traditions after seventy years of Soviet rule; independent trade unions remained weak, Ukrainian society distrusted parties, there still was a small (although growing) middle class. Wilson (1997) observed that because the KPU appeared to be the strongest force on the left, the restructuring of this flank depended on the KPU’s position but the post 1993 KPU incorporated the hardcore orthodox pre-1991 KPU members and was therefore unlikely to become a party that could modernize itself along the lines of successor parties in Central-Eastern Europe.

In Romania and Bulgaria, successor Communist Parties transformed successfully into European center-left parties following their electoral defeat in 1996–1997. Ukraine’s leftist parties only entered government in 2005 (SPU) and 2006 (KPU) thus mitigating their need to moderate their ideological positions upon assuming governmental responsibility. The common home base of the KPU and Party of Regions in the Donbas and Crimea assisted in the merger of their voters. The SPU modernization was interrupted in 2006–2007, and the Communists only started to campaign for attraction of better educated electorate outside the pensioners (first changes can be seen in Table 2). Attempts at reuniting the left in late 2007 and 2008, mainly driven by the discredited Socialists are unlikely to prove successful, and the emergence of the populist Union of Left Forces could lead to further disintegration.

### Table 2
**Dynamics of voting according to exit polls**

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<td>6.3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
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<td>28.1</td>
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<td>4.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>40.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>17.4</td>
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<td>4.4</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
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Source: Natsionalnyj exit poll: pozachergovi parlamentski vybory 2007. Kyiv, 2007, pp. 102–108. The exit poll was conducted by a consortium of the Democratic Initiatives Foundation, the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology and the Razumkov Ukrainian Center for Economic and Political Studies.
Even though the KPU has a relatively large number of members what binds them to the party is the existence of patron-client ties (Ishiyama, 2002). But, during the first decade after independence the leftist parties lost their state clientele. Their permanent opposition status during the Kuchma era limited their ability to use patronage and other government resources. Moreover, the advocacy role for Russian-speakers was taken over by oligarchic parties (especially the Party of Regions, see below) (Protsyk and Wilson, 2003).

Successor parties in Ukraine 2: The party of power and centrists

Centrist parties in Ukraine largely lack a distinct ideology instead representing the economic and power interests of their relevant members and leadership. The political center has been inhabited by various parties of power, two of which deserve special attention: the People’s Democratic Party (NDP) and the Party of Regions. While the NDP failed to keep its influence, the Party of Regions is the only former pro-Kuchma centrist party that has continued to be successful following the orange revolution winning first place in the 2006 and 2007 elections.

Centrists are not successor parties to the KPU in ideological terms. But they inherited much of the political culture of the KPU, such as a very centralized power structure, political and economic conservatism, and command-administrative methods. Moreover, there is continuity in personnel and many of the assets of the banned KPU were “appropriated” by nomenklatura members who formed the informal party of power (Polokhalo, 1995). In the course of power consolidation the party of power transformed itself into a coalition of rival centrist parties which were allied to their benefactor, President Kuchma. These centrist parties only emerged in the 1998 elections after the emergence of powerful economic actors during the 1990s.

The rise and failure of NDP

In 1996, the NDP was founded when the Party of Democratic Revival of Ukraine (PDVU) and the Labor Congress of Ukraine united. The PDVU had its origins in the Democratic Platform of the KPU. The Labor Congress had its greatest support base within the former Komsomol of the Soviet KPU and its head Anatolii Matvienko was elected NDP leader (Kuzio, 1994, 1998).

The NDP was planned to become a political core for the consolidation of pro-Kuchma centrist forces. When NDP member Yevhen Kushnaryov became head of the presidential administration (1996–1998) and Valeriy Pustovoitenko was appointed Prime Minister (1997–1999) the NDP and the newly founded faction in parliament grew rapidly (Fesenko, 2005). Positioning itself on the moderate wing of the Kuchma regime the NDP offered a “pragmatic and gradualist approach to the economic crisis” in the 1998 elections. It gave priority to market reforms while guaranteeing jobs, the termination of wage arrears, adequate pensions etc. (Harasymiw, 2005). In the 1998 elections the NDP competed with both the national
democratic *Rukh*, the Agrarians and another emerging party of power, the Social Democratic united Party (SDPUo\(^8\)). Despite access to huge administrative resources in the 1998 elections the NDP received only 5.01 percent of the popular vote resulting in 17 seats in parliament. That core group was joined by 71 deputies elected in single mandate constituencies, including 12 party members. Most former ministers, presidential advisors, state employees and many business people joined the NDP faction. By August 1998, the NDP was the second largest faction in parliament (*Wilson and Birch*, 1999).

The NDP was not a cohesive force and collaborated with various local partners. Moreover, before the 1999 presidential elections Matvienko did not back Kuchma’s re-election and departed to found the Republican Party “Sobor” which joined the Tymoshenko bloc in the 2002 elections. Prime Minister Pustovoitenko became head of the NDP in 1999 but his replacement as prime minister reduced incentives for parliamentary deputies to stay with the NDP (*Protsyk and Wilson*, 2003). The NDP started to disintegrate and former members joined various political forces, including parties that later supported Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine in 2002 (*Kuzio*, 2004a). By the 2002 elections the NDP faction was reduced to the original number of 17 deputies.

During the 2002 parliamentary elections the NDP joined the For a United Ukraine bloc and seven of the 35 elected deputies from For a United Ukraine were NDP members. During the last two years of the Kuchma era the NDP increasingly distanced itself from the Kuchma regime. NDP members were stripped of government positions and the faction’s members were co-opted by other parties. Former parliamentary speaker Ivan Pliushch resigned from the NDP and defected to Our Ukraine (*Kuzio*, 2004a,b). In 2008 the marginalized NDP is involved in the process of joining President Yuschenko’s new emerging party of power, United Center.

*Party of Regions: The rise of the Donetsk group to the national level*

The most successful component of the For a United Ukraine (ZYU) bloc was the Donetsk party of power, the Party of Regions. While the ZYU bloc gained only 11 percent at the national level it obtained almost 40 percent in Donetsk region (in contrast to the NDP, which was initiated from above and had no specific regional support base).

During the Soviet era, the Donetsk region already assumed a special position due to its strong industrial base although the so-called “Dnipropetrovsk clan” was much more influential in Kyiv and Moscow. In elections held in the 1990s Donetsk bosses entered parliament and Yuhym Zvyahilsky had been acting prime minister for

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\(^8\) The SDPUo is not defined in this article as a communist successor party, unlike the NDP and the Party of Regions. This party was based on informal and opposition groups outside the KPU but later seized by the Medvedchuk-Surkis Kyiv oligarchic group which discredited the social-democratic name of the party. Unlike the NDP and Party of Regions which were created as new parties the SDPUo was an example of an existing party taken over by oligarch business interests. Another example of such a takeover by oligarch interests in the 1998 elections was the takeover of the Green Party of Ukraine which grew out of the opposition Green World Association NGO.
almost a year in 1993–1994 but they were never organized as a coherent regional force. First, the power elite in Donetsk is a mix of “red directors” and former Communist Party officials as well as newcomers who made capital trading gas and other raw materials. During the 1990s these emerging actors were afflicted by fierce internal competition for economic assets giving Donetsk a reputation as a “wild East”. Second, conflict with the Dnipropetrovsk clan over the division of the gas market nearly put the Donetsk clan out of business because the Dnipropetrovsk clan received more national support after Kuchma was elected president.

For many years, the motto “politics is made in Kyiv, and money is made in the Donbas” aptly described the dominant strategy of the regional actors. Until the creation of the Party of Regions in 2000–2001 the majority of the important regional actors were unaffiliated with any party. With the change of the electoral law in 1997 and Yanukovych’s appointment as governor in the same year attempts at uniting politically intensified. Yanukovych and his allies established a monopoly over local politics (Zimmer, 2006b), primarily by employing a typical nomenklatura strategy—that is, by putting “their people” in key positions. Yanukovych himself assumed additionally the chair of the regional council. During the 1999 presidential elections, Yanukovych supported Kuchma who won unexpectedly the Donetsk left-leaning electorate over his Communist challenger and Donetsk native Symonenko. This increased the Donetsk lobby’s influence on the national stage.

The founding of the Party of Regions of Ukraine was a result of a forced merger of the Party of Regional Revival of Ukraine (founded by the Donetsk elite during the mid 1990s and led by then Donetsk mayor Volodymyr Rybak), the Party of Labor (another Donetsk-based party of “red directors” led by former Deputy Prime Minister Valentyn Landyk), Solidarity (headed by Petro Poroshenko who defected soon to Our Ukraine and became head of its 2002 campaign), Kyiv Mayor Leonid Chernovetsky’s Party For a Beautiful Ukraine and the All Ukrainian Party of Pensioners. As its position in the region was already incontestable, the Donetsk clan did not establish the party to rule the region but to enhance its presence in the corridors of power in Kyiv. Initially, Mykola Azarov, head of the State Tax Administration, was elected leader of the party until Yanukovych took over in 2003.

This formalization and concentration of political power was strongly driven by economically powerful actors in Donetsk, that is by Rinat Akhmetov (Ukraine’s richest man) and his ascending business empire which has been united as System Capital Management (SCM) since 2000. It initially also included the Industrial Union of Donbas (ISD), the leading financial industrial group of the late 1990s, but the ISD oriented towards Yushchenko’s candidacy in the 2004 elections and following his election sent its senior leaders to work in the presidential secretariat, the National Security and Defense Council and second Tymoshenko government (2007–?).

These old-new economic actors in SCM and ISD remained in the background but brought in their confidents. Consequently, the power arrangement within the region shifted in favor of younger actors with weak origins in the Soviet nomenklatura, but with immense resources and the possibility to exercise both physical and structural force. Machine politics was especially intense in the 2002 and 2004 elections adding
to the effect of administrative resources (Zimmer, 2005), preventing other parties from campaigning in the Donetsk region (Zimmer, 2006a). The Party of Regions itself claimed that in 2002 it had more than half a million members, which made it the strongest of all parties in Ukraine. However, many of these members were simply dragooned into the party. Yanukovych was personally rewarded for ensuring high support for Kuchma and ZYU in 1999 and 2002 respectively by being proposed as prime minister in November 2002 despite his criminal youth (he was twice sentenced to prison). His first deputy was Andriy Kluyev, former deputy governor of Donetsk, and in 2002–2004, a chairman of the parliamentary committee for energy questions. During the 2002 parliamentary elections the Party of Regions as a part of the ZYU bloc won almost all of the single mandate districts in the Donetsk region. After the elections ZYU fell apart and thereafter the Party of Regions formed its own faction in parliament —Regions of Ukraine— led by Raisa Bohatyreva from Donetsk.9

Prime Minister Yanukovych became the official presidential candidate in 2004. After the limited success of machine politics and fraud that culminated in the Orange Revolution, Yanukovych lost to Yushchenko in the repeat second round election on December 26. The election results showed a clear East–West division of the electorate (intensified by deliberate manipulations of the ruling regime and Russian interference) with Yanukovych’s deriving most of his support in Eastern and Southern Ukraine.

Re-emergence after defeat and the dilemmas of modernization

In the 2006 elections the Party of Regions’ candidate list was dominated by economic actors from the highly industrialized east of the country. About 50 of the first 90 candidates came from Donetsk region. To secure his economic and personal interests and obtain immunity from prosecution after Yushchenko’s election, Akhmetov entered the political stage and was elected to parliament in the 2006 and 2007 elections in the Party of Regions. The orange era has though seen Akhmetov’s assets increase to $30 billion, making him one of the wealthiest individuals in Europe, never mind Eurasia.

The Party of Regions won the first place in the 2006 elections. This success was remarkable following its defeat in the 2004 presidential elections after which the Party of Regions had become demoralized. It has been assisted by persistent orange disunity since the September 2005 dismissal of the Tymoshenko government. As a result of Moroz’ defection from the orange camp to “Anti-Crisis coalition” with Party of Regions and the KPU, President Yushchenko had to agree for a brief period of cohabitation with the second Yanukovych government.

However, his clumsy attempts to monopolize power provoked early parliamentary elections of 2007. Party of Regions won the plurality of the vote (34.37 percent

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9 In the 2006–2007 Yanukovych government he was deputy prime minister for energy issues.
10 She left the Party of Regions faction in May 2008, six months after becoming secretary of the National Security and Defense Council but remained a member of the party.
with 175 seats) but had to go into opposition again as it failed to move out of its Eastern and Southern strongholds into Central Ukraine and was challenged by the Tymoshenko bloc in the East and South outside its hardcore areas of support in the Donbas and Crimea (Copsey, 2008).

A large proportion of the votes the Party of Regions gained (compared to 2002) in the 2006 elections came from the KPU (Hesli, 2007). In terms of program the Party of Regions, like the KPU, positioned itself in opposition to Yushchenko and Tymoshenko in the 2006 and 2007 elections promoting Russian as a second state language, favoring a federal system and promoting stronger ties with Russia. Both the KPU and the Party of Regions were attractive to voters who oppose both Ukrainization and Westernization. However, the program’s emphasis was on socioeconomic issues. Thus, the Party of Regions promoted many of the same issues as the KPU, albeit without the “ideological ballast” and the KPU’s explicit Soviet nostalgia. In addition, the Party of Regions could provide more resources in a clientelist exchange to voters who are mostly elderly, female and have less formal education (Kupchinsky, 2006; Zimmer, 2005).

Nevertheless, the Party of Regions faces difficult dilemmas. It is does not have a clear ideology yet, remaining mostly a party of wealthy people who were (or are still) connected in this or that form with the state bureaucracy. How large business’ interests will be reconciled with slogans of social protection in party’s ideology and practice as well as in the eyes of its voters is yet to be seen.

Yanukovych of 2008 is not the same Yanukovych as in 2004. He is to play according to the results of democratic elections. It was the so-called “moderate” wing of the Party of Regions (usually associated with Akhmetov, Kolesnikov and Bohatyreva) seeking compromises with President Yushchenko which persuaded Yanukovych to agree to early elections allegedly for the promise of grand coalition after elections. Divergence of interests of the two main groupings is apparent, but Yanukovych remains the only public face of the party which can contest in the next presidential elections.

Conclusion

As we have shown in this article, the Ukrainian left has been crowded out by centrist parties in a lengthy process that can be explained by several mutually reinforcing factors.

The bulk of the former Communist elite remained in power after independence. They formed informal networks and constituted the party of power, which was later formalized into various versions of centrist parties, which mostly lacked a clear ideology. Thus, as a rule, there is no direct lineage between the Communist party and the past and present centrist parties, but the actors took a detour (via informalization of power) and reacted rationally to new institutional frameworks and incentives, when they formalized their political and economic clout into political party organizations. In this process, they rejuvenated their cadres and adopted new strategies. They were financially more viable than the leftist parties and had access to both administrative resources and patronage to draw voters.
Finally, the most successful centrist party, the Party of Regions, adopted slogans that hitherto had been claimed by the leftist parties and took over large parts of the leftist electorate. It did so by making it a viable alternative for voters who oppose the orange camp but equally do not support the backward-oriented KPU. This process was facilitated by the fact that the left was split among various groupings and was exceedingly successful in elections until the turn of the millennium. Therefore, it failed to modernize in terms of program and personnel.

The success of leftist slogans in electoral campaigns, however, indicates that the current crisis of the Ukrainian left is not a crisis of social-democratic ideology but rather a crisis of leftist parties. A genuine social-democratization is pending, even though it is far from evident who will lead such a process.

Appendix A. List of party acronyms

KPSS Communist Party of the Soviet Union
KPU Komunistychna Partiya Ukrayiny, Communist Party of Ukraine
NDP Narodno-Demokratychna Partiya, People’s Democratic Party
PDVU Partiya Demokratychnoho Vidrodzhennya Ukrayiny, Party of Democratic Revival of Ukraine
SDPUn Sotsial-Demokratychna Partiya Ukrayiny [obyednana], Social Democratic Party of Ukraine united
SPU Sotsialistychna Partiya Ukrainy, Socialist Party of Ukraine
ZYU Za Yedynu Ukrayinu, For a United Ukraine

References


