What's left of the left in East-Central Europe? Struggles and successes in times of crisis.

Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to analyse comparatively the evolution of left and centre-left parties in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), looking at the transformations over time, the role within the party systems and the challenges they faced and they are facing. It asses the status of the political ‘left’ in CEE from the years of the EU accession up to 2015.

This study will look for specific features of the left and centre-left in CEE as opposed to the other major political blocs by looking at their political offer, organisation, impact of governmental participation and the emergence of challenger parties/movements. This research contributes to the study of the general structure of political competition in CEE, covering six countries that have joined the EU between 2004 and 2007.

More specifically, the research looks at how in Central and Eastern Europe, despite a crisis of left-wing parties neither social movements, nor other new political actors, have capable to capitalise on the failure of the old parties, or on the relatively large popular support, at least not from the let of the political spectrum.

The research will be divided in two parts. The first part explores the characteristics of left and centre-left parties in CEE in general and aims at providing an updated typology of those parties in the region. A second part, which will follow, will be devoted to assess the performances and evolution of left wing parties over time, looking in particular at the possible effects of the economic crisis on the political landscape of CEE. Changes in the organizational structures, the impact of governmental participation, the relationship with societal actors and the emergence of new contenders will be the major issues analysed in this second part.
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Introduction

“Few predicted that the successor of these parties would survive in the democratic political system, much less thrive. [...] It seemed simply a matter of time before these parties would be swept away in the ‘dustbin of history’. Yet all communist parties ‘survived democracy’ [...] and all remained politically active afterwards. Several of the successor parties have even won free elections returning to govern.”

The words of Busse we just quoted clearly show how, a decade after the democratic transition, communist successor parties (CSPs) were, quite surprisingly, still relevant actors in the political arena in East-Central Europe (CEE). They were almost everywhere monopolizing the left-wing camp and democratically returned in government in many former communist countries. But what can we say more than ten years later, after a quarter of century since the events of 1989? How is the landscape of the political left in Central and Eastern Europe? At a first glance, the picture is definitely more mixed, as these last years have seen rises and falls for the left and centre-left in CEE, with the deepest crisis afflicting the countries where CSPs have been most significant in the past. Moreover, no signs of revival seem to appear on the horizon, as shown by the latest European and national elections. Thus, if CEE has been considered an interesting ‘laboratory’ to study parties and party system dynamics, this is also true for CSPs, and our research aims to address how they faced various challenges in the last years. In this regard, the present situation of Poland and Hungary is emblematic: after having dominated the political and electoral stage for years – and successfully legitimated themselves as new, modern, centre-left parties – communist parties’ heirs are now relegated to a marginal role. Sudden losses of post-communist parties like Poland, where at the beginning of the XXI century no-one could have predicted (look at publications years 2001-2003).

As such, only the two countries born after the Velvet Divorce still have relevant left-wing political parties, although neither in the Czech Republic nor in Slovakia the social-democratic exponents can be seen as CSP.

Moving a bit to the East towards Bulgaria and Romania, we found two mixed cases: in Romania a CSP who is hegemonic on the left and still the first political force in the country; in Bulgaria the BSP is

For almost two decades, the literature has been rather consensual in assessing the relatively good shape of the former communist parties all over the region. Overall, CSPs have proved to be an “extremely resistant species” both in relation to their electoral success and organisational networks. CSPs attracted the attention of numerous scholars over the years and have been one of the most intensively studied topic in post-communist politics. The bulk of researches on CSPs has been done in the first years after the collapse of the communist in the mid-90s, while a new more substantial wave of studies followed in the early 2000s, after a decade since the collapse of the regimes and continued until the mid-2000s. Instead, the most recent contributions on parties and party systems in CEE tend to focus on the evolution and institutionalization of party systems, the emergence of new parties more than CSPs. However, this paper considers that an updated comparative analysis of the communist parties’ heirs, their evolution and current electoral appeal can

be of major interest in order to assess the changes and the patterns of normalization of maturing new democracies.

Henceforth, the main questions we aim to address are what is now of CSPs, how their structure and role changed in the last years, and where should we look for possible explanations of their rise and fall. To do so, we provide a general overview of the current situation of CSPs in CEE, by looking at their transformation over time and their position within the party systems. The period covers the entire post-communism: from the democratic transition until the recent 2014 European elections. In particular, we propose to comparatively analyse Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland.

In this work, we follow the definition of communist successor parties given by Ishiyama as “those parties which were the primary successors to the former governing party in the communist regime and inherited the preponderance of the former ruling parties’ resources and personnel”. However, since we intend to cover even the most recent developments, in the current research we adopt a broader perspective, not strictly looking at CSPs but also taking into account new (relevant) parties born from splits in the original CSPs or by the merging of CS with other parties, that we may call “post communist-successor-parties”. Furthermore, we will also briefly mention minor radical left parties looking back at the communist past looking to underline the different fates of leftist parties.

In this paper, we specifically propose to check if recent developments and trends may be linked with the findings of past researches or, otherwise, if we have to look forward toward different explanations to account for recent changes and developments. In order to inquire this, we focus on two dimension: the first is based on CSPs classifications and looks at legacies of the past and the eventual persistence of anti-communist rhetoric. This part builds on the conclusions of previous researches provided by Kitschelt, Bozoki/Ishiyama and Grzymala-Busse. The second dimension moves in a rather different direction, aiming to evaluate if and how participating in government have influenced CSPs’ evolution.

In order to address our issues/question, the paper has been divided according to four-part scheme. In the first section, we propose a broad picture of CSPs and their evolution in the Visegrad countries. In the second section, we try to look at the influence of the communist legacy and of change on the parties, following in part the works of Grzymala-Busse, Kitschelt and Ishiyama/Bozoki. In the third section, we then analyse the impact of participating in government on these parties, adapting some approaches proposed in New Parties in Government. In the fourth section, we resume what is left of the left nowadays in CEE by looking at electoral results. Finally, we sum up our findings and attempt an explanation of the rise and fall of communist successor parties in East-Central Europe, to see how they managed to succeed or fail as the democratic process moved through a more or less tortuous pattern of ‘normalization’, and inquire why some of the most radical changes happened in the countries that have proven more stable over time.

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7 Bozoki and Ishiyama, The Communist Successor Parties.

8 Grzymala-Busse, Redeeming the Communist Past.
1. The current status of the political left in Central and Eastern Europe

Since our current aim is to provide a broader comparison, and many other specific works have already been made on the single cases and stories for each party, in the following paragraphs we will just briefly resume the more relevant developments of the left in CEE.

1.1 Brief summary of the evolution of the left in CEE.

Poland

The main heir and successor of the old ruling party, the Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR), was the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, SdRP). SdRP was founded in January 1990 as a result of the dissolution of the PZPR in its last congress, convened after the failed attempt to incorporate the opposition in the communist state mechanism, and the electoral disaster in the semi-free elections of 1989. SdRP was constituted by the more reform-minded members of the old party that by the time represented the vast majority of party delegates, trying to distance itself from its communist past (although without strongly condemning it) and proposing as a modern social democratic formation. A minority of reformist former party member, willing to distance even more from the PZPR formed the Polish Social Democratic Union (Polska Unia Socjaldemokratyczna, PUS), while the minority of orthodox communists founded another political formation called the Polish Communists Union 'Proletariat' (Związek Komunistów Polskich 'Proletariat', ZKPP). Both those political formations did not managed to gain any popular support and the PUS eventually joined the SLD or the social democratic party Labor United (Unia Pracy, UP). Hence, the only relevant CSP in Poland can be considered the SdRP, which after the 1990 presidential elections won by Lech Walesa, Solidarność’s leader, seek to unite other Polish leftist political formations in a coalition. This become reality in July 1991 when the Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, SLD) was constituted, with the SdRP clearly resulting as its dominant actor. In fact, due to the predominant character of SdRP and the fact that all elections were contested as a coalition we may refer to the SLD as the polish CSPs, even before the transformation from a coalition to a single party in 1999.10

In the first fully free elections of 1991 SLD managed to gain 12% of the votes, coming just behind the first party, Democratic Union, that gained 12.3% of votes. In 1993, in the middle of a difficult transition and the failure of the alliances of the democratic forces, early elections were called and the SLD won them with over 20% of the votes.11 In 1993-1997 SLD governed in coalition with the Polish People’s Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL), a former satellite party of PZPR, promoting economic reforms and integration with the West; in the 1995 Presidential elections, SdRP leader and SLD candidate Aleksander Kwaśniewski, also managed to (barely) defeat Walesa in a runoff vote, and was re-elected in 2000. In 1996, SdRP was accepted as a full member in the Socialist International, reinforcing its image of a modern social democratic party. In the 1997 legislative elections, SLD was not confirmed in office although it increased its share of votes to 27% and a right-wing governing coalition was formed. In the 1990s SdRP/SLD managed to achieve the image of effective

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9 In 2002 another ‘spiritual’ CSP was created from ZKPP, the ‘picturesque’ and politically irrelevant Polish Communist Party (Komunistyczna Partia Polski, KPP) which pretends to resume the spirit of the old PZPR.


11 In the Sejm, the lower chamber of the Polish Parliament.
party and competency\textsuperscript{12}, and proved to be a Communist successor capable of unite the left as the hegemonic political actor, absorbing other leftists and social democratic forces.

In 2001, with a deteriorated economic situation, SLD proved by far the first party in Poland, with over 41% of the votes and again formed a coalition with PSL. However, the huge success of 2001 vanished in 2003-2004 as a series of scandal involving SDL members and governmental conflicts led to the breakout of the coalition with PSL and eventually, a huge crisis for the SLD, which also caused the breakup of the united left. In 2004, some members of SLD split to form the Social Democracy of Poland (\textit{Sojuzdemokracja Polska}, SDPL) and other left the alliance. After the disastrous 2005 elections, where SLD achieved its worst result to that date, with just over 11% of votes, the party revised its profile with social policies, pro-Europeanism and anti-nationalist argument become the core of the party programme.\textsuperscript{13} A new coalition called Left and Democrats (\textit{Lewica i Demokraci}, \textit{LiD}) was formed in 2006, led by SLD and comprising SDPL and UP, which gained a meagre 13.2% of the votes in the 2007 early elections and broke up upon internal conflicts in 2008. For the 2011 parliamentary elections, SLD presented itself alone, registering the lowest electoral support in its history, with just 8.24% of the votes, resulting as the fifth party. Since 2011 the crisis of SLD worsened as the party proved unsuccessful to reorganise and more challenges arose from new political formations like the newly formed liberal-populist “Palikot’s movement”. In the recent 2014 European Elections, characterised by a low turnout, SLD formed a coalition with UP and saw a small increase in electoral support since the 2011 elections, regaining the leadership on the left, but continued to find itself in a marginal position, with a political landscape dominated by right wing and populist parties where the left is still marginal. This became even more evident after the 2015 presidential elections and with the disastrous general elections a few months later, when the left and progressive coalition (United Left, ZL) failed to reach the 8% threshold and thus to gain parliamentary representation for the first time in the history of contemporary Poland.

\textbf{Hungary}

In 1989 Hungary was one of the countries leading the change in the Communist bloc, presenting a reformist stance already in the last years of the regime that also helped shaping the identity of its main communist successor party, the Hungarian Socialist Party (\textit{Magyar Szocialista Párt}, MSzP), which in the course of time proved to be more a legal than an ideological successor.

The MSzP was founded 7 October 1989, after the dissolution of the former ruling party, the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (\textit{Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt}, MSzMP) in its last congress convened after the end of the National Roundtable. The MSzP inherited the majority of the old party structure, membership and resources but tried since its onset to break with its communist past, presenting itself as a reform-oriented social democratic party made of technocrats and reformists. Furthermore, another rupture with the communist tradition was the new party structure: in its initial stage MSzP was among the most open and decentralized parties in Hungary, loosely organized and with a scarcely formalized organizational structure.\textsuperscript{14} However, despite never having prioritized membership, it also used to be among the first two parties with the largest membership in Hungary, and the Hungarian party more closely resembling a mass party in the early 90s.

The orthodox minority of the former ruling party, which did not join the MSzP, created a minor CSP, called as the old MSzMP, later renaming themselves Workers’ Party (\textit{Munkáspárt}, MP) in the 90s. This party, a sort of hybrid between a Kadarist nostalgic party and a modern radical left movement, received modest electoral

\textsuperscript{12} Markowski, \textit{op cit.}, p. 84.


support and never managed to pass the electoral threshold, although it has been able for a long time to keep a diffuse territorial organization and a steady electoral consensus of about 3%. As for the case of polish SdRP/SLD, the MSzP can then be considered the only relevant CSP in Hungary.

In the first democratic elections of 1990, MSzP gained a modest 10% of the votes and was initially isolated in parliament. However, in the difficult initial phase of the transition and a general disappointment for the first non-communist government and the weakness of the regime-changing elite, MSzP managed to gain an increasing popularity, helped by its strong political infrastructure, competent technocratic profile and a well-chosen campaign strategy. In the elections of 1994, with 33% of the votes and a crushing victory in all the single member constituencies (SMC), MSzP obtained an absolute majority of parliamentary seats. However, instead of creating a single-party government, MSzP formed a supermajority (over 75% of parliamentary seats) coalition government with the liberal Alliance of Free Democrats (Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége, SzDSz), the only political formation that proved open to collaborate with them in the first legislature, starting a long-lasting partnership and further contributing to its internal and international legitimation. During its governmental term MSzP characterized itself as a pro-western and pro-market democratic party, speeding the privatization and liberalization process; moreover, the critical economic contingency requested unpopular austerity measures that contributed to dismantle legacies of the old socialist economy and welfare system. Despite a recovering economy, by the time of the 1998 elections the popularity of MSzP was still wounded by the austerity measures and some scandals involving party officials but far from being discredited and the party had still a good chance to be re-elected. However, learning the lesson from the meagre results of 1994 and the success of MSzP, by 1998 the opposition has been reorganized under the charismatic guide of Viktor Orbán, whom also dominated the electoral campaign with his charisma and populist-like appeals, eventually defeating by a narrow margin the MSzP. The 1998 elections have been the starting point of a new phase in Hungarian politics, with the establishment of a bipolar competition and the introduction of elements of personalization and presidentialization of politics in Hungary.

Between 1998 and 2002 the MSzP contrasted the government of Viktor Orbán and shifted toward a Third Way model, stressing its internationalist and pro-European profile against nationalistic rhetoric of Fidesz. Although maintaining links with traditional left-wing organizations and trade unions, the MSzP proved with time to be quite autonomous from specific interests’ groups, resembling more and more a catch-all party. The quasi-perfectly-bipolar elections of 2002, saw a narrow victory for the MSzP over the incumbent Fidesz-MDF coalition, confirming the governing alternation in Hungary and placing back the MSzP-SzDSz coalition in power. The new government successfully completed the adhesion procedure into the European Union but a deteriorating economic situation and internal conflicts in the majority, saw the MSzP defeated at the 2004 European Elections; this forced the resignation of prime minister Medgyessy and, following a consultation with SzDSz, Ferenc Gyurcsány, a rich young businessman, was chosen as it successor. He’ll become the leader of MSzP who brought the party to the apex of success and who started its downfall.

Under the charismatic and strong leadership of Gyurcsány, the party structure substantially become more centralized and MSzP fully endorsed the “third way” agenda, also contributing to the presidentialization and personalization of politics in Hungary started with the first Orbán government. Between 2004 and 2006

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16 The MSzP actually gained more proportional votes than Fidesz but failed to win enough SMCs. MSzP received almost the same votes as 1994, unlike its coalition partner, SzDSz.
Gyurcsány was able to improve the image of the party and eventually succeeded in having the MSzP-SzDSz coalition reconfirmed in office at the 2006 election (with a larger majority). Yet, the decline of MSzP started early after the victory of 2006, when news that the government gave false reports on the economic situation have been made public\textsuperscript{19}, starting a period of protest and riots against the government. Nonetheless, the protests eventually ended and the Gyurcsány government managed to remain in power until the combined effects of the economic crisis, internal conflicts with SzDSz and a shrinking popularity forced Gyurcsány to resign before the 2009 European elections. Substituted by Gordon Bajnai, this change did not prevented a sound defeat in the European Election, that saw an absolute majority of votes going to Fidesz and the rise of the radical right party Jobbik. Drastic austerity measures worsened even more the falling popularity of the MSzP, despite some modest successes in managing the deep economic crisis and a new young prime minister candidate, Attila Mesterházy, the party suffered a sound electoral defeat in the 2010 elections with just 19% of the votes and winning in just three SMC. The 2010 elections also saw the rising of the radical right and, above all, the start of the new “Orbán era”, with a two-third majority of seats for Fidesz. After the electoral defeat in 2010 the MSzP tried to keep a role as the leading opposition forces against Orbán but failed to regain its popularity, weakened by harsh internal conflicts, and splits. The most relevant loss for the MSzP was in 2011, the split of the party’s liberal platform led by Gyurcsány: claiming impossible reforming the party and opposing the new social-democratic turn of the party he left the party to create the new political party called Democratic Coalition, (Demokratikus Koalíció, DK). Between 2010 and 2014 the party never really manage to reorganize itself, but in 2014 MSzP managed to create an electoral coalition of left and progressive forces called Unity (Összefogás) with DK, and Egyutt (a left wing movement founded by Bajnai). The progressive coalition managed to get 25% of the votes in the parliamentary election, and MSzP got 21 out of the 29 seats for the coalition, which has been dissolved shortly after the elections. However, the deep crisis of the MSzP become even more evident in the European Elections of 2014, as the party managed to gain just 10,9% of the votes - its minimum since 1990 - less than Jobbik 14% and just 1% more than DK, resulting in the resignation of the entire party leadership. In July 2014 a special congress appointed the new leadership, which declared the will to strengthen the party by restarting from the basics, focusing on the defence of freedom, solidarity and the fight against poverty.\textsuperscript{20} Add part 2014-2016 and the result of the 2016 congress.

**Czech Republic**

An expression that could concisely define the case of Czech Republic’s CSP may be “sticking to communism”. In fact, (former) Czechoslovakia had two peculiar characteristics: having been the only ‘real’ democracy in the region during the interwar period and a strong communist tradition, in particular in the highly industrialized Czech lands. This helps to explain why, among the four Visegrad countries, Czech Republic present the only case of a non-reformed CSP, and the contrast, is even more pronounced when compared to what happened in Slovakia. Contrary to what happened in Hungary or Poland, the sudden loss of power of the regime in the fall of 1989 caught the Czechoslovak Communist Party wholly unprepared for a transition to democracy and by the time an extraordinary congress convened the transition was already a fact. In a feeble attempt to reform the party by changing its leadership, democratizing its structure and federalize the KSC Czech and Slovak structure. This led to the creation of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy, KSČM) on 31 March 1990 as the Czech federal branch of KSC. In the

\textsuperscript{19} This is known as the Ferenc Gyurcsány’s speech in Balatonőszöd, where, during a confidential MSzP party meeting in May 2006, Prime Minister Gyurcsány admitted to have given false reports on the economic situation of the country in order to get re-elected. An audio registration of the speech leaked and was broadcasted by the Hungarian National Radio on September 2006, igniting the protests.

first free elections of June 1990 KSČM obtained 13.2% of votes, showing a persistent support while, in the same election, the re-established Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party (Česká strana sociálně demokratická, ČSSD), which was not a CSP, failed to pass the 5% electoral threshold. In the first KSČM congress of November 1990 Jiri Svoboda, a reformist left wing-intellectual, was elected chairman over more conservative candidates. Facing the internal conflict between reformists and orthodox communists Svoboda tried to pursue a third evolutionary way to gradually transform KSČM in an acceptable left party, adapting its ideology and eventually changing its name. However, many among the more reform-oriented factions left the party and in 1992 party members (prevalently conservative communists) in an internal referendum massively rejected to change the name of the party. In the June 1992 elections, KSČM, in a coalition with other minor left wing formations and personalities, gained 14% of the votes, resulting the second party, again ahead of the ČSSD. In 1992-1993 the party saw the continuation of internal conflicts among reformist and conservative communists, which was in the end solved embracing a third way called neo-communism but resulting also in the resignation of Svoboda.

From an organizational point KSČM maintained the mass membership and organization, while the neo-communist way, despite efforts to be considered as a “normal” party, formally accepting democracy, free market economy and stressing its refuse to return to the previous real socialism regime saw the KSČM sticking to its anti-establishment character, with no coalition potential for democratic other parties. Furthermore, KSČM showed a prominent anti-imperialist profile and strongly opposed the adhesion of Czech Republic to NATO and the European Union. In 1996 and 1998 elections, KSČM managed to steadily gain between 10 and 11% of the votes. In the same years, ČSSD emerged as the leading party of the Czech (democratic) left, the legitimate social-democratic force which, after having been overshadowed by KSČM, constantly increased its support from the 6% of 1992 to over 30% of the votes in 1998, eventually becoming the first governing left party in CZ. ČSSD strongly refused to collaborate with KSČM and formed a minority government 1998 and a preferred a coalition with centre-right parties after the elections of 2002, which saw KSČM obtaining its best electoral success, polling 18.5%. 

Shortly after the unexpected exploit of 2002, KSČM was made object of a rising anti-communist campaign, which led to the ban of its youth organization and probably contributed to the loss of votes for KSČM from the 18% of 2002 to 12% in the 2006 elections. Nevertheless, the mid 2000s also saw some change in the ideology and political programme of KSČM, distancing more from its past and aligning itself towards a “Eurocommunist” profile; moreover, after 2005 began increasingly cooperating with ČSSD at parliamentary level. A major success for KSČM have been the 2012 Regional elections: although the ČSSD confirmed itself the first party, the real winner was KSČM, who gained 20% of the votes and increased its number of regional councillors from 114 to 182. This opened the way for KSČM to join the governing majority in several regional assemblies, in coalition with ČSSD and, before the early elections of 2013, there have also been speculation about KSČM potentially joining a governing coalition with ČSSD. However, ČSSD obtained a modest 20% of the votes and, despite KSČM polling over 14%, such a majority would not have been possible. In the end, ČSSD formed a governing coalition with centre right parties and KSČM persisted in opposition. Finally, the

21 Cf. Sean Hanley, The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, in Communist Successor Parties
22 Cf. ibid., p.
23 A majority comprising ČSSD and KSČM would have also been technically possible with 111 seats out of 200 in the lower chamber.
24 Cf. Goran Markovic, 2013, p.80-81
25 Miroslav Mares, in Communist and Post Communist, p. 299.
recent 2014 European elections, characterized by a record-low turnout saw a reduction of votes for KSČM to about 11%.

Slovakia

Czech Republic and Slovakia have a common origin in the “Velvet revolution” that ended the socialist regime and the “Velvet divorce” that peacefully split Czechoslovakia in 1992. However, different are their political traditions as well as the evolution of their CSPs: Slovakia, as the poorer rural area of the former unitary country lacked the left wing traditions and a strong communist presence of pre-war Czech lands, and its former communist party proved to be much more favourable to reform than their Czech counterpart.

Unlike the Czech KSČM, the Communist Party of Slovakia (Komunistická strana Slovenska, KSS) already existed as a territorial organization before 1990, so no new party has to be created when KSC decided to federalize the party structure. Furthermore, a new generation of pro-reform communists quickly managed to take the control of the KSS. In the first free elections of 1990, the reformist KSS obtained 13.3% of the votes for the Slovak National Council. After having been part of the federated KSC, the KSS changed the name of the party in SDL on 26 January 1991, continuing to distance from its past. During its first congress SDL split formally with the KSČM and become the main Slovak CSP, with a minority of conservative communists leaving SDL’ for new political formation that in 1992 eventually joined to reconstitute the (new) KSS.

In the elections of 1992 SDL’ obtained 14.7% of the votes, coming second well behind Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) led by Vladimir Meciar, whose populist appeals arose part of the consensus for SDL, while communists splits gained just around 1% of the votes.26 In the early 1990s the SDL’ tried to find a clear identity along the line of pragmatic reformism and modern social democracy. In 1994 SDL’ briefly participated in a caretaker government and in the subsequent elections presented itself in a centre-left coalition. However the coalition obtained a meagre 10,3%, and HZDS was confirmed as the main Slovak party with 35% of the votes. Between 1994 and 1998 SDL’ failed to avoid a further dispersion of the left and pursued an independent opposition policy with a strong anti-nationalist and anti-authoritarian stance27, while from an organizational perspective the party remained highly decentralized and plagued by internal discord. Yet, in the 1998 elections SDL’ increased its consensus obtaining almost 15% of the votes, while HZDS decreased to 27% and a new centrist coalition polled just over 26%; given the electoral results SDL’ was invited to join the coalition government with SDK as a minor partner. While in government, SDL’ quickly began losing its popularity due to the right-wing economic policies promoted by the government, and a series of scandals affected the party. Moreover, in 1999, following internal conflicts over the future of the party, Robert Fico, one of the most popular SDL’ politicians, left the party to create a new political group called “Direction (Smer), representing the more liberal “third way” left and contributing to undermine the support for SDL’. 28

In the 2002 elections SDL’ suffered a crushing defeat, obtaining just 1,36 of the votes, while Smer managed to achieve 13,46%. Furthermore, benefiting from the crisis of SDL’, KSS managed (for its first and last time to date) to gain parliamentary representation with 6% the votes. After the failure of the SDL’, the resurrection of the Slovak left was made by Robert Fico’s Smer, which attracted and absorbed other left political formations and, in 2004, even what remained of SDL’. Fico has been capable to create a new party based on a new model of party organization centred on its charismatic leader and capable of good electoral and

26 De Waele and Soare, p. 305.
28 Ibid.
communicative strategies. In fact Smer structured itself almost as the opposite of SDL’, developing a more pronounced electoral-professional profile and starting to develop a territorial organization and membership only in a second time. Between 2002 and 2006, Smer proved capable in to succeed where SLD’ failed, becoming the hegemonic party of the left, and able to appeal to broader electorate following a “third way” model. In the 2006 elections, Smer resulted the first party with over 29% of the votes and, surprisingly formed a coalition government led by Robert Fico with HZDS and the populist right wing party Slovak National Party, which later caused the temporary suspension of SMER from the recently joined European Socialist Party. However, Smer managed to be readmitted to PES in 2008 and governed to the end of the legislature. Unlike SDL’, Smer managed to actually gain votes in the 2010 elections, confirming itself as the first Slovak party with almost 35% of the votes, but the losses of coalition partners prevented it from forming a majority. Two years later, the centre right government, already plagued by scandals, resigned after a vote of no confidence, and in the early election of 2012 Smer obtained an absolute majority of parliamentary seats polling over 44% of the votes, with Robert Fico reassuring office leading a single party government. In 2014 SMER nominated Robert Fico for Presidency but failed to win over the independent candidate Andrej Kiska 59 to 41. Again, in the 2014 European elections, Smer showed signs of a lowering consensus, obtaining just 24% of the votes, although still resulting the first Slovak party.

1.2 An updated map of the left in Central and Eastern Europe

In order to inquire the current status of the left, it is worthwhile to provide an updated map of all the past and present parties belonging to the left of the centre of the political spectrum. This is a preliminary step before looking back at their origins, legacies, and the adaptation/evolutionary process that has characterized them in the last 25 years. Thereupon, in this section we first provide a general overview of left and centre-left parties in CEE starting with a resume of their main typological characteristics and eventual legacies of the past regime and the transition. Subsequently, we recall the change and adaptation process that have characterized many of such parties and, lastly, we briefly look at the presence and persistence of a regime divide, or an anti-communist cleavage.

Among the most important theories on party development, we may point out studies stressing the importance of the previous regime and historical legacies, which were pointed out as powerful predictors in determining the types of CSPs, at least in the first years after the transition as well as more elite driven ones. A first overlook at the main left wing parties in CEE can be based on the classification of CSPs proposed by Ishiyama together with Kitschelt’s distinctions between bureaucratic-authoritarian communism, patrimonial communism and national consensus communism. With regards to the CSPs’ adaptation strategies Ishiyama identifies two dimensions, distinguishing on the one side between reformed and non-reformed parties and on the other between transmuted and non-transmuted parties. The first dimension

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30 Ibid.
31 Cf. Miroslav Mares, p.298
34 Grzymala-Busse, Redeeming the Communist Past.
35 Kitschelt, H. Party Cleavages in Post-Communist Democracies.
distinguishes between reformed CSPs which abandoned communist ideology towards a more moderate leftist position as opposed to non-reformed parties sticking to a Marxist identity and considered ‘anti-system’ parties. The second dimension refers to whether transmuted parties broke with their leftist tradition and managed a rightist/nationalist turn in order to cope with the political changes in the country. Breaking away from the two transformation types proposed by Ishiyama, we added another one that fits more recent evolutions, which we called “post communist-successor-party” and applies to a (relevant) party born from splits in the original CSPs or by the merging of CS with other parties, showing a significant continuity (for instance personnel, resources, ideology) with a CSP.

[NB drop the emphasis on the earlier literature on CSPs for a broader approach to the evolution of parties and party systems in the region!!!!]

We present in table 1 an updated summary of all left and centre-left parties in the six countries covered by this research, showing the main variables that influenced party change and adaptation (inheritance from the old party, transformation type, ideology and attitude to the communist past) and a brief description of their fate in the years. Furthermore, in trying to provide a more complete and up to date summary, we decided to include also some minor political formations born from former communist parties or out of other radical left parties linked to the communist past even if they did not contest any election or gained less than 1% of the votes.

Table 1: Summary of left parties’ origins, traits and developments.

| Hungary |  
|---|---|
| **Former ruling party: MSzMP** |  
| Party | founded | Inheritance and attitude to the communist past | transformation type (if applicable) | ideology | International Affiliation | fate |
| MSzP | 1989 | Reformist elite, resources, maj. Membership / Relatively critical | reformed/non transmuted | social democracy, centre-left | SI; PES | still existing; prominent in 1994-2009, highly redimensioned role and size after 2009 |
| MSzMP | 1989 | orthodox elite, minor membership/ Positive | non reformed/non transmuted | communism | - | Little success, dissolved in 1993 to become Munkaspart. |
| Munkaspart | 1993 | orthodox elite, minor membership/ Positive | non reformed/non transmuted | communism /radical left | - | politically irrelevant, suffered multiple splits. |
| DK | 2011 | MSzP liberal elite, no direct ties with MSzMP / Critical | post CSP | liberal centre-left | S&D Group / PES Candidate | Still existing, almost the same size of MSzP at 2014 European elections |
| 4K! | 2012 | No ties to the communist past | Radical left party | Social democratic / radical left | European Left | Still existing, politically irrelevant. |

| Poland |  
|---|---|
| **Former ruling party: PZPR** |  
| Party | founded | Inheritance and attitude to the communist past | transformation type | ideology | International Affiliation | fate |

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>founded</th>
<th>Inheritance and attitude to the communist past</th>
<th>transformation type</th>
<th>ideology</th>
<th>International Affiliation</th>
<th>fate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SdRP</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>elite, structure, resources, maj. Membership/ relatively critical</td>
<td>reformed/non transmuted</td>
<td>social democracy</td>
<td>SI</td>
<td>relevant role, dominant actor of SLD coalition, merged into SLD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZKPP</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>orthodox minority/ positive</td>
<td>non reformed/non transmuted</td>
<td>communism</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>politically irrelevant, merged into KPP in 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPP</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Claimed (spiritual) successor of PZPR/ positive</td>
<td>non reformed/non transmuted</td>
<td>communism</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>still existing, politically irrelevant (not participates in elections)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDPL</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Part of SLD elite/ critical</td>
<td>Post CSP</td>
<td>Social democracy</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Still existing, after modest success is now irrelevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP/TR</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>No CSP</td>
<td>Populism; liberal; leftish</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Renamed “Your Move” (TR) in 2013, part of the United Left coalition. Out of parliament.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Czech Republic**

Regime type and transition: bureaucratic-authoritarian, implosion

**Former ruling party: KSČ**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>founded</th>
<th>Inheritance and attitude to the communist past</th>
<th>transformation type</th>
<th>ideology</th>
<th>International Affiliation</th>
<th>fate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KSČM</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>name, elite, minor resources, membership/ Positive with limited criticism</td>
<td>Non reformed/non transmuted</td>
<td>communism /radical left</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Still existing, never a governing party, relevant electoral successes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ČSSD</td>
<td>(1878) 1989</td>
<td>personnel</td>
<td>Not a CSP; re-established historical party</td>
<td>Social democracy</td>
<td>SI; PES</td>
<td>Still existing, governing party, relevant electoral successes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPOZ/SPO</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Individually Person/leadership</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Centre-left</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Still existing, minor party. Split from ČSSD. Linked to ex pres. Zeman.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Slovakia**

Regime type and transition: bureaucratic-authoritarian, implosion

**Former ruling party: KSČ/KSS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>founded</th>
<th>inheritance</th>
<th>transformation type</th>
<th>ideology</th>
<th>attitude to the communist past</th>
<th>fate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SDL'</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>elite, structure, resources, maj. Membership</td>
<td>reformed/non transmuted</td>
<td>democratic socialism</td>
<td>Relatively critical</td>
<td>relevant until 2002, merged with SMER in 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KSS</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>name, ideology, personnel</td>
<td>non reformed/non transmuted</td>
<td>communism</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>still existing, modest success apart in 2002, declined again after 2006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### SMER
1999
- elite, part of resources after merging with SDL*
- post CSP
- centre-left
- Critical
- still existing, relevant successes from 2002, currently governing

### Romania

Regime type and transition: patrimonial communism, implosion/from above

**Former ruling party: PCR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>founded</th>
<th>Inheritance and attitude to the communist past</th>
<th>transformation type</th>
<th>ideology</th>
<th>International Affiliation</th>
<th>fate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FSN</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>National patriotic</td>
<td>Left; social-communism</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Dissolved 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSORD</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Neo-communist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Merged with PDSR 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSM</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>personnel</td>
<td>National patriotic</td>
<td>communism</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Merged with PSD in 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDSN</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>name, ideology, personnel</td>
<td>National patriotic</td>
<td>communism</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Split in 1996 to form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDSR</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>personnel</td>
<td>Social democracy</td>
<td></td>
<td>SI, PES</td>
<td>Largest party in Romania.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSD</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Centre-left social democracy</td>
<td></td>
<td>SI, PES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSR</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Socialism-communism</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>Split of the radical part of PSM after the merging with PSD. Closest to PCR.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Bulgaria

Regime type and transition: patrimonial communism, implosion

**Former ruling party: KPB**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>founded</th>
<th>Inheritance and attitude to the communist past</th>
<th>transformation type</th>
<th>ideology</th>
<th>International Affiliation</th>
<th>fate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BSP</td>
<td>(1894)</td>
<td>elite, structure, resources, maj. Membership/Relatively critical</td>
<td>reformed/non transmuted + successor of historical party</td>
<td>Social democracy</td>
<td>SI; PES</td>
<td>Still existing, leader of the left electoral alliance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pBS</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Historical successor of pre-communist party</td>
<td>Social-democracy</td>
<td>SI; PES</td>
<td>still existing, modest success</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: adapted from Ishiyama (2002), with integrations by the Author

As illustrated by table 2, the vast majority of left and centre-left parties in CEE are reformed/non-transmuted CSPs, following the way which Ziblatt called of “pragmatic adaptation”, distancing from the past and redefining the party as a social democratic party of experts and pragmatists.37 The only notable exception is KSČM, which refused to reform choosing the “Leftist retreat” by entrenching in Marxist tradition and

---

becoming an anti-system opposition party. Non-reformed is also a common trait of other communist parties in CEE, which characterize themselves as typical politically irrelevant anti-system parties, generally having very little success and not playing any role in the party systems. For post CSP, the definition can be attributed confidently to the Slovak SMER: a party which both originated as a split from a CSP and that later absorbed SDL’. Post CSP fits more loosely DK in Hungary, as it shows less elements of (both ideological and organizational) continuity with MSzP. About SLD, although formally a party formed in 1999 from the merging of a CSP with other parties, we cannot really speak of a post CSP due to its peculiar nature and the predominant role of SdRP that led to identifying the whole existing coalition as a CSP. Instead, a post CSP in Poland can be considered SDPL, which split from SLD in 2004, distancing from the corrupted image of the original party; it eventually registered a modest success, suffered splits in recent years, and is now practically irrelevant.

Looking at different traditions and regime legacies may help for instance to explain the difference between Czech and Slovak CSPs and from Czech and other CSPs. In Czechoslovakia, the existence of a democratic state prior to the communist regime and of a strong social democratic tradition allowed the re-establishment of ČSSD, which contributed closing the moderate left to former communists and to explain the “leftist retreat” of KSČM, as well as the strong communist tradition in the industrialized Czech lands helped its lasting success. In Poland and Hungary, the nature of the regime and of the transition favoured the reformist turn of former communists. Moreover, a peculiar characteristic of CEE was the early development of a fully pluralist political competition consolidated around policy question emerged, although in Slovakia this took more time to realize. In CEE, free elections favoured no competitors a priori, political parties largely controlled the political process and parties competed on policy programs rather than relying on populism or patronage. In Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic, this favoured a political competition prevalently structured among economic issues and on which party could best implement economic reforms.

In terms of adaptation, the story of CSPs in CEE is for the most part a story of (initial) success: they generally transformed from “bad guys” to real “socialists”, social-democratic political forces committed to the basic rule of the pacific power alternation and integrated in both EU and international networks of collaboration as the Socialist International and the Party of European Socialists. In more formal terms, CSPs showed a good regeneration capacity, being able to compete for and enter democratic governments and to gain long-term access to governmental power. This resulted from the ability to develop programmatic responsiveness, gain popular support for the party and achieve parliamentary acceptance. Hence, with the exception of KSČM and other minor communist formations, we are in presence of deeply reformed parties that have abandoned their communist ideology for a more moderate leftist position, fully accepting the new democratic regime and, in many cases even pursuing stronger reforms than parties from the anti-communist opposition. Reformed CSPs manage to redeem themselves by distancing themselves from the communist past and capitalizing on the elite resources they inherited from that past (as competence, structure, and discipline) which helped establishing a prominent technocratic profile opposed to the ‘political amateurism’ of the new

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38 Ibid.
39 M. Kubát, Political Opposition in Theory and Central European Practice, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 131-135.
40 Technically, this definition should be attributed also to several of the minor communist parties born from direct or less direct minor CP successors but, given their continuity ideological with the former ruling party, we classified them as CSPs.
44 Kitschelt et al., 1999
46 Ibid.
anti-communist elites. Collaboration with non-communist parties helped to legitimize themselves, as in Hungary MSzP managed to establish collaboration with a party from the anti-communist opposition contributing to its domestic and international legitimation and starting an alliance that lasted for 15 years. In Poland SdRP/SLD managed to enter government only with a former ZDRP satellite party, the PSL and was excluded by other parties of the former democratic opposition.47

Speaking of general evolution trends over the years for reformed CSPs in CEE, we can underline in particular a steady tendency towards the catch-all party model, a firm pro-western (particularly pro-European) stance and a gradual process of de-ideologization, giving up traditional social democracy while looking at western parties under the influence of the “third-way” model.48 In fact, this trend was interrupted only by the electoral defeats and subsequent crisis of CSP in Poland and Hungary, which led the largely redimensioned parties to reorganize, redeveloping a more leftist identity49 although pro-Europeanism still remain a common core issue for both SLD50 and MSzP. With reference to non-reformed CSP, we can see that also the KSČM has not remained immune to change: KSČM is not the old KSČ and gradually undertook ideological changes that made it more similar to other reformed western communist/radical left parties.51 This change is made even more clear as it started parliamentary collaboration with ČSSD and managed to join regional governing coalition after 2012.

A final dimension that we want to present here is the strength and persistence of anti-communism or anti-communist rhetoric in CEE with respect to CSPs. In fact, a strong anti-communist divide may not be surprising in Czech Republic, given the presence of a relevant unreformed CSP, which has been especially subject to a strong anti-communist campaign after its great success of 2002.52 Still, the past regime divide has been significant all across CEE53, influencing coalition formation strategies and political cleavages54, as well as government survival.55 Notably, in Hungary communism/anti-communism continue to be a relevant cleavage56: in particular, anti-communism has been one of the few ideological constants for Fidesz from its origin to present. Dealing “once and for all” with the communist past has been one of the major issues of the second Orbán government57 and a prominent reason behind some of its more controversial reforms; moreover, the anti-(post)communist rhetoric has been still present in the recent 2014 electoral campaign.58 Also in Poland, a general resentment of many other parties towards former communists greatly reduced the

47 Ibid., p. 3.
50 De Waele and Soare, The Central and Eastern European Left, p.298.
52 Ibid., pp.80-81.
56 Zsolt Enyedi, “The survival of the fittest”, in S. Jungerstam-Muldners, Post Communist EU Member States, 194-195
coalition potential for the redimensioned and fragmented polish left, although SLD is recently being considered a potential coalition partner for the currently ruling Civic Platform.

1.3 The demand for the left in Central and Eastern Europe

On political orientation in CEE

What is really “left” in CEE?

Figure 1 shows the average political orientation for all elections for which data are available in each of the six countries covered.

Some examples about the meaning of left and right in CEE...

Nationalist left, economic LR,

The demand side: voters’ orientation in CEE

Insert all tables with data from ESS


Based on the latest ESS results, in Hungary the political orientation is slightly leaning towards the right. Unsurprisingly the larger share of voters is (self)collocated at the centrum of the political spectrum, accounting for almost one third of voters.

Speaking of actual votes casted for parties, the vast majority of voters voted as expected. It is worth stressing how Fidesz was still capable of catching votes from every part of the political spectrum (and even catches half of the more-on-the-right voters, with the other half going to Jobbik), while the progressive coalition is vastly confined just within the left.

Compare previous data with aggregate electoral results for each country

International cooperation

Differences and contrasts between centre left parties in the region. (Eg. What Mesterhazy said about Fico)

1.4 Electoral Struggles and Successes

The title of this paper is clearly asking “what is left of the left in Central and Eastern Europe”: this question can be legitimately raised and answered at least looking at three levels: (a) CSPs and their own successors; (b) CSPs, their successors and other left wing/socialist and democrat parties (c) the broad left/progressive camp. Given the scope of our work, we will try to answer the question limiting to the first level, looking in
particular at the electoral results of CSPs over time as resumed below in table 4, and providing a brief resume of the evolution of the main CSPs in the Visegrad countries.

**Table 4: Election results of left-wing parties in Central and Eastern Europe (1990-2014)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSzP</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>25.67¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSzMP/MP</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Poland**  |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |        |
| SLD       | 12   | 20.4 | 27.1 | 41   | 11.3 |      | 13.2² | 8.24   | 9.44   |
| SDPL      | -    | -    | -    | -    | -    | 3.9  | -    | -      |

| Czech Republic** |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |        |
| KSČM       | 13.24| 14.05| 10.33| 11.03| 18.51| 12.81| 11.27| 14.91  | 10.98  |
| ČSSD⁴      | 4.11 | 6.53 | 26.44| 32.31| 30.2 | 32.32| 22.08| 20.46  | 14.17  |

| Slovakia   |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |        |
| SDL’       | 13.35| 14.7 | 10.4¹| 14.7 | 1.4  |      |      |        |
| Smer       |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |        |
| KSS⁷       | -    | 0.76⁸| 2.7  | 2.8  | 6.3  | 3.9  | 0.83 | 0.73   | 1.51   |

*proportional list votes; ** lower chamber; ¹Both part of “Unity” coalition; ²both part of SiD coalition; ³still Czechoslovakia; ⁴ČSSD is not a CSP; ⁵still KSS; ⁶in coalition; ⁷not the same KSS of 1990; ⁸as “KSS ’91”

1.5 New parties and movements

All across the region, no new contenders seem able to challenge the role of the major parties or alliances which has been established in the last decade. This despite the fact that

In comparison, the vast majority of new parties and movement are not rooted in the traditional left and centre-left but rather populist/green/radical right...

*** Insert table summarizing new parties and movement by country ***
In Poland, since the sound defeat of SLD in 2005, there has been a massive swing of voters from the left to the right, which has not yet showed any significant comeback. Moreover, the left, both represented by SLD and other minor political formations, is challenged by the emergence of new populist parties with a vague left wing character, like the Palikot movement. However, SLD managed to regain the lead of the Polish left, and is keen on joining a governing coalition with the current ruling party Civic Platform after the 2015 elections but is still (unsuccessfully) struggling to regain at least in part its past popularity.61 With regard to small Polish post-CSP, SDPL, after some modest success in 2004 European Elections it participated in the short-lived LiD alliance for the 2007 elections and since 2011 suffered splits and is not playing any significant role anymore, although it moved closer to Palikot’s Movement until the crisis of the unitary coalition prior to the last European Elections.

In Hungary still in 2009, when its decline was already evident, MSzP was considered the healthiest CSP in CEE62, yet in 2010 MSzP dropped from its higher result ever in 2006 to a meagre 19%. The crisis of MSzP and its main ally led to the fragmentation of the once strong and united left, in a country now dominated by the right wing Fidesz and threatened by the rising success of the far-right party Jobbik. Between 2010 and 2014, MSzP failed to regain support and suffered the split of Gyurcsány’s DK.63 Given the current situation is difficult to say if we can still consider MSzP as the leading force of the (redimensioned) left in Hungary. Surely, it

62 De Waele and Soare, op. cit., p.300
63 Although at first, this helped the party to get rid of one of its most controversial figures.
managed to lead the short-lived left wing coalition for the 2014 elections and still is by large the major left opposition force in the Hungarian National Assembly; however, a record-low 10% at the recent European elections clearly shows the deep crisis of the party, challenged by other left wing forces and, in particular, by DK which unexpectedly obtained 9% of the votes.

For Slovakia, since 2005, with the merge of SDL’ into Smer, we cannot speak anymore of having real CSP, as even the communists of KSS are not directly linked with the old KSS. The resurrection of the Slovak left after the disaster of 1998-2002 is directly linked to the success of Robert Fico’s Smer, a new post CSP which succeeded where SDL’ failed. Helped by the peculiar Slovak situation, Smer managed to unite the left and prove to be competitive, adopting a successful strategy that, despite some controversies, has made it the healthiest left party in the region to date, and eventually achieving an absolute majority in 2012. Nowadays, despite showing some sign of paying the price of power, notably the loss of the 2014 presidential elections, Smer is still the first political party in Slovakia and has no real contenders in the left. To sum up, Slovakia represent today the only successful case for CSP, or better, for an heir of a CSP, in CEE.

In Czech Republic the left wing spectrum remains characterized and divided by the presence of a still communist CSP and of a modern democratic social democratic party like ČSSD. Although never repeating the unexpected success of 2002, in the last years KSČM obtained good electoral results, especially in the 2012 regional elections. Yet, despite becoming more and more a potential governing partner, it retains a prominent radical left character, which still keep it on the threshold. In the 2014 European election KSČM saw a decreased percentage of vote compared to less than a year before, yet the record-low turnout, and the peculiar nature of the elections for the European Parliament are not enough to tell if this will be a solid tendency. Furthermore, the loss of votes in comparison with the 2013 Elections was common for all parties, with the only successes represented by new parties.

The picture that emerge from our analysis presents a mixed situation, although for sure not one particularly favourable for CSPs. Out of the left wing parties currently present in CEE, just three parties that could really be defined as communist successors still exists, MSzP, SLD and KSČM. Among those, the only one that proved to be stable over time is the one that most surprisingly managed to survive, the non-reformed Czech communists, with the SLD and MSzP still struggling with a deep crisis of consensus. Moreover, the creation of what we have roughly defined post communist-successor-parties, at least outside Poland, has proved to be a successful story, referring in particular to Smer in Slovakia but also, on a smaller scale, to DK in Hungary.

2. Is left different from other part(ie)s in Central and Eastern Europe?

On the stability and instability of the left in cee (just parties above 1%)

2.1 Electoral volatility and fragmentation

Bloc Fragmentation

64 Rybář and Deegan-Krause, Slovakia’s Communist successor parties, p. 503.
Structure of party systems by bloc

Using the effective number of parties’ index, we can see (figure 2) that the left and centre left is usually composed by a single party, being in almost all cases (but Czech Republic) the communist successor party

NB Poland 2015 and Slovakia 2016 are currently missing.

Figure 3 shows the volatility according to political orientation, from aggregated results. The more extreme results we find for the smaller categories, like green and populist parties, which in the years covered are more prone to sudden appearance and disappearances

Table 1 Summary of electoral volatility by orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Far Left</th>
<th>Centre Left</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>Centre-right</th>
<th>Right</th>
<th>Far-right</th>
<th>Populist</th>
<th>Civic/green</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obs.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>Mean</td>
<td>42.78</td>
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<td>39.11</td>
<td>39.11</td>
<td>25.39</td>
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<td>40.90</td>
<td>46.90</td>
<td>22.43</td>
<td>27.16</td>
<td>35.44</td>
<td>30.84</td>
<td>41.50</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

66 For a definition of Communist Successor Parties, we can take Ishiyama (1995) as “those parties which were the primary successors to the former governing party in the communist regime and inherited the preponderance of the former ruling parties’ resources and personnel”
While figure 4 shows the same aggregated electoral volatility using single party data.
Aggregate volatility by country

Plot of (single parties) electoral volatility for each country by orientation show quite different results

2.2 The impact of being in government

Table 2: Electoral outcomes after the first time in government

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country/Party</th>
<th>First Time in Government</th>
<th>Coalition Status</th>
<th>% of Votes*</th>
<th>Confirmed in Office</th>
<th>% of Votes* in the Subsequent Election (Trend)</th>
<th>Governed Again? (Years in Office)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HU/MSzP</td>
<td>1994-1998</td>
<td>major partner</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>32.7 (+)</td>
<td>Yes (2002-2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SK/SDL</td>
<td>1998-2003</td>
<td>minor partner</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>4.4 (-)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SK/SMER**</td>
<td>2006-2010</td>
<td>major partner</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>34.79 (+)</td>
<td>Yes (2012-present)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CZ/CSSR***</td>
<td>1998-2002</td>
<td>minority gov.</td>
<td>32.31</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>30.1 (-)</td>
<td>Yes (2013-present)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Proportional share (HU), lower chamber (PL, CZ). **Not a direct CSP. ***Not a CSP.

Table 3: Electoral outcomes after governing again

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country/Party</th>
<th>Time in Government</th>
<th>Coalition Status</th>
<th>% of Votes*</th>
<th>Confirmed in Office</th>
<th>% of Votes* in the Subsequent Election (Trend)</th>
<th>Governed Again?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PL/SLD</td>
<td>2001-2005</td>
<td>major partner</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>11.3 (-)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HU/MSzP</td>
<td>2002-2006</td>
<td>major partner</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>43.2 (+)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HU/MSzP</td>
<td>2006-2010</td>
<td>major partner</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>19.3 (-)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SK/SMER**</td>
<td>2012-present</td>
<td>single-party gov</td>
<td>44.41</td>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Proportional share (HU), lower chamber (PL, CZ). **Not a direct CSP.

3. Insights from Hungary and Romania

Detailed case studies

Hungary
[]...[ Based on Interviews to party officials

Romania
[]...[ Based on Interviews to party officials

Preliminary conclusions: what’s left of the left in Central and Eastern Europe.

Some preliminary inconclusive conclusions...
One of the main questions we tried to answer is now of the left in CEE? As we have seen, it is still largely made of CSPs, which managed to get rid of the negative legacies of the past but keeping the positive one, becoming in general pragmatic centre-left parties, social democrats. After having achieved a period of success in the nineties and early 2000s almost all centre-left parties evolved to catch all parties, prominently office seeker and inspired by the new left, following and reinforcing a general trend of personalization of politics as is the case of the MSzP. This changed after they experienced losses and crisis, when, as in Poland and Hungary, turned back to the basics and assumed more leftist position trying to regain legitimacy and consensus, although without yet showing a clearly defined identity. Again, we saw how KSČM presents itself as an exception in CEE, since, while having experienced changes too, becoming more and more similar to a modern radical left party, still presents itself as the “least-reformed” CSP, yet capable of a steady success. To cover the more recent developments, we expanded the scope by looking at what we defined “post communist-successor-parties”, which particularly fits the case of Robert Fico’s Smer in Slovakia and, to a lesser extent, DK in Hungary and we saw that they proved able to successfully challenge CSPs.

Looking at past legacies, the main trend we can underline is how the actual situation is almost inversely proportional to what used to be fifteen years ago. In fact, the greatest decline for CSPs happened in Poland and Hungary, the countries where they have used to be stronger, capable to quickly regenerate and regain government. In the former Czechoslovakia the “least-reformed” KSČM continues to prove its stability, moving some steps towards modernization and loosing part of its anti-system nature, while in Slovakia a post CSP like Smer have been capable of achieving the greatest successes to date for any party in that country. As for anti-communist rhetoric, and regime-divide, this has been always present, and represented a relevant issue in coalition and government formation. Yet, despite being still present, especially in Hungary, this aspect of communist legacy seems not to be among the main direct causes of the present crisis of CSPs.

Conscious of the limits of our general overview, we may attempt some preliminary/general reflexions on the possible causes of the present CSPs condition in CEE. One of the most interesting point is how the most radical changes happened in the countries where they have been more successful to regenerate. In fact, MSzP and SLD share a similar rise, development and a common fate, although in different times. Affirming that they failed not for being “(post)communist”, but because they “have governed badly” or because they were “a bunch of crooks” may be both exaggerate and too simplistic, but probably is not so far from truth. In fact, we believe that the main causes for the decline of CSPs in CEE are to be found elsewhere from strictly looking at the communist past, focusing more on governing performance and party organization/re-organization as well as other context specificities. Better yet, legacies of the past can be indirectly linked by looking at how they influenced the adaptation strategy of the parties. Their effort to create an image of pragmatic and competent technocrats was disrupted when they were rocked by scandals and paid the price of unsatisfying government performances, especially the unpopular measures to face worsening economic crisis. In fact, corruption and scandal are a common element, which critically undermined the public image of the most successful CSPs. Furthermore, in reorganizing themselves as catch all parties, they tied themselves less and less to specific categories of voters have reduced their capacity to withstand harder times not having a large solid base of hard-core loyal supporters. In addition, electoral failure of leftist formations in CEE, notably the inability to re-emerge, follows – in a harsher way – a widespread tendency that cross the former-communist borders. In fact, in the last years we saw the general failure of the “third way”, with left parties, especially social democrats, systematically declining in nearly all European countries.

67 Much can be attributed to country specific reason and, in particular, to the ability of MSzP to relaunch its image under the first Gyurcsány government.
68 For instance, we can’t discard the “Orban effect”, as a main contributor for the crisis of MSzP in 2010 or in the 1998 elections.
(with the partial exception of southern Europe\textsuperscript{69}) as we have seen even in the last European Elections. In fact, a common trend seem to be the inability of the left to capitalise from the economic crisis, worsened by the emergence of new, usually populist (and/right wing), parties that challenge what’s left of the left.

Looking at the two different successful cases in former Czechoslovakia, we may link the success of Smer with the ability capitalize from the failure of its predecessor and from the unstable condition of Slovak party system and Slovak Left while proposing a new effective party model. However, what has made it so successful, expose Smer to the same risks of failure that have affected other CSPs. Equally, context specificities and legacies still seem to be good explanatory causes for the survival and stability of the Czech KSCM over time, coupled by a slow but present adaptation.

Hence, to explore the possible reasons behind the different fates of CSPs, in-depth case studies cold be able to disclose context-specific aspects potentially neglected by broader comparisons, while further researches may concentrate on the role of corruption and the emergence of new parties, especially looking at the competition presented by new populist parties to left parties in CEE. Moreover, in time, comparisons with western European countries will help to see if we can speak of converging trends in party politics and check for increasing signs of normalization or “westernization” in CEE politics after a generation since the fall of communism.

Speaking of suggestions for possible future developments we may not be particularly optimistic about a return of the left in the near future in Poland, following the disastrous results of the 2015 elections and the current political developments. In Hungary the best way for the left to face Fidesz and regain credibility wold be the creation of a unitary left formation; however, given the specific situation, this is unlikely in the short term, and much will be decided by the struggle between MSzP and DK, and, as well as future choices of other left wings movements. Anyway, the road to 2018 is long and both a decline of Fidesz and a partial resurrection of the left are still possible, although. As for Slovakia, Fico’s Smer is still the major political player in Slovakia despite a shrinking consensus. Benefitting from a divided and fragmented party system. In Czech Republic, KSCM can still count on a solid basis, however it might not be able to repeat the successes of the last years, and the influence of participating in some regional governments still have to be assessed. For sure, given the present situation, the way to become an acceptable governing partner is still long for Czech communists. The social democrats, on the other end

Bibliography


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Appendix A: list of acronyms

ČSSD Czech Social Democratic Party (Česká strana sociálně demokratická)
DK Democratic Coalition (Demokratikus Koalíció)
KPP Communist Party of Poland (Komunistyczna Partia Polski)
KSČ Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (Komunistická strana Československa)
KSČM Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy)
KSS Communist Party of Slovakia (Komunistická strana Slovenska)
LiD Left and Democrats (Lewica i Demokraci)
MP Hungarian Workers’ Party (Magyar Munkáspárt)
MSzP Hungarian Socialist Party (Magyar Szocialista Párt)
MSzMP Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt)
PES Party of European Socialists
PSL Polish People’s Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe)
PZPR Polish United Workers’ Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza)
SDL’ Party of the Democratic Left (Strana demokratickej ľavice)
SDPL Social Democracy of Poland (Socjaldemokracja Polska)
SdRP Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej)
SI Socialist International
SLD Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej)
Smer Direction/Direction – Social Democracy (Smer/Smer–sociálna demokracia)
SzDSz Alliance of Free Democrats – Hungarian Liberal Party (Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége – a Magyar Liberális Párt)
UP Labor United (Unia Pracy)
ZKPP Polish Communists Union 'Proletariat' (Związek Komunistów Polskich 'Proletariat')

**Appendix B: Tables and graphs**

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<th>Freq.</th>
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<th>% resp</th>
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**Average orientation** 5.32