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Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Europeism and Euroscepticism in Eastern and Central European Party Systems

Resumen Este artículo examina la evolución de los sistemas de partidos de Europa Oriental y Central hacia la división emergente entre las fuerzas pro-UE y euroescépticas y presenta una visión revisada de la división tradicional de centro-periferia en seis países: Polonia, Hungría, República Checa, Eslovaquia, Bulgaria y Rumania. La primera parte discute el enfoque espacial de Rokkan, la segunda desarrolla una visión revisada de la escisión centro-periferia en relación con el espacio a nivel regional, y la tercera analiza la competencia de los partidos en términos de europeísmo y euroescepticismo en los sistemas de partidos de Europa Central y Oriental.

Palabras clave Sistema de partidos, europeísmo, euroescepticismo.

Abstract The paper examines the evolution of Eastern and Central European party systems to the emergent division between pro-EU and Eurosceptic forces and puts forward a revised view of the traditional centre-periphery cleavage in six countries: Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania. The first part discusses the Rokkan spatial approach, the second develops a revised view of centre-periphery cleavage in relation to space at the regional level, and the third analyzes party competition in terms of Europeism and Euroscepticism in Eastern and Central European party systems.

Keywords Party system, europeanism, euroscepticism.

Introduction

Fifty years ago, Albert O. Hirschman identified, with the term's *exit, voice and loyalty*, three possible strategies that citizens could undertake regarding their membership of an organization, whether it was a company, a political party or a state (Hirschman, 1970). More recently, the term "Brexit" has brought to mind the concrete possibility that this relationship of belonging, between citizen and a supranational political organization, can be concluded through an "exit".

Although the English case is still an extraordinary event today, it is true that the growth of European integration has given rise to contestation and opposition. The European project has generated novel institutions, complex processes and a whole realm of regulatory policy while generating debate, discourse and division. While it has created its own domestic policies, these have not been created in a vacuum. As Taggart and Szczerbiak (2001) pointed out:

The associational politics of parties and party systems, and the processes connected with them, force the issue into certain configurations and have the effect of patterning conflict. Looking at the nature of Euroscepticism therefore means looking at how domestic politics structure one part of the process of European integration. But it also means that we can use the European issue to illuminate deeper lines of division within the party system, between the core and periphery, between the embattled centre and the alienated outer rim. In short, studying Euroscepticism tells us something about European integration and tells us much about party politics (pp. 5-6).

The presence of Europeism/Euroscepticism cleavage in the context of national party systems is confirmed by the results of the last two European Parliamentary elections (2014-2019), which showed three strictly related phenomena:

- ◆ a broad electoral abstentionism, that involved all the EU's member states and strengthened the public opinion's alienation from the European institutions
- ◆ a growth of Euro-sceptical parties also in the Western and Southern European countries (i.e. *Front National* in France; *UK Independence Party* in the United Kingdom; *AFD* in Germany; *Syriza* and *Golden Dawn* in Greece; *League* and *Five Stars Movement* in Italy; *Podemos* and *Vox* in Spain)
- ◆ a widespread national requirement to renegotiate the terms of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union.

The third point, in particular, threatens to cross the division line between smaller and larger European member state, involving a deeper conflict between the German centre of European economic power, on one hand, and the rest of Europe on the other.

In this perspective, any satisfactory empirical analysis of the impact of the Europeism/Euroscepticism cleavage within the East and Central Europe party system involves the solution of three closely related problems, namely the question of 'space', the theoretical background of cleavage in comparative analysis and a revised conception of the centre-periphery cleavage in line with the post-communist political context. The core concept here is a definition of space in terms of territorial and cultural boundaries.

This paper considers six countries (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania) and explains the evolution of the Eastern and Central European party systems to the emergent division between pro-EU and Eurosceptic forces on the basis of a revised view of traditional centre-periphery cleavage. All the countries examined are former Soviet Union satellites, democracies that emerged after the fall of the Berlin Wall and current EU member states. The study is divided into three parts.

The first introduces the Stein Rokkan spatial approach, the second suggests a broader conception of the centre-periphery cleavage in relation to regional space and the third analyzes Eastern and Central European party competition in terms of Europeism/Euroscepticism.

The notion of space

As is known, Rokkan argues that there is a connection between major cleavages and national and industrial revolutions. Lipset and Rokkan (1967) suggest that three conditions must be met if a cleavage is to become politically salient. First, the cleavage must distinguish people on at least one potentially important characteristic. Second, individuals must know which group to identify with on any characteristic. Third and most importantly, political parties must organise support and competition around the cleavage, thus giving it institutional expression.

In this regard, Rokkan's (1970) concept of cleavage -understood as a long-term structural conflict capable of creating organised and opposing political alignments (Bartolini and Mair, 1990; Allardt and Pesonen, 1967; Rae and Taylor, 1970; Lawson, Römmele and Karasimeonov, 1999; Bartolini, 2000; McAllister and White, 2007)- highlights the process of political, economic and cultural differentiation whereby it is possible to divide the members of a community into groups. The nature and intensity of the mechanisms of cohesion and solidarity that are established among those who claim a common identity, which can pertain to race, ethnicity, religious creed or social status, stimulate a process of mobilisation of the forces belonging to each group, which are channelled into the creation of organisations with formal structures, like political parties.

More specifically, in defining the centre-periphery cleavage, Rokkan gives importance to 'space' in terms of geographical space (location) and membership space (social and political dimensions: community, identity, cultural values). As he argues, it is very easy to cross geographical borders but not so easy to cross the membership line, which entails abandoning one's original cultural identity, adopting another and being accepted by the new group. Space is related in his analysis to the formation of territorial units in Europe and the consequent establishment of state boundaries. In a broader analytical sense, a boundary is a line of demarcation between territorial or membership groups. In this perspective, the term is used to indicate the focal point for delimiting a territory or group and identifying both territorial groups and membership groups. As Bartolini (2005) points out, an economic boundary defines an area of free market transactions (economic rights, property rights, a common currency and the mobility of factors of production); a cultural boundary defines a space characterised by the traits of the membership group (nation, race, language, ethnic features); a politico-administrative boundary delimits the territory on the basis of regulatory regimes (social and political rights, education, labour market); and a military boundary delimits the territory on the basis of extraction-coercion agency and capacity.

While the building of boundaries sets the costs of barriers for various types of transactions across local communities, membership groups and territorial entities, exit (Hirschman, 1970) is the act of crossing a boundary. This means that the ability to control the crossing of boundaries corresponds to the formation of a centre. Bartolini (2005) emphasises the striking correspondence between Rokkan's macro-level link between external boundary control and internal political structuring and Hirschman's micro-level relationship between exit options and propensity to voice. On this view, conflicts over the demarcation of boundaries reflect clashes of interests among the social groups

controlling different resources within each territory. The centre-formation process provides two basic lines of conflict: dominant cultural groups versus ethnically, linguistically or religiously distinct subject populations and the attempt by the centre to standardise and mobilise remote peripheral territories.

In terms of political power, centre and periphery can be defined by their spatial positions and political interests. The centre is identified as the core location of military, economic and cultural power, the place of political decisions and policy-making process and the seat of the ruling class, whereas the periphery is the territory subordinate to the military, economic and cultural power of the centre, the place at a distance from the policy-making process, and where the population is dependent on political decisions. As we shall see, the spatial approach inherent in the centre-periphery cleavage provides the starting point for analysis of this cleavage in a broader sense.

A new conception of centre-periphery cleavage

Centre-periphery cleavage will be used here to describe an asymmetrical relation between two different entities (Zarycki, 2002; Blahó, 2012) that can assume different forms, such as North and South at the global level, western and eastern at the regional, and the ethnic minority and majority division at the national. In other words, centre and periphery denote the different places of two subjects in connection with their own spatial position at the national, regional and global level. This means that the power of the centre is not only the power of a national government imposing a dominant culture in order to standardise the national language or control the media but is also reflected in unequal interactions between different places in the world in terms of cultural, political and economic position. The centre-periphery cleavage can therefore be interpreted in terms of three different dimensions, the first being the classic conflict between the central culture of the modern nation state and its peripheries, the second the economic and political dominance of the Soviet Union over its satellite countries during the bipolar international system, and the third the asymmetrical relations between the European Union, regarded as the centre, and the peripheral Eastern European member states. All three of these dimensions of the centre-periphery cleavage have influenced the evolution and consolidation of the Eastern European party systems.

The availability of exit and voice to support cultural identity or political and economic power against the centre structures the channels of the periphery's political participation and organisation. Political parties are therefore a critical element in the translation of social cleavages into political divisions and examination of their role will tell us a great deal about the trajectory of these emerging conflicts.

The following analysis suggests a revised view of the centre-periphery cleavage in terms of organised conflict originating from the EU and East European member states (regional level). The regional sphere can postulate a clear divide between *internal* and *external* and hence between *state* and *supranational organization*. This level refers to the institutional influence -understood in procedural and organisational terms- that the European Union has been capable of exercising *on its member states*. As we will see, the conditions of access and the standards imposed for continuing membership have helped to modify the positions of some parties and their interaction in terms of pro-Europeanism vs. Euroscepticism.

Given the above premises, the aim of this study is to explain the evolution of the Eastern European party systems in terms of the impact of Europeism/Euroscepticism cleavage on party alignments. To this end, the area-based comparison commences with the empirical

verification of the possible presence of centre-periphery cleavage by ascertaining the simultaneous existence of three conditions: the development of conflict arising from pressures exerted by the centre to bring the periphery into line; awareness on the part of the periphery of its diversity and of the existence of political, economic and cultural interests incompatible with those of the centre; and the periphery's ability to mobilise and organise itself so as to compete with the centre. More specifically, the EU accession process highlights the differing interests of larger and smaller member states, thus leading many Eastern European parties to move from loyalty to voice and/or exit strategy.

The regional level

The asymmetrical relations between the European Union and Eastern European member states can be understood in terms of the timing of accession, economical and political reforms (conditionality) and the defence of national interests and national sovereignty (Mayhew, 2000; Bardi *et al.*, 2002). Many Eastern European leaders, including Klaus, Orbán and the Kaczyński brothers, have claimed that the accession process and policy-making in accordance with the Copenhagen criteria are aimed at protecting the economic interests of the larger states (Germany and France). After the Soviet experience, many Eastern European countries are afraid of being absorbed by the EU machine and various segments of society therefore feel largely extraneous to the European project (Hix and Lord, 1997; Marks and Hooghe, 1999; Henderson, 1999; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2007).

By integrating the classification of Taggart and Szczerbiak (*hard* or *soft* Euroscepticism) (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2001; Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2008) with Hirschman's strategies, it is possible to place East European parties in three categories. The first corresponds to the *exit*, coincides with hard Euroscepticism and implies the rejection of the entire project. In most cases, the parties that choose this strategy support the request for a referendum to verify their country's public opinion on whether to stay or leave the EU. The second strategy, namely *voice*, represents the soft Eurosceptic position and involves contingent or qualified opposition to specific European issues and policies. The objectives of this strategy aim to reform the structure and rules of the EU through a wide range of voices, ranging from the refusal to apply certain community directives to the attempt to radical reform in an intergovernmental sense of certain policies (think immigration). Finally, the third is expressed by *loyalty* and coincides with a markedly European propensity, founded on the conviction that the solution to the challenges posed to the EU cannot ignore the search for a common position.

Other studies put forward a binary classification based on whether the parties support or oppose the integration process and identify three recurrent dimensions as regards the stance of each unit on the issue of for or against the EU (Hooghe *et al.*, 2002). The first is socio-economic and regards the presence of a strong link between position on the left or right and support for or opposition to the EU, where fiscal policy in particular tends to simplify the lines of division and strengthen the competition between social democrats, who advocate the European model of regulated capitalism, and neo-liberalists, who are closer to the model of intergovernmental deregulation. The second regards the emergence of new political issues concerned with lifestyle, the environment, cultural diversity, nationalism and immigration. In this perspective, clear-cut opposition to the process of supranational integration, perceived as an alienating, liberalist mechanism, is expressed not only by extreme left-wing parties, communists, environmentalists and social libertarians but also by populist, nationalist and xenophobic formations of the far right. It should be noted, however, that in recent years the strengthening of new right-wing

parties in both the East and the West has been the result of an increased perception of challenges that threaten the national community, such as immigration, foreign cultural influences, the tendency to fall in with the dominant Anglo-Saxon model (in terms of language, for example) and the influence of international organisations. The European Union is seen by these parties not only as encapsulating all these threats but also as working to undermine state sovereignty and slash the power of national governments.

The third dimension introduces a distinction between parties in government and opposition, suggesting a programmatic strategy aimed at maximising support and addressing specific issues for and against the EU only when the contingent situation permits. In general terms, a tendency is assumed to adopt moderate policies and/or support the EU when in government and the opposite when in opposition (Rohrschneider and White, 2007; Rohrschneider and White, 2015).

The data of the **Chapel Hill Expert Survey** of 2017, applied to the last elections, make it possible to present an overall picture of the positions adopted by the various Eastern European parties in relation to whether they are Eurosceptic or pro-European, right-wing or left-wing and in government or the opposition (table 1).¹ As regards the last point, the parties that have never been part of a coalition government are indicated in bold.

1. See the appendix at the end of the paper.

Table 1: Euroscepticism in East and Central Europe party systems

Country	Hard euroscepticism	Soft euroscepticism	Europeanism	% Last elections (soft and hard eurosceptics, total)
Bulgaria				
left			BSP DPS	
right	UP VOLYA		GERB	13.6
Czech Republic				
left	KSCM		CSSD	
right	SPD	ODS ANO	Pirate KDU-CSL TOPo9	59.3
Hungary				
left			MSZP LMP DK	
right	JOBBIK	FIDESZ		68.4
Poland				
left			SLD	
right	KWN	PIS	PSL KO	50.4
Romania				
left			PSD	
right			UDMR PNL USR ALDE PMP	-
Slovakia				
left			SMER-SD	
right	SNS L'SNS	SAS OL SME-RO	MH SIET	46.5

Data revised by the author

Empirical analysis confirms the rise of Euroscepticism in the post-communist area on the left-right spectrum. In particular, many of the most important Eastern European right parties, including the Civic Democratic Party, FIDESZ and Law and Justice, have adopted a Eurosceptic position. On the contrary, nearly all the reformed former-communist parties have continued to support the EU (with the exception of the SMER, which has sometimes adopted a more critical stance).

The data bear out the initial hypothesis of Hooghe and colleagues as regards:

- ◆ the soft Euroscepticism of the parties that are more openly neo-liberalist (ODS), conservative and/or populist (FIDESZ, PIS, SME-RO, SAS, OL)
- ◆ the hard Euroscepticism of the far right (UP, SPD, JOBBIK, KWN, SNS, L'SNS) and the far left (KSCM).

To sum up, the hard Euroscepticism column is occupied exclusively by extremist parties, a trend seen both in the stabilization of some far-right groups (JOBBIK, SNS) and extreme left (KSCM), and by the creation of new entities with strongly nationalist and xenophobic propensities throughout the area (UP, SPD, KWN and L'SNS). The pro-Europeanism column is instead occupied by parties of a primarily social democratic or moderate parties (BSP, CSSD, MSZP, LMP, DK, SLD, PSD, SMER-SD), with the addition of some liberal/conservative (GERB, PNL, KO, USR, ALDE, MP, SIET), Christian democratic (KDU-CSL, PSL, PMP) and ethnic (DPS, UDMR, MH) formations.

Confirmation of the hypothesis of a more pro-European attitude on the part of parties in government instead appears less obvious, as the column of soft Euroscepticism proves to contain *all* the parties that have led or been part of government coalitions for longer or shorter periods of time with only two exceptions. It is also true, on the contrary, that nearly all the pro-European formations have been in government. The Eurosceptic strategy, at least in its hard version, does appear, however, to be nearly always adopted by parties that know they have no chance of taking power and therefore not only have nothing to lose in electoral terms but can even hope to gain votes in extraordinary situations of economic crisis, migratory pressures and threats to the sovereignty of the state. This trend was confirmed by the opposition from the most extremist groups, except for brief periods of external support for governments for coalitional reasons (KSCM, JOBBIK, SNS, UP).

In Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic for example, but also in Greece, Spain and Italy (Verney and Bosco, 2013) the dynamics of party competition shows an increase of Euroscepticism in relation to the economic consequences of EU integration (Szczerbiak, 2008; Hanley, 2008; Markowski and Tucker, 2010). While the adoption in the Czech Republic of Eurosceptic and pro-European stances, respectively by liberal and social democrat parties, is something grafted onto the party alignments without altering them, the situation appears more complex in Poland and Slovakia, where the economic factor of Euroscepticism does not produce bipolar competition between pro-European social democrats and Eurosceptic liberal-conservatives. Although the last Polish parliamentary elections (October 2019) helped to partially realign the pro-European/Eurosceptic competition on the right/left axis, thanks to the return of the SLD with 12.5%, it must be emphasized that it is the SLD, the only group on the left in Poland, from 2005 to 2011 fluctuated between 13.15% and 8.24% and in 2015 failed to get any seats at the Sejm. As a result, the Eurosceptic and pro-European division in Poland is found mainly among right-wing groups. In Slovakia, if we consider that the SMER maintains a more critical position towards the EU than its eastern European counterparts, only the Hungarian minority, the Christian democrat and moderate parties are openly pro-EU (see the new SIET - Network). This means that in both countries the pro/anti-EU cleavage not only cuts across left/right alignments but also strengthens the competition between secular-liberal and Catholic-populist forces in Poland. It alters relationships between social democrats, nationalists and ethnic parties in Slovakia, where these forces in the past have been part of and are still members of the same coalition government.

Hungary is an exception (Batory, 2008), as the consolidation of the Hungarian national identity and state sovereignty is perceived in marked contrast to a supranational institution such as the European Union. At the same time, the economic consequences of EU integration have fostered the spread of conservative (FIDESZ) and/or xenophobic (JOBBIK) views. In the case of Hungary, however, as in the Czech Republic, the pro/anti-EU cleavage is consolidated within the sphere of the left/right division.

Bulgaria and Romania constitute two different cases in that none of the moderate right-wing parties has adopted a Eurosceptic stance. In both countries competition of an ethnic character does not appear to have given way to competition for and against the EU for three reasons:

- ◆ the national issue is still important (Bulgaria)
- ◆ the major parties of the right and the left are seeking further legitimisation at the national and international levels through support for European values, while it is the more extremist parties that have opted for opposition to EU (UP, VOLYA)
- ◆ general scepticism on the part of citizens as to the ability of national institutions to cope with emergency situations, not least because they have requested direct intervention on the part of the European Commission.

This happened, for example, in Romania during the institutional crisis of 2012, and has influenced support for the more pro-European parties.²

2. It should be noted that the voting turnout in Romania is one of the lowest in Europe, with only 39.2% at the general election in 2008 and 41.6% in 2012.

On the whole, therefore, the evidence of Eastern and Central European support for Euroscepticism among both opposition and government parties confirms the presence of some powerful strategic incentives to express domestic party competition in terms of a pro-EU/anti-EU divide. This involves the question of *national interests* as against supranational European power but also the perception that EU rhetoric masks the economic interests of its core.

Conclusions

In East and Central Europe there is a line of continuity connecting the present-day forms of Euroscepticism with the need felt to secure independence; first from Moscow and now from Brussels. Today the centre-periphery cleavage is the most concrete manifestation of the succession of asymmetric relations that has seen the *state* in Eastern Europe fight for independence from the Soviet empire, defend the national territory against claims at the sub-state level and defend national sovereignty against the imposition of European parameters.

In this context, the move between exit and voice has fueled the creation of new barriers in two opposite but closely connected directions. The first barrier, which goes from the bottom upwards, is represented by the attempts of Member States to tilt EU policies in their favor and openly challenge the interests of the strongest countries. The second, from top to bottom, has manifested as the need to close national borders to immigration. This double closure to the outside world has had a disruptive impact on party alignments in all European countries and has brought into focus the centrality of the division caused by the presence of irreconcilable national interests - economic, political and strategic - all in a European 'space' that should be shared.

In conclusion, it is suggested here that the power relationship between two different entities is determined by the position each can occupy in its national, regional or global space, and the political struggle between who holds the 'centre' and who remains on

the *periphery* of the system influences political competition and characterises the party system. This probably means today that examination of the pro-EU/Eurosceptic divide could shed a great deal of light on the political divisions within party systems not only in the post-communist area but also in Western and Southern Europe, as shown by the cases of the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, Greece and Italy.

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