Intra-Party Democracy in Post-Communist Europe: Explaining Change and Stability

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Abstract

In the post-communist period, political parties in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) had to convincingly demonstrate that they are a vital part of a functioning democratic society. Well-developed intra-party democracy (IPD), and the ability of parties to be responsive to the preferences of the people which is arguably associated with IPD, is one way of accomplishing this. By asking what factors are relevant to an explanation of IPD we present an analytical framework in which the formation of IPD can be investigated and explore the patterns of IPD and their determinants. We draw on a newly constructed dataset based on standardized content analysis, including 129 party statutes from 14 major parties from Hungary, Romania and Slovakia between 1989 and 2011. Relying on unit fixed effect (FE) regression approaches, which allow us explicitly to investigate differences between parties and over time, our analyses suggest that party origin, party size and Europeanization have important implications for the formation of IPD within CEE parties.

Keywords

Intra-party democracy – Political parties – Party change – Central and Eastern Europe

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Introduction

Despite partisan dealignment and declining membership numbers, political parties are still central actors in the decision-making process in modern representative democracies (Cross and Katz 2013b: 1; Kittilson and Scarrow 2003). Thus, they are also important players in the process of democratic consolidation in young democratic political systems (Pridham 2014). Regarding Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), this raises the question of how internally ‘democratic’ these parties are organized. Katz (2006: 44) in particular stresses, that studying the formation of intra-party democracy (IPD) in former communist regimes is desirable, because it meaningfully expands our knowledge that has been previously collected by studying Western European countries.

In general, it is quite surprising that only a few studies have been interested in explaining why IPD, or some of its conceptual aspects, vary between political parties and countries (see e.g. Kenig 2009; Lundell 2004; Pennings and Hazan 2001). In the CEE context, findings of previous studies on the formation of IPD are mostly based on case studies of single countries, or focus on a very narrow number of political parties (Bäck 2008; Pettit 2012). The main conclusion regarding CEE parties is that they remain rather ‘oligarchic’ in their internal organization (Chiru and Gherghina 2012), but comparative evidence is lacking so far. However, our data suggest that general conclusions of this type do not adequately represent the actual dynamics and that differences between parties can be observed. Due to this lack of research, our main research question is the following: What factors are relevant to the explanation of the formation of IPD with CEE parties? Accordingly, our main focus is to explain the formation of IPD within CEE parties from 1989 up to 2011. This period is of great interest, because it comprises more than the first two decades of the new democratic parties and democratic political systems after the collapse of communism in CEE.

To answer our research question we use Harmel’s (2002) typology of ‘party organizational change’ as an overarching theoretical framework. Within this framework we generate specific hypotheses about the formation of IPD within CEE parties. Subsequently, these hypotheses are tested empirically. For this purpose, we draw on a newly comprised dataset based on standardized content analysis, including 129 party statutes from 14 major parties from Hungary, Romania and Slovakia between 1989 and 2011 (von dem Berge et al. 2013). For the analysis, we use unit fixed effect (FE) regression approaches, which allow us to investigate differences between parties and over time.
Theoretical Framework: IPD Formation as a variant of Party Organizational Change

In dealing with factors that contribute towards an explanation of IPD, we have to consider that, in absence of a general theory, there are several strands of the literature providing important insights and suggesting relevant hypotheses. The most important concept for explaining IPD and its formation within CEE parties is the concept of ‘party change’ (e.g. Bosco and Morlino 2007; Harmel and Janda 1994; Wilson 1994), which is broadly defined as changes in “party rules, structures, policies, strategies or tactics” (Harmel and Janda 1994: 272). As our focus is on IPD, we are dealing with ‘party organizational change’ (Harmel 2002), because, broadly speaking, IPD “refers to the implementation of a minimum set of norms within the organizations of political parties” (von dem Berge et al. 2013: 2; see also Zeuner 2003: 254; emphasis by the authors). Within an ideal democratic party, the “will should be formed ‘bottom-up and […] the internal distribution of power should be marked by dispersion at different levels, bodies and individuals rather than by the concentration in one organ” (Cular 2004: 34). The reasons for party organizational change can be internal (within the party) and/or external (outside of the party). But in the end, also externally motivated changes have to be implemented within the party by those who are in power, which have to respond to the environmental stimulus (Wilson 1994: 264, 281; Harmel 2002: 129, 132).

Harmel (2002) suggests three main theoretical approaches which can be used to explain party organizational change: the ‘life-cycle approach’, the ‘system-level trends approach’ and the ‘discrete change approach’. The life-cycle approach and the system-level trends approach can be considered as rather ‘evolutionary models of party change’ whereas the discrete change approach is rather to be viewed as a ‘developmental model of party change’ (see also Panebianco 1988: 181-236). While especially the life-cycle approach (‘evolutionary model’) describes to a large extent the natural process of party institutionalization and stabilization, the discrete change approach (‘developmental model’) considers primarily political events and circumstances as reasons for party organizational change. By extending Harmel’s conceptualization, we use all three types of party organizational change to explain the evolution/development of IPD within CEE parties. This is possible and necessary because of the specific circumstances in which CEE parties have emerged, evolved and developed.

It should be noted that Harmel discusses party organizational change in more general terms (e.g. when a party transforms into an entirely new organizational form), while we focus exclusively on IPD as the dependent variable. Nevertheless, we use Harmel’s three-type-approach as a broader and overarching framework in which the generated hypotheses only deal with IPD, which is conceptualized as one component of party organization and therefore
also of party organizational change. In any case, the theoretically derived independent variables have to be strong enough to break the natural “wall of resistance” (Harmel and Janda 1994: 261) of political parties. Because according to party change theory, parties are conservative organizations which resist change to a large extent (e.g. Harmel and Janda 1994: 261, 278).

**The Life-Cycle Approach**

The life-cycle approach explains party change as a function of a party’s maturation and growth (Harmel 2002: 119, 128). The main source of explanation is the aging process of the party which can be described as an ‘evolutionary’ process (Harmel 2002: 129). Here, party changes occur in particular periods of a party’s life time (Harmel 2002: 132).

From this perspective, organizational changes of CEE parties can be seen to a large extent as ‘evolutionary changes’, because these parties are (re-)founded in the early 1990s after the collapse of Soviet communism and therefore undergo a kind of ‘natural evolutionary’ process. In this sense, all CEE parties are at more or less similar ‘evolutionary stages’ in which organizational changes can be considered as normal events on the way to stabilization and institutionalization. Broadly speaking, especially in the 1990s, but also in the early 2000s, CEE parties and party systems were only weakly institutionalized when using the two main indicators ‘age’ and ‘electoral volatility’, and become more institutionalized as time went on (e.g. Mainwaring and Torcal 2005; Powell and Tucker 2014). Therefore, one can argue that democratic parties become more internally democratic as time progresses because in order to establish and consolidate party structures, democratic experience over time is needed.

**H1a**: The older the parties, the higher their IPD-levels.

In contrast, in his ‘iron law of oligarchy’ Michels (1911) argues that all parties – which were not oligarchic from the beginning – are very likely to develop oligarchic and centralized structures. This is by far the best-known assumption of the life-cycle approach (Harmel 2002: 121). Therefore, it is included here as a counter hypothesis to what can be expected against the special background of evolutionary party institutionalization in CEE countries.

**H1b**: The older the parties, the lower their IPD-levels.

Compared to old and established parties, newly emerged parties are more likely to implement an inclusive way of intra-party leadership selection (Chiru and Gherghina 2012: 513; Cross and Blais 2012: 130, 134f.). There are two reasons for this assumption: First, inclusive
leadership selection methods help new parties to become more attractive to voters, and second, there are no established party elites which could hamper such a move in order to prevent their influence over leadership selection. While transferring this argument to the context of CEE parties, we have to pay special attention to the context and conditions of the emergence of these parties. In CEE, new parties can be expected to be more democratic, because they are formed after the breakdown of the previous autocratic regimes in a democratic context and openly profess their conviction towards its values.

**H2**: Parties which newly emerged after 1989 have higher IPD-levels than parties which already existed before and during the communist period.

From the perspective of an “integrated theory of party goals and party change” and in line with the life-cycle approach, party change can be conceptualized as a process of adaptation including not only decisions to change party organizations but also issue positions and electoral strategies (Harmel and Janda 1994: 259-261). These three variants of party change (organizational, ideological/programmatic, and strategic) may influence each other mutually. To give an example: One might expect that when parties change their programmatic profile and increase their distance to the centre of the ideological left-right spectrum, they lower their IPD-levels and when parties lower this distance, they raise their IPD-levels.\(^1\) Dealing with candidate selection as an important aspect of IPD, in the light of party goals, one can argue that ‘policy-seeking’ (Strom 1990) or ‘ideological’ parties tend to adopt rather exclusive ways of intra-party decision making that ensure “a candidate’s ‘socialization’ into the party culture” (Hazan and Rahat 2010: 21; Gallagher and Marsh 1988). Contrary to that, ‘vote-seeking’ and ‘office-seeking’ (or ‘power-oriented’) parties can be expected to choose a more inclusive way of intra-party decision-making, not least to attract voters (Hazan and Rahat 2010: 21; Gallagher and Marsh 1988).

In other words, ideological parties, and within this group especially ‘extreme ideological’ parties further away from the centre of the ideological left-right spectrum, are likely to make sure that only candidates are selected who stick to the party’s ideology and programme and have internalized the party values. Power-oriented parties on the other hand are more likely “to include as many different kinds of candidates as possible, regardless of ideological loyalty or ascriptive characteristics, in order to broaden the party's appeal“ (Ishiyama 2000: 878). In applying this argument to the overall concept of IPD it can be assumed that within ‘(extreme) ideological’ parties only a rather exclusive group of ‘ideologically reliable’ party elites

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\(^1\) Especially in the 1990s the young and weakly institutionalized CEE parties are found to change their programmatic profiles quite frequently (von dem Berge 2015: 368-378).
decides, which is also justified by the need to position the party such that it appeals to the desired segment of the electorate (Belchior and Freire 2012: 276; Dalton 1985: 290-292). Viewed from the same perspective, ideologically moderate parties can be expected to have higher levels of IPD because they formulate their ideological positions based on inclusive internal debates and compromises resulting in policy alternatives that are less distinct (Allern and Pedersen 2007: 72).

**H3**: The closer a party is to the centre of the ideological left-right spectrum, the higher its IPD-level.

Party size has also been discussed to have an influence on IPD. The theoretical considerations are quite simple here: In general, IPD is a goal of political parties which they wish to achieve, not least to become more attractive to voters (Harmel and Janda 1994: 271). Since it is assumed that for organizational reasons, IPD might be easier to implement in small parties than in large parties (Lundell 2004: 32), IPD-levels should be higher in smaller parties than in larger parties. Similar to ‘ideology’, CEE parties changed in their sizes – especially in the 1990s – quite frequently.² Furthermore, the relatively young CEE parties grow over time (also big parties usually start small). Therefore, CEE parties are suitable objects to test the assumed association between party size and IPD: When parties change from ‘being small’ to ‘being large’, they lower their IPD-levels and when parties change from ‘being large’ to ‘being small’ they raise their IPD-levels. In order to be able to make more general statements, the following hypothesis is formulated and tested:

**H4**: The smaller a party is, the higher its IPD level.

*The System-Level Trends Approach*

The system-level trends approach explains party change as an adaptive response to changes in the environments of parties (Harmel 2002: 119, 129). These changes occur at particular periods of history: “Dramatic environmental changes” in the historic evolution of political parties “effect fundamental change in the nature of party organization” (Harmel 2002: 128, siehe auch 124f.). An example is the typology from Katz and Mair (1995) which describes the transformation of political parties from cadre parties via mass and catch all parties to cartel parties. The reasons for these party changes were wide-ranging transformations in the

² See for example: www.parties-and-elections.eu
systemic environments of parties, such as the expansion of suffrage or the emergence of television campaigning.

In our framework, ‘system-level’ is more narrowly defined as the national political system. The ‘historic stage’ of the political systems influences its characteristics which in turn influence the political parties existing within these systems. In the period from 1989 up to 2011, the CEE political systems were situated in a very special historic stage. In this context, especially two system-level processes are important which led to fundamental and even radical transformations of the political systems in CEE: Europeanization and Democratization (see e.g. Pridham 2011, 2006).

Regarding Europeanization it is important that parties adapt to their environments. Therefore, one can expect a party organizational change over time, because within the EU the CEE parties work together closely with West European member parties which are major actors in the EU and therefore constitute their new ‘European’ environment to a large extent. Furthermore, von dem Berge and Poguntke (2013: 316) expect that those CEE parties which integrate into one of the two main ‘Europarties’ EPP (European People’s Party) and PES (Party of European Socialists) tend to democratize their intra-party procedures over time. The reason is, that the “Europarties are supposed to require a minimum of intra-party democracy, because they regard themselves as promoters of democracy […] and, equally important, undemocratic membership parties would undermine the legitimacy of the Europarty“ (von dem Berge and Poguntke 2013: 316). As this process of Europarty Eastern enlargement takes place within the superordinate process of EU Eastern enlargement on the level of nation states (Delsoldato 2002: 270), it is conceptualized as a system-level trend.

**H5**: The closer a party is connected to a Europarty, the higher its IPD-level.

Also democratization is supposed to lead to organizational changes within CEE parties. Since the collapse of the Soviet bloc, CEE countries have experienced fundamental transformations in the political, socio-economic and cultural sphere (see e.g. Merkel 2011). The political systems have become ‘more democratic’ which means that the ‘democratic consolidation’ of these countries has been quite successful (ibid.). Therefore, the trend towards more democracy at the nation-state level in CEE can be expected to have a ‘democratic’ impact on the party organizations in these countries and thus contribute to an increase of IPD levels within CEE parties in the last two decades.

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3 Europeanization is usually defined as a top-down-process describing the impact of European integration on the national level of European states (Eising 2003; Ladrech 1994: 69).
**H6**: The higher the democracy-level of a country, the higher the IPD-levels of the parties.

Furthermore, on the system-level the mere existence of a ‘party law’ might influence the IPD-levels of parties. In fact, almost half of the party laws in Europe refer to IPD (Van Biezen and Piccio 2013: 47). Moreover, van Biezen and Piccio (2013: 48) find that “IPD constitutes a significant and increasing area of national regulation.” And most importantly for us, if party laws intervene in intra-party processes, this is usually done in favour of IPD (Van Biezen and Piccio 2013). CEE parties are suitable objects to test this assumption because from 1989 until 2011 there were periods with and without party laws.

**H7**: The existence of party laws leads to higher IPD-levels within parties.

*The Discrete Change Approach*

Discrete party changes are less sweeping than life-cycle or system-level changes (Harmel 2002: 125). They can be better described as ‘developmental’ than as ‘evolutionary’. In this approach, reasons for party change are rather short-term single events. Party organizational change results from external changes in the environment of political parties and/or internal circumstances within the parties (Harmel 2002: 119, 125).

Regarding the external reasons, electoral defeat is argued to be the “mother of party change” (Janda 1990: 5), because it forces parties to reevaluate the ideological positioning as well as the functioning of their internal structures and processes (Wiesendahl 2010a; Harmel and Janda 1994; Detterbeck 2002; Wiesendahl 2010b). Regarding IPD, this means that when a “party experiences electoral success, internal demands for continued success result in increased importance of the parliamentary wing and decreasing importance of the members and their organization” (Harmel 2002: 132). Furthermore, it can be argued that a party which suffers from a poor electoral performance might increase its IPD in order to attract more voters.

**H8**: Experiencing an electoral loss will urge parties to reform their structures and increase their IPD-levels.

**H9**: The more electoral defeats a party has experienced, the higher its IPD-level.

Concerning the internal reasons for party organizational change, one of the most important factors is leadership change (Müller 1997; Harmel 2002: 126f.; Harmel and Janda 1994). This phenomenon has also been observed in a case study on the Hungarian Socialist Party (Ágh 1995: 501). In this vein, Harmel (2002: 128, 139) asks who could doubt that the resignation of
an older leader and/or the selection of “a younger and more dynamic leader” might create conditions for party organizational change. The direction of change (lower or higher IPD-levels) depends on the preferences of the new leadership.

**H10:** Leadership change leads to changes in IPD, which can mean lower or higher IPD-levels.

**Case Selection and Operationalization**

**Case Selection**

In order to test the hypotheses put forward in the previous section, we use data on major political parties (Sartori 2005) in three CEE countries, namely Hungary, Romania and Slovakia as empirical cases between 1989 and 2011 (the individual parties are listed in Table 1). Our focus on the mentioned countries is advantageous in view of the hypotheses we wish to test, because political parties in these countries faced similar challenges with respect to their internal development due to extensive transformation processes in the political, economic and societal sphere after the collapse of communism in 1989 (see e.g. Merkel 2011).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Hungary | • KDNP (Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt)  
• FIDESZ, since 1995 FIDESZ-MPP, since 2003 FIDESZ-MPSZ (Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége – Magyar Polgári Szövetség)  
• MSZP (Magyar Szocialista Párt)  
• MDF (Magyar Demokrata Fórum)  
• PNT-CD (Partidul Național Țărănesc Creștin Democrat)  
• UDMR (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară România)  
• PD-FSN, since 1993 PD (Partidul Democrat), since 2007 PD-L (Partidul Democrat-Liberal)  
• PDSR (Partidul Democratiei Sociale din Romania), since 2001 PSD (Partidul Social Democrat) |
| Romania | • KDH (Kresťanskodemokratické Hnutie)  
• MKDH (Maďarské Kresťanskodemokratické Hnutie), since 1998 SMK (Strana Maďarskej Koalície)  
• SDKU, since 2006 SDKU-DS (Slovenská Demokratická a Kresťanská Únia – Demokratická Strana)  
• SMER, since 2005 SMER-SD (SMER – Sociálna Demokracia)  
• SDL (Strana Demokratickej Lʼavice)  
• SDSS (Sociálnodemokratická Strana Slovenska) |
| Slovakia |

Also the institutional context of the countries is largely comparable: all three are unitary states with parliamentary systems and proportional representation (Ismayr 2010). Therefore, the general findings of this study might also apply to parties from the other seven CEE countries which became EU members in 2004 and 2007, namely Poland, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Bulgaria.

Moreover, the most important key figures for the structure of party systems – volatility, effective number of parties and polarization – are, despite some minor differences, largely similar in all three countries (see Table 2). Arising differences in structures of party competition and relevant specifics of the countries are taken into consideration through our modelling approach (fixed-effect-models). Despite all this, each of the parties under study is (or was) officially connected to one of the two main Europarties EPP or PES, which militates for a certain similarity.

**Table 2:** Key figures of party system structure (mean values, 1990-2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Volatility</th>
<th>Effective Number of Parties</th>
<th>Polarization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>16.65</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>14.24</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>12.55</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Own calculation based on data from Grotz and Müller-Rommel (2011: 355f.)

*Notes:* ‘Volatility’ is measured according to Pedersen (1979), the ‘Effective Number of Parties’ is measured according to Laakso and Taagepera (1979), and ‘Polarization’ is measured according to Dalton (2008).

**Dependent Variable**

One of the main challenges of studying the formation of IPD is that there is no dominant approach towards measuring it. A substantial part of the scholarly discussion focuses on single case studies (for an overview see Cross and Katz 2013a). Available comparative studies that provide explanations for varying levels of IPD often rely on self-reported assessments of party members (Bäck 2008; Saglie and Heidar 2004) or focus only on certain aspects of the overall concept of IPD (Kenig 2009; Spies and Kaiser 2012).

For the dependent variable IPD we use data based on deductive and standardized content analysis of party statutes (von dem Berge et al. 2013). In this approach, IPD consists of two
main conceptual criteria: ‘inclusiveness’\(^4\) and ‘decentralization’\(^5\). Both are applied to three main categories of IPD which are theoretically derived: members’ rights, organizational structure and decision-making (especially leadership and candidate selection as well as decision on manifestos). On the foundation of further theoretical considerations more detailed sub-categories and individual items are derived from these three main categories and brought together into a comprehensive coding scheme (von dem Berge et al. 2013: 17-21). This results in an overall IPD measure being available for each of the individual party statutes. The overall IPD measure is an equally weighted average of all covered items, sub-categories and main categories with a value range between -1 and +1, where a higher value indicates a higher level of IPD (for further details see von dem Berge et al. 2013).

**Independent Variables**

Within the ‘life-cycle approach’ four variables have to be defined. From the perspective of partisanship and party institutionalisation, party age (Hypothesis H1 and H1b) is measured as the length of time (in years) since a given party was formed starting with 1989 (Beck et al. 2001: 172). In line with the argument put forward by Lundell (2004: 32) a “renovation of the ‘old’ party organization or a change of party name is not considered a birth of a new party” (see Table 1). Information on whether one of both applies to the selected parties can easily be found in the literature (e.g. von dem Berge 2015: 511-529; Rose and Munro 2009; Szajkowski 2005).

The difference between ‘newly emerging parties’ and ‘parties with past experience’ (Hypothesis H2) is operationalized as the difference between parties that formed as genuinely new organizations after the collapse of communism and parties that openly expressed their connection to political parties which existed before the 1989 regime changes.\(^6\) As a binary outcome variable new party therefore indicates whether a party established itself without previously existing structures.

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\(^4\) ‘Inclusiveness’ is defined as follows: “Under the most exclusive rules, key decisions are controlled by a single leader or a small group of leaders, and others have no binding role in the process. In the most inclusive parties, all party members, or even all party supporters, are given the opportunity to decide on important issues, such as the choice of party leader or the selection of party candidates [or on important policy issues]” (Scarrow 2005: 6).

\(^5\) ‘Decentralization’ can be best described by defining ‘centralization’: “Centralization describes the extent to which decisions are made by a single group or decision body. In a highly centralized party, a national executive meets frequently and has the authority to make decisions that are accepted at all levels of the party. In especially decentralized parties, the national party committee probably meets much less often and tends to be focused more on coordination and communication than on providing definitive guidance to the party” (Scarrow 2005: 6).

\(^6\) This variable was coded based on data from the European Journal of Political Research Political Data Yearbook and the respective country reports for Hungary, Romania and Slovakia.
To test the idea that ideologically moderate parties tend to have higher levels of IPD (Hypothesis H3) we rely on a measure introduced in the literature on party competition. In particular, similar to Iversen (1994: 181) we refer to ideological distance as the absolute distance of a given party from the neutral centre on the left-right dimension of the respective party system. To measure this variable, we rely on a simple linear transformation of the ‘rile’ variable available through the Manifesto Project Database (Volkens et al. 2014) resulting in a scale from 0 (left) to 10 (right) and determine the distance of every party at a given point in time from the centre (5) on this scale (Belchior 2012; Ezrow 2007: 185).

In line with the literature (Tavits 2012), party size is operationalized as the vote share of any given party in the preceding parliamentary elections based on data from the European Election Database⁷ (Hypothesis H4). With reference to the theoretical background of this hypothesis, ‘membership numbers’ would be a more fitting indicator for measuring party size. Unfortunately, there are no reliable data on membership numbers of CEE parties in the 1990s.

The ‘system level trends approach’ considers explanatory factors that are predominantly situated at the contextual level, i.e. in the system-level environment of the parties. According to the formulated hypotheses, three variables are important here. First, regarding Europeanization the membership of CEE parties in European party organisations is expected to have a positive influence on IPD. The variables summarized under EP membership, which are used to test this expectation (Hypothesis H5), are dummy variables for each of the three accession stages which CEE parties had to accomplish when joining the Europarties: observer, associate member and full member, with no membership as a reference category (von dem Berge and Poguntke 2013: 319, 324).⁸ This variable has been coded based on the information provided by von dem Berge (2015: 511-529). Second, for measuring democratization the democracy level of a country at any given point in time is measured by drawing on the Polity IV database⁹ (Hypothesis H6). Third, in order to determine the influence of the presence of party laws (Hypothesis H7) on IPD a dummy variable is incorporated based on the Party Law in Modern Europe Database (van Biezen 2015). It is a dummy variable coded ‘1’ if at any given point in time there is any sort of legal regulation on political parties, otherwise it is ‘0’.

Within the ‘discrete change approach’ three variables are important. The electoral loss (Hypothesis H8) variable is based on the difference in a party’s vote share between two

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⁷ The data used for this variable are based on material from the “European Election Database”. The data are collected from original sources, prepared and made available by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD). NSD are not responsible for the analyses/interpretation of the data presented here.

⁸ All CEE parties under study are or were members of one of the two main Europarties EPP or PES.

⁹ See: http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm
succeeding general elections. For all negative values indicating that a party lost votes, this variable is coded ‘1’, otherwise it is ‘0’. In addition, an electoral defeats variable indicates how many times a party suffered an electoral loss during its existence (Hypothesis H9). For each electoral loss this variable increases by ‘+1’. Both variables were coded based on the previously discussed vote shares (see variable ‘party size’). Party leadership change is again a dummy variable which indicates whether in any given year there was a personnel change of the party leader (Hypothesis H10). It was coded based on information provided by the European Journal of Political Research Political Data Yearbook.

Analysis and Results

Considering Specifics of CEE Parties

Studies dealing with IPD in CEE countries have previously made several observations that need to be addressed before we proceed with the evaluation of the proposed hypotheses based on our larger-N dataset. According to Chiru and Gherghina (2012) CEE parties can be expected to have low levels of IPD due to their tendency of keeping their “doors closed”. This is because CEE parties are unlikely to implement inclusive procedures for leadership selection because they are strongly elite dominated, they possess extensive relationships with the state and they are characterized by “clientelistic practices” (Chiru and Gherghina 2012: 514).

This “oligarchistic inertia” argument (Chiru and Gherghina 2012: 511) is reasoned to be the result of the general elite domination of CEE parties. In comparison with their Western European counterparts, CEE parties have an ‘institutional origin’ instead of a ‘societal origin’ (Birch 2003: 14, 64; Klíma 1998: 497; Tiemann 2008: 36f.). Thus, the emergence of these parties is not the result of societal cleavages but of the decisions taken by political entrepreneurs and elites and such “internally created parties build their organization top down” (Klima 1998: 497).

A descriptive view at the heterogeneity and formation of IPD in the analysed countries over time shows that, generally speaking, parties have changed substantially in terms of their IPD-levels (see Figure 1). A simplifying argument contending that parties did not become internally more democratic over time does not necessarily fit the picture. The overall trend points towards a somehow steady, but also non-linear increase. Especially parties in Romania and Slovakia experienced a rather strong increase of IPD in the first years of their existence between 1990 and 1994. However, it should also be kept in mind that this overall trend does
not stand representatively for the formation of IPD within individual parties as their experiences have been rather diverse and differences between parties remain wide.

**Figure 1**: Formation of IPD in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia over Time

![Intra-Party Democracy](image)

More specifically, we can take a closer look at the cross-sectional differences between parties (over time) with regard to their IPD levels (see Figure 2). A descriptive overview reveals that the roots of some of the parties with the highest levels of IPD can be traced back to reform-oriented wings of their respective communist parties that existed during the period before 1989. In Hungary, the MSZP was founded by members of a neo-liberal wing of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party that ruled during the authoritarian period. Similarly, in Romania PD(-L) emerged from F(D)SN. Its founding members were previously members of the Romanian Communist Party, they, however, began to question mismanagement under the rule of Nicolae Ceaușescu. In Slovakia, SDL was also founded by reform-oriented members of the Communist Party of Slovakia who were in favour of creating a modern European social-democratic party.
**Figure 2:** Cross-sectional Heterogeneity of IPD in Studied CEE Parties

*Testing the Hypotheses: What Factors Influence the Formation of IPD over Time?*

Since our analysis is based on time-series cross-sectional data, the following models have been estimated using regression analysis with unit fixed effects that allow us to eliminate the cumulative influence of all time-invariant characteristics, i.e. any unmeasured time-invariant country-level effects including that of electoral systems or any broader historical or socio-economic background. In addition, to account for potential heteroscedasticity, we also used robust standard errors. Given the limited number of observations available for our analysis, we proceed by sequentially including explanatory variables that are associated with the three explanatory complexes discussed in the theoretical discussion (see Tables 3 and 4: Models 1-4 for the ‘life-cycle approach’, Models 5 and 6 for the ‘system-level trend approach’ and Models 7-9 for the ‘discrete change approach’) and also report a full model including all variables (Model 10) and a final model that takes into account variables that have proven to be relevant in the previous analyses (Model 11).

Starting with the evaluation of the hypotheses that were ascribed to the ‘life-cycle approach’ of party organisational change, we consider indicators of party age, origin and size...
as well as changes in their programmatic positions over time. The theory and empirical evidence is mixed when it comes down to the role of party age in IPD formation. Results presented in Table 3 show that the impact of party age on IPD is statistically highly significant and consistent across all estimated models providing support for Hypothesis 1a. From an institutionalist perspective (Panebianco 1988: 239), this suggests that the studied CEE parties became more democratic as they were maturing. This can be interpreted in terms of parties with a longer organisational existence becoming more complex organisations (Bojinova 2007: 13). And with organisational complexity the need to formally “regulate (…) issues that initially had not been regulated” has arisen (Cular 2004: 32) leading to the inception and implementation of explicit rules enhancing overall levels of IPD. Against the background of Hypothesis H1b, this result shows that Michel’s ‘law of oligarchy’ is not (yet) relevant within the CEE context with its young democratic structures.

In Hypothesis H2, a differentiation between newly emerging parties and parties with personal or organizational ties to previously existing organizations (communist successor parties and also pre-communist parties in which original party members prominently took part in a party’s re-activation after 1989) was introduced. From a theoretical point of view, new parties can be expected to have higher IPD levels because they form genuinely new organizations free from pre-existing rigid structures and regulations. Free from restrictions of an arguably path-dependent development of ‘old’ parties, they can create a “new organizational style” characterized by democratic structures and procedures (Scarrow 2005: 5).

The results presented in Table 3, however, clearly reject Hypothesis H2. Contrary to our expectation, the statistically significant and substantial negative effect points towards new parties having lower levels of IPD. Testing this hypothesis for the selection procedures of party executives (a measure for this is also available in our data), for which it was originally conceived, further confirms the reported results. An interpretation of these results is possible when viewing the development of parties from an institutionalist perspective. Since parties existing in the communist period (regardless their ideological affiliation) have pre-existing internal party structures that can be adapted to changing conditions during the process of democratic consolidation, they can also be expected to have higher IPD-levels as compared to parties that are formed from ‘scratch’.
Table 3: Determinants of IPD (Fixed-Effects Regression Analysis)

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<td>0.138***</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>-0.100***</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0.138***</td>
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<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
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<td>(0.063)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
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<td>-0.100***</td>
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<td>(0.063)</td>
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Note: Cell entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with robust standard errors shown in parentheses. Significance levels are: *** significant at 0.1% level, ** significant at 1% level, * significant at 5% level.

Implications of the positioning of parties on the ideological left-right spectrum for their IPD levels have been derived based considering party goals (Hypothesis H3). For ‘ideological’ parties we would – generally speaking – expect to find lower levels of IPD as compared to ideologically moderate parties that position themselves closer to the centre, because ideologically moderate parties are expected to be characterized by more inclusive rules regarding the participation of their members as well as selection of candidates and formulation of policy-positions. Including a variable which, with increasing values, indicates a larger distance to the ideological centre does not confirm Hypothesis H3, since the respective effect estimate does not reach established levels of statistical significance.

Vote share as an indicator of party size has been theorized to have a negative impact on IPD levels (Hypothesis H4). Previous empirical studies have considered several reasons for this. On the one hand, assuming that party size and organizational complexity go hand in hand, larger parties tend to have more centralised structures (Lundell 2004: 32). On the other
hand, large parties also need to carefully balance “democracy and efficiency” (Scarrow 1999: 348), resulting in them placing limits on IPD in favour of party cohesion and electoral efficiency (Rahat et al. 2008: 674). Empirical evidence generated by testing the impact of this variable shows that there is weak support for the second line of the argument, suggesting that Hypothesis H4 should be rejected. Although the effect is consistent across all tested models (see Table 3 and Table 4), its impact is rather limited.

Turning to explanatory factors that scrutinize three hypotheses which deal with the impact of ‘system-level changes’ over time on changes in IPD-levels, we start with the impact of EU-level actors, namely the Europarties (Hypothesis H5). The evidence presented in Model 5 and 6 (Table 3) and Model 11 (Table 4) clearly supports this hypothesis. In general, the role of European party organizations in shaping CEE parties is contested. Some argue that Europarties played a key role in facilitating the evolution and development of parties and their internal structures in CEE countries (von dem Berge 2015; von dem Berge and Poguntke 2013; Pridham 2014). Others are more pessimistic and expect that Europarty influence has been largely superficial leaving “the internal roots of the party organizations [in CEE countries] largely untouched” (Holmes and Lightfoot 2011: 34). Our results clearly support the first, more optimistic view. Each of the included variables reflects one of the following accession stages: observer parties, associated members and full members. As for their influence, a statistically significant and substantial positive impact can be found for the associate member accession stage.

Our results do not lend any support to Hypothesis H6 that predicted that higher levels of IPD should be associated with higher degrees of democracy in the studied countries. Also, based on Hypothesis H7, we were interested in estimating the impact of introducing legal regulations on IPD and presumed that this should have a positive impact on IPD. Here as well, however, our results do not provide any evidence for this hypothesis.

The impact of the electoral performance of parties on their IPD levels has been accounted for with reference to the ‘discrete change approach’ towards party change (see Table 4). Furthermore, a conceptual differentiation between the impact of an electoral loss at the previous general elections (Hypothesis H8) and the number of electoral defeats a party has experienced through its lifespan (Hypothesis H9) was introduced. The proposed relationships are evaluated in Models 7-9 in Table 4. Although in theory, the impact of electoral performance on party organizational structures is usually assessed to be very important (Janda 1990), our results suggest otherwise. With the singular exception of the electoral defeats
variable in Model 10, the included variables are statistically not significant which leads us to reject Hypotheses H8 and H9.

Table 4: Determinants of IPD (Fixed-Effects Regression Analysis)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 7</th>
<th>Model 8</th>
<th>Model 9</th>
<th>Model 10</th>
<th>Model 11</th>
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<tr>
<td>Party Age</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.006*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
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<td>New Party</td>
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<td>-0.098**</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.019)</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ideological Distance</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.022)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vote Share</td>
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<td>(0.001)</td>
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<td>EP Membership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Observer</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.046)</td>
<td>(0.051)</td>
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<td>(0.006)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.023)</td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
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<td>(0.021)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Electoral Defeats</td>
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<td>Leader Change</td>
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<td>R²(within)</td>
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<td>0.109</td>
<td>0.155</td>
<td>0.549</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rho</td>
<td>0.294</td>
<td>0.274</td>
<td>0.257</td>
<td>0.276</td>
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</table>

Note: Cell entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with robust standard errors shown in parentheses. Significance levels are: *** significant at 0.1% level, ** significant at 1% level, * significant at 5% level.

As for our last Hypothesis H10, the literature acknowledges that a change of the party leader is a major event for every party and thus might lead to a change in party organizational structures (Müller 1997). Our results suggest that a change of the party leader is associated with a boost to IPD, although the effect strength is somehow weaker when compared to other statistically significant predictors included in our models. It is conceivable that this positive effect might be explained by a shift within the parties themselves. From their inception, the elite-dominated CEE parties often relied on the personal reputation of the party leader as a means to successfully compete for votes and get re-elected (Ágh 1995). To a certain extent this was also due to the fact that at that time, most parties were only starting to build their organizations. As electorates in CEE countries became more diverse over time and party
competition more complex due to newly emerging parties competing for votes, CEE parties have realized that building on the party itself as an electoral resource is a promising strategy for sustaining themselves in the electoral arena (Tavits 2012: 425). Often, a change of the party leader is a process requiring the active participation of party congresses and the rank-and-file members of political parties. A successful change therefore not only provides a proof of concept of internally democratic practices to party members but also might serve as an opportunity to communicate this to the electorate.

Conclusion

At its core, the central starting observation of our contribution is that remarkably little is known about the formation of IPD within CEE parties and only few empirically secured findings exist. Available studies often advocate a somehow pessimistic view. Low levels of IPD in CEE parties are expected because “the greater volatility of the electoral and partisan market in Eastern Europe might lead to fears that internal party democracy would threaten party unity” (Bojinova 2007: 27). Furthermore, several studies have previously argued, that IPD has – comparatively speaking – not a high priority, because the party organisations themselves are postpositional relative to the goals of effective management and to the goals of party leaders (Cular 2004: 31). This aspect is also highlighted by Stojarová and her colleagues in reviewing the developments in 18 CEE countries. They stress especially the tendency towards party leaders continuously occupying their positions for long periods of time leading to situations in which they are able to retain “a significant influence over the party” (Stojarová et al. 2007: 30).

This also highlights one of the main issues of the literature on IPD in CEE parties. Most contributions have focused on a certain aspect of party organisations, such as candidate nomination, candidate selection, leadership selection or decentralization. In this context, we have set out to evaluate and validate existing presumptions of the dynamics of IPD formation. To this end, we relied on the theoretical framework of party organizational change to arrive at 10 hypotheses structured according to three major approaches: the life-cycle approach, the system-level trend approach and the discrete change approach.

Based on data collected through coding party statutes of major CEE parties in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia several key findings deserve to be highlighted here. Generally speaking, a fair share of the data we have collected suggests that there is no need for a pessimistic interpretation supposing autocratic or oligarchic tendencies inside the CEE parties
we have investigated. As a matter of fact, especially parties in Slovakia show a remarkable increase in their IPD-levels between 1990 and 1994 followed by further, albeit slowed down, internal democratization.

As for the factors that positively influence the level of IPD, our analysis has shown that, as expected, older parties as well as parties that are larger in terms of their vote share also tend to be more democratic. More importantly, with a particularly strong effect, the analysis also demonstrates that the ability of parties to develop and sustain internal democracy greatly depends on their cooperation with and integration in Europarties. Approaching this from the angle of mixed expectations based on the prevailing discussion, this further validates empirical studies that argue that Europarties are a crucial driving force of IPD within CEE parties (von dem Berge 2015: 421-435) and also, more general, democratization in CEE countries on the nation-state level (Pridham 2014).

New parties, despite the fact that they emerged and consolidated themselves within the general conditions of a democratic system, systematically display lower levels of IPD. To some extent this comes as a surprise, because previous studies have suggested that due to their “oligarchic inertia” (Chiru and Gherghina 2012: 211) previously established parties with ‘past experience’ can be expected to be and remain internally fairly autocratic. Our results suggest otherwise, but can be viewed from the angle of studies that deal with the electoral performance and success of new parties in general. In this line of reasoning it has been suggested that the ability of parties to perform well in the electoral arena is contingent upon them having more experience and a support base (Bolleyer and Bytzek 2013: 783). Similarly for IPD, new parties might struggle with creating functioning internal structures that correspond to the ideal of democratic organisations, whereas parties with past experience can adapt existing structures to do so.

If we view IPD as a desirable trait of political parties (Scarrow 2005; Teorell 1999; for a more critical approach see Katz and Cross 2013), it seems that intervening via large-scale legal regulations that are potentially “out of sync with existing opportunity structures for political mobilization” (Van Biezen and Piccio 2013: 48) does not necessarily warrant that political parties will become internally more democratic. We have shown that more in line with what drives CEE parties to become internally more democratic, are incentives related to their membership in Europarties and the imperatives of electoral success.
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