

Democracies Adrift? How the European Crises Affect East-Central Europe

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Abstract

The present article proposes to study and compare the state of democracy in East-Central European countries. Such a comparative survey is deemed timely because there have been electoral landslides, corruption scandals involving political leaders and mass protests in several of these countries. Popular satisfaction with democracy has declined and democratic accountability institutions have been eroded in Hungary and Poland. These developments pose questions about where these democracies are heading and how their paths are related to the crisis of European integration.

I argue that the crises of economic and European integration together with the existing de-alignment between voters and political parties have discredited the nexus between economic integration and prosperity and widened the incongruence between responsive and responsible government. The impact of the crises differs from country to country, depending on institutional constraints, socio-political cleavages and the interrelation of economic and democratic performance. Multi-dimensional policy spaces facilitated the growth of anti-establishment parties in the Czech Republic and Slovenia. Higher performance expectations of citizens, the mixed electoral system and missing institutional safeguards of societal-political pluralism rendered Hungary's democracy more vulnerable.

Democracies Adrift?

How the European Crises Affect East-Central Europe

Introduction

The global financial crisis and the ensuing crisis of the European Union have not only entailed economic recession, austerity and more fiscal surveillance for East-Central Europe (ECE). The crises have also affected the practices and institutions of democracies in this region, indicating a departure from the stable state of the (post-)enlargement era.

Parliamentary elections in the Czech Republic (October 2013) and Slovenia (December 2011, July 2014) reshuffled two party systems that were considered to be among the most consolidated in ECE (Lewis 2006, 575). New political parties and candidates criticizing the established political forces entered several other parliaments and obtained significant electoral support. Corruption scandals involving acting and previous prime ministers occurred in Croatia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia during the very brief period from 2011 to 2013. Large street demonstrations and sustained public protests in several ECE countries showed the popular outrage about corrupt political elites, austerity policies and bad public governance in general. Opinion surveys document how citizens have become increasingly dissatisfied with the working of democracy (Armingeon and Guthmann 2014). In Hungary and Poland, governing majorities undermined or removed democratic checks and balances constraining their power.

These developments pose questions about where these democracies are heading and how their paths are related to the crisis of European integration. How did this crisis exert an impact on ECE democracies? Why did some democracies prove to be more resilient whereas others, particularly Hungary, experienced an erosion of democratic stability? This article examines these two questions, proposing four ways to understand the effects of these crises in ECE. I start from the well-established insight that EU membership and its core component of economic integration constituted external and economic anchors that stabilized ECE democracies (Magen and Morlino 2009, Pettai and Brusis 2012, Rupnik and Zielonka 2013, Tomini 2014). One important anchoring mechanism was the belief, shared and mutually reinforced between the EU and domestic political elites, that open markets and foreign investment provided the only viable model of economic development capable of generating longterm collective welfare benefits and socioeconomic convergence for ECE. Mainstream political parties had legitimized the policy adaptations required by the EU as corresponding to popular preferences of catching up with Western standards of living and belonging to a European community.

I argue that the economic crisis triggered in 2008 and the ensuing Eurozone crisis weakened or removed these external, economic and societal anchorings of ECE democracies. Beyond their direct economic effects, the two crises challenged the credibility of the nexus between economic integration and prosperity and widened the incongruence between responsive and responsible government. These political effects interacted with the extant dealignment between voters and political parties in ECE, affecting both the representational and accountability dimension of democracy. They resulted in protests and protest voting that reshuffled and polarized party systems and brought anti-establishment parties into parliament and government. These developments have not led to a breakdown of democratic institutions but indicate that institutional arrangements and behavioral patterns of democracy are drifting away from the status quo of the accession period.

The impact of the crises differs from country to country, depending on country-specific configurations of institutional constraints, socio-political cleavages and citizens' expectations. Multi-dimensional policy spaces in the Czech Republic and Slovenia facilitated the intrusion of anti-establishment parties into seemingly stable party systems. Differential expectations of

citizens, the formative effects of electoral system choices and institutional safeguards of societal-political pluralism can explain why democratic accountability eroded in Hungary, but is perhaps less likely to decline in Poland.

The contributions to this Special Issue of “Problems of Post-Communism” study how democratic institutions and politics in ECE countries are influenced by these larger structural factors and processes. Their empirical focus is on Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Together with Croatia and the Czech Republic, these countries are meant by the label “East-Central Europe” in this article and may be viewed as a group due to shared or similar experiences and conditions. The present article and country studies focus on the political ramifications of the economic crisis and do not examine the effects of the 2015 refugee crisis in detail.

This introductory article first takes stock of major new challenges to ECE democracies. The second section analyzes causal pathways through which the economic and EU crises took effect in ECE. A third section discusses the varying resilience and vulnerability of ECE democracies. The final section outlines the contributions to this Special Issue.

1. Key challenges to ECE democracies

Identifying challenges to democracy involves a degree of subjective judgement since democracy is a multi-dimensional, normatively loaded concept. Lacking a consensual definition, scholars have used different standards to assess the quality and eventual deficiencies of democracy. To select crucial democracy-related developments and trends in ECE, I refer to the so-called Transformation Index, an expert survey and rating conducted by the Bertelsmann Foundation, a Germany-based NGO.¹ This choice has been motivated, firstly, by the fact that the authors of this Special Issue and I have participated in this survey.²

Secondly and more importantly, the concept of “constitutional democracy” underlying the survey is grounded in contemporary theories of democracy (Møller and Skaaning 2010, 262-264). The concept complements Robert Dahl’s notion of electoral contestation and political participation with horizontal accountability, civil liberties, consolidated representative organizations (parties and interest associations) and a strong civil society shaped by democratic norms (Dahl 1971, Merkel 2004, O’Donnell 1999). In the survey design, this concept is disaggregated into 17 questions that are analyzed and rated by country experts.

If the expert ratings reflecting the situation in January 2009 are compared with the ratings referring to January 2015, five items show the largest average declines for the six ECE countries: citizens’ approval of democratic norms and procedures (item number 5.3); functioning of checks and balances constraining executive power (3.1); stability, social rootedness and representation capacity of the party system (5.1); independence of the judiciary (3.2); and media freedom (2.4). For the party system (5.1), the degree of civic self-organization and social trust (5.4) and political corruption (3.3), the average scores of ECE-6 exhibit the biggest distance from the optimal score of 10. Based on this empirical configuration of declines and deficiencies in the Transformation Index, four challenges are outlined that correspond to the items mentioned.

Democracy challenge 1: Anti-establishment parties and party system upheavals

Defining themselves as honest alternatives to the established political elites, numerous new political parties managed to enter parliaments. Their names convey a message of distinction from traditional party politics, ideologies and the perceived moral contamination of politics: “Action of Unsatisfied Citizens” (ANO 2011), “Dawn of Direct Democracy” (Úsvit) or “Public Affairs” (VV) in the Czech Republic, “Politics May Be Different” (LMP) in Hungary, “Your Movement” (TR) in Poland, “Ordinary People and Independent Personalities” (OL’ANO) in Slovakia or “Civic List” (DL) in Slovenia.

Elections restructured the party systems in the Czech Republic and Slovenia that scholars had considered to be among the most consolidated in ECE (Enyedi and Casal Bértoa 2011, Lewis 2006, Tiemann 2012). In the Czech Republic, ANO 2011 emerged as the second largest party in its first electoral campaign, run for the Chamber of Deputies elections in October 2013. In Slovenia, a newly created party, Pozitivna Slovenija (PS), won the parliamentary elections of December 2011, but nearly disappeared in the following parliamentary elections of July 2014, being replaced by another new party that obtained almost 35 percent of the votes from scratch, the Modern Center Party (SMC) (Krašovec and Johannsen 2016). Candidates from outside the political establishment won the presidential elections in Slovakia (Andrej Kiska, March 2014) and finished third in the first rounds of the presidential races in Croatia (Ivan Sinčić, December 2014) and Poland (Paweł Kukiz, May 2015). Five new parties entered parliaments in Poland (October 2015) and Slovakia (March 2016).

It is rather uncertain whether these new political actors will survive several elections and will make a difference for the integrity of politics and democracy (Matthes 2016a, Mesežnikov and Bíró-Nagy 2013). But their electoral success indicates that existing parties have been unable to accommodate the concerns of larger groups of voters (reflecting item 5.1 in the Transformation Index).

The fluid party systems of the region complicate the distinction and delineation between old and new, conventional and anti-establishment parties (Pop-Eleches 2010). Although the term “populist” has become a pejorative, catch-all label in partisan political debates, I consider the term necessary and useful to describe a group of parties that does not fully overlap with the newly created anti-establishment parties in ECE (Deegan-Krause and Haughton 2009, Hanley and Sikk forthc.). Populist parties are defined here as parties that claim to represent the opinion of the people against a political establishment that is portrayed as disregarding the concerns of ordinary citizens (Kriesi 2014). Populist parties criticize established parties because of their elitist, cartel-type politicking and their corruption-prone leaders. To distinguish themselves from established mainstream parties and other anti-establishment parties, populist parties renounce or show their neglect of a consistent social democratic, liberal, or christian democratic ideology (Pop-Eleches 2010). Their assertive nonideological posture is usually associated with the dominance of a charismatic party leader. In addition, populist parties often appeal to fears and resentments against the EU.

Democracy challenge 2: Political corruption scandals

Croatia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia in 2011-2013 all witnessed corruption scandals involving acting and previous prime ministers: Ivo Sanader, Petr Nečas, Mikuláš Dzurinda and Janez Janša. Hungary saw an attempt to accuse the preceding Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány of corruption.³ While the circumstances of these individual cases differ strongly and some charges may prove unfounded, the number of incidents could be easily expanded by including other leading politicians and earlier years. Private or partisan exchange

relations violating public interests appear to be so frequent and pervasive that it is pertinent and necessary to look for explanations that go beyond assigning individual motives and guilt (Index item 3.3).

Democracy challenge 3: Popular dissatisfaction with democratic governance

Surveys indicate that citizens' satisfaction with the way democracy works in their country declined in four of the six ECE between 2008 and 2015 (Index item 5.3) (Armingeon and Guthmann 2014). The remaining two countries with initial increases after the outset of the economic crisis, Hungary and Poland, showed lower levels of satisfaction between 2010/11 and 2015, respectively.

One manifestation of this growing dissatisfaction was the wave of large street demonstrations that shook the Czech Republic (April 2012, November 2014), Hungary (October 2012), Slovakia (February 2012) and Slovenia (January 2013). The protesters partly gathered against corrupt politicians or the austerity programmes of governments, but also in order to voice a general dissatisfaction and disappointment about the performance of these democracies. Some of the protests were related to referendum campaigns launched by opposition parties to mobilize popular resistance against government policies. In Slovenia, controversial reform projects were subject to six referenda in 2010 and 2011 (Krašovec and Johannsen 2016). Other opposition-led referenda took place in Croatia (December 2013), Poland (October 2013) and previously in Hungary (2008) and Slovakia (2010). In Hungary, the government of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán conducted a campaign to obtain popular legitimacy for its draft constitution when it distributed questionnaires on the constitution among all citizens in 2011. This "national consultation" was, inter alia, intended to replace the lack of support for the constitution voiced by opposition parties and civil society organizations (Index item 5.4).⁴

Democracy challenge 4: Erosion of democratic accountability

In Hungary and Poland, governing right-wing populist parties dismantled constitutional checks and balances. Violent protests and antagonistic political polarization constituted the prelude to the sweeping electoral victory of the Hungarian Civic Party (FIDESZ) in 2010. Its two-thirds majority enabled the government of Prime Minister Orbán to enforce a "dominant-power politics" (Carothers 2002) veiled as a national revolution. By adopting and amending 859 laws between 2010 and March 2014 (Országgyűlés Hivatala 2014, 97-171), the government fundamentally transformed Hungary's constitutional framework and system of government. The governing majority weakened or removed all institutional checks that had been envisaged to ensure democratic accountability (Magyar 2013) (Index items 2.4, 3.1 and 3.2). This policy also put the constitution at the majority's discretion, since this majority adopted a new "basic law" in a controversial procedure in 2011 and amended it four times during the first two years after its adoption. To frame its policy as defending the Hungarian nation against foreign powers, the Orbán government deliberately sustained low-level conflicts with the EU and other international organizations. Orbán's Hungary represents the deconsolidation of a democracy deemed to be one of the most stable in the 1990-ies (Ágh 2013, 2016, Merkel 2007).

Following its electoral victory in October 2015, Poland's Law and Justice Party (PiS) formed a government that used its parliamentary majority to replace judges of the Constitutional Tri-

bunal who had just been elected by the previous Sejm majority. The governing majority confined the Tribunal's autonomy by facilitating the removal of judges, increasing the quorum and majority requirements for rulings and obliging the Tribunal to consider motions in the sequence in which they were filed. Although the Tribunal declared these legal amendments unconstitutional, the government refused to accept and publish the ruling. In addition, the parliamentary majority placed the public prosecutor's office and the public TV and radio services under the control of the government. PiS representatives repudiated the critique from EU institutions, claiming that the reforms were both legitimized by the party's electoral majority and necessary to struggle against persisting informal, corrupt (post-) Communist networks.

2. Effects of the economic and EU crises

There are some indications that the party system upheavals, widespread political corruption involving top political leaders, dissatisfaction voiced by citizens, mass protests and dominant-power politics are interrelated (Hanley and Sikk forthc., Krastev 2014). Ineffective public and constitutional accountability mechanisms appear to delegitimize existing structures of representation, causing citizens to withdraw their electoral support and express their protest. Dissenting voters elect new political representatives and parties that claim to differ from the established political elites, often using populist discourses. Among the populist parties in government, some tried to shirk or override their constitutional accountability by appeals to an alleged popular mandate. Some populist governments also failed to deliver the accountability promised to, and expected by their voters, which in turn has exacerbated popular frustration about politics, triggering new waves of protest voting or non-voting (Pop-Eleches 2010).

To determine how the economic and EU crises affect these interrelated accountability and representation problems, a closer look at the effects of these crises is necessary. Following the collapse of the US and European inter-bank loan markets in 2008, the global economic recession entailed several years of recession and economic stagnation in the EU and led to a prolonged sovereign debt crisis in the European Economic and Monetary Union (Eurozone). The EU institutions and the Eurozone states had to develop financial support policies and institutions preventing several states from defaulting. The crisis of the Eurozone did not confine itself to those ECE that had joined the Currency Union (Slovakia and Slovenia). Rather, the crises slowed down and partially reversed the income convergence of all new EU member states (Matthes 2016a).

Their political effects have been at least as grave as these socioeconomic effects. They left fundamental institutional arrangements untouched – that is, democratic elections as the uncontested mode of regulating access to political rule, a proportional or mixed electoral system, a parliamentary system of government and a unitary state organization (Armingeon and Careja 2008, Zubek and Goetz 2010) However, the crises generated drift processes that affected the impact of these institutions (Mahoney and Thelen 2010). Political actors have been faced with the loss of previously stable external, economic and societal anchors. In the remainder of this section, four hypotheses are suggested about these processes of unanchoring.

For political representatives and citizens in ECE, a main reason for joining the EU has been the mass prosperity benefit expected from economic integration with the West European EU member states. Political elites in ECE had promoted EU membership and foreign investment as the only viable strategy to attain Western prosperity and as external anchors of stable economic development. The economic and Eurozone crises shattered these beliefs and thereby damaged the credibility of their advocates since the crises showed that a foreign-led economic

development is vulnerable to risks emanating from international financial markets (Nölke and Vliegthart 2009).

Many citizens in ECE perceived their country and themselves as affected by a crisis that had not been caused by them and that was transmitted to them through the EU. Although the ECE states had adopted the regulatory framework of the EU prior to the crisis, they were unable to prevent or revert the outflow of foreign capital, tightening of credit supply and increase of risk aversion among financial market actors. For ECE citizens, the EU appeared not only unable to protect its new member states, but its crisis management also violated principles of justice by obliging the poorer ECE member states to incur liabilities for the debts of wealthier member states from Southern Europe (Malová and Dolný 2016). The refugee crisis of 2015 and the EU's attempts to involve ECE countries in hosting refugees further reinforced this perception. Four particular effects of the economic crisis are given below.

Effect 1: Credibility losses

By disproving the nexus between economic integration and future mass prosperity, the economic and EU crises weaken the credibility of established political parties and foster populist and other new challenger parties.

Established political parties lack realistic alternative strategies of economic development and are forced to acknowledge that catching up with the West will take much longer and will entail more hardship and uncertainty than expected. Challenger parties purport to have alternative economic strategies and can legitimize their programs by proving the failure of economic and political integration as a viable model of convergence. Moreover, the uncertain and fragile benefits of European integration also enable populist challengers to complement their Eurosceptic rhetorics with a persuasive economic rationale.

More risk-averse international financial markets and closer EU surveillance in the wake of the Eurozone crisis constrained the fiscal and distributive policy discretion of ECE governments (Laffan 2014). As a consequence, the gap between responsible and responsive government widened, i.e., the incompatibility between external constraints and public opinion as referential bases of governing increased (Bardi, Bartolini, and Trechsel 2014, Mair 2009, 15, Rose 2014). Governments implement “responsible” policies if they take into account the financial stability and sustainability of public budgets and the expectations of the EU and the international financial markets. “Responsive” policies reflect public opinion, voters’ demands, the configuration of interests and the balance of power between different groups in society. These policies increasingly deviate from policies required to build and sustain confidence among financial market actors.

Effect 2: Governmental quandary

By rendering responsible and responsive government less compatible, the economic and EU crises support the polarization between established parties and anti-establishment parties.

If established parties choose and cling to responsible policies prioritizing the consolidation of public budgets, they subordinate their representative role to a governing role. This contributes to their cartelization as parties governed by party leaders holding public offices (Katz and Mair 1995). Governing parties that adjust their policies to the expectations of international financial markets and EU institutions enable anti-establishment parties to present themselves as the only parties responding to the voters’ concerns. These challenger parties advocate responsive government and seek to mobilize the popular dissatisfaction with the outcomes of responsible policies.

Effect 3: Populists in office

If populist or other anti-establishment parties win elections and join or lead governments, they are faced with three basic options: unresponsive compromising, irresponsibility or constrained accountability.

If populist-led governments compromise on their goals and begin formulating responsible policies, they are likely to lose credibility and support in their electorate, particularly as their responsiveness may be contested by other populist challengers. If populist incumbents seek to fulfill their political promises, financial markets and EU institutions are likely to sanction their “irresponsible” policies, resulting in, or contributing to their failure. Such failure will expose them to public criticism at home and prompt many voters to withdraw their notoriously feeble support. The third option is to combine responsive policies with measures to constrain public scrutiny and political competition, leading to the pattern of dominant power politics observable in Hungary and less markedly in Poland.

The socioeconomic and political effects of the crises interact with, and reinforce, the institutional weakness of political parties in ECE. Scholars have described the instability and weak roots of party systems in ECE as a dealignment between voters and parties (Casal Bértoa and Mair 2012, Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2012). Trust in political parties has generally been low in ECE. For example, in June 2014, 12 percent of the citizens in ECE polled by the Eurobarometer Survey (unweighted average) declared they would tend to trust in political parties, compared to a mean of 31 percent in Northern and West European member states.⁵ Trust declined further in Slovenia during the economic and EU crisis, but increased in Hungary and to some extent also in Poland. In the other countries, trust levels did not change much between 2008 and 2014.

Levels of party membership in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia are lower than in 20 of the 27 European countries surveyed in 2007-2009 (Van Biezen, Mair, and Poguntke 2012, 28). The Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia also experienced the largest declines in the number of party members between the late 1990-s and 2007/2008, compared to 17 other European countries (Van Biezen, Mair, and Poguntke 2012, 32).

Electoral turnout has declined or stagnated at low levels in all ECE countries. In the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia, turnout fell by 15-25 percentage points in the five national legislative elections between 1998 and 2013; in Croatia and Hungary, turnout declined by 22 and 9 percentage points in the four elections between 2000/2002 and 2011/2014, respectively (Armingeon et al. 2013). Electoral turnout in Poland increased between 1997/2001 and 2011, but its 2011 level of 49 percent has been lower than in the other four ECE. The average turnout in the six ECE countries was 56 percent in national legislative elections held between 2011 and 2014, whereas the average turnout for 15 Western democracies without compulsory voting was 72 percent in 2011 (Armingeon et al. 2013). Particularly the poorer and less educated groups of ECE voters have withdrawn from political participation (Markowski and Enyedi 2011, 214, Matthes 2016b).

Low and declining participation levels in elections and parties have been associated with voters' fluctuating allegiances. In contrast with electoral volatility in Western Europe, volatility in ECE is not only higher, but it is also mainly caused by parties entering or leaving the political system, not by voters switching their vote between existing parties (Powell and Tucker 2014, Tavits 2007).

Taken together, the data on volatility, turnout, trust and membership in political parties membership indicate that ECE citizens are more dealigned from parties than in Western Europe and that the existing weak ties have dwindled further since 2008.

Effect 4: Reinforcing dealignment between voters and parties

Lacking stable electorates and bases of party members, party leaders depend on state resources to sustain and expand their organizations which creates incentives for political corruption. Revelations about corrupt officeholders and charges of corruption in turn tend to widen the dealignment and to nurture anti-establishment protests.

Dealignment necessitates and facilitates campaigning and communication through media rather than through a mobilized party membership (Rupnik and Zielonka 2013, 16). This mediatisation of politics not only supports parties dominated by a leadership that is directly addressing and responding to the public. It also reinforces the polarization between these established and anti-establishment parties since a bipolar staging of political controversy corresponds to the needs and requirements of a mediatized public sphere.

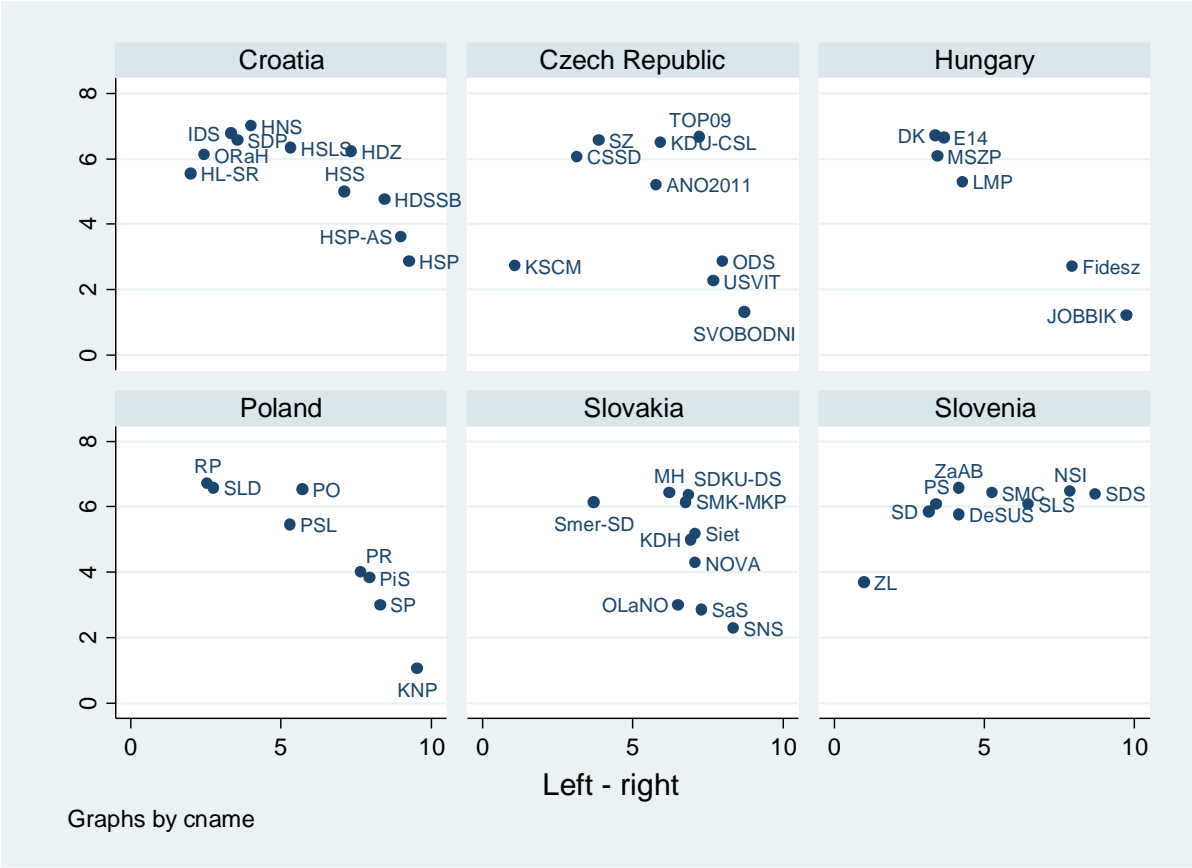
In addition, dealignment induces voters to vote for parties and politicians based on their perceived performance in office. Also labeled as “retrospective” or “economic” voting (cf. e.g. Roberts 2008), this electoral behavior contributes to landslide elections during economic crises and to the outbidding of incumbents by their populist challengers.

3. Patterns of vulnerability and resilience

The political effects of the crises affected all six ECE countries and provide the key to explain the syndrome of interrelated accountability and representation problems observable in ECE. However, the ECE countries differ with regard to the four pathways and outcomes of unanchoring. These processes are mediated by several country-specific variables that include the configuration of cleavages in society and the political system, the state’s international image and its domestic repercussions, the interaction between economic performance and popular support for democracy, and the institutional constraints posed by the constitutional framework.

In what follows I provide some evidence for the proposed crises effects and explore selected cross-national differences. The first proposition regarding the credibility losses of established parties may be assessed by investigating their programmatic stances. A well-known data source on policy positions is the “Chapel Hill Expert Survey” (CHES) (Bakker et al. 2015). Covering all six ECE in 2014, this survey asked country experts (n= 7-17 per country) to rate each country’s main parties according to whether their general ideological orientation was more leftist (0) or more rightist (10) (horizontal axis) and whether they opposed (0) or supported (10) European integration. The mean expert ratings for these two questions are plotted in the graphs shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Party positions in East-Central European countries



Party position data compiled from CHES (Bakker et al. 2015). See the appendix for a list of party acronyms and names

In five of the six graphs, the party positions are approximately distributed in the form of a curve running from the upper left corner (leftist-pro-EU) to the lower right corner (rightist-anti-EU).⁶ This pattern reveals that center-left parties have not sought to position themselves as critics of European integration (see also: Lewis 2011, Marks and Hooghe 2006, Matthes 2016a, Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2009). Their pro-integrationist position has limited the abilities of center-left parties to blame the EU for the economic crisis. In contrast, major center-right parties have tended to take a more EU-critical position and have been more able to reconcile this position with their stances on other political issues.

The positioning of center-left parties suggests that they have lost more credibility than center-right parties, because they depend more on European integration as a source of legitimation. In contrast, center-right parties have found it easier to adopt moderate Eurosceptic positions, to advocate national interests or to de-emphasize issues of EU integration (Marks and Hooghe 2006, 167-169).

There are only two leftist parties rated as EU-critical in the CHES: the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) in the Czech Republic and the United Left (ZL) in Slovenia. Both parties are viewed as outsiders by the other political parties and have not been included as partners in coalitions forming national governments (Krašovec and Johannsen 2016).

However, the differential credibility and ideological consistency of EU-critical positions can only partially explain why established political parties (that is, parties existing since the early 2000-s) lost or gained the support of the electorate in the wake of the economic and European

crises. As Table 1 shows, three major leftist parties (ČSSD, MSZP and SD) indeed lost significant shares of their voters between 2006/08 and 2015, while the Polish Union of Social Democrats (SLD) had become marginalized already prior to 2008. Eurosceptic rightist parties in Hungary and Poland (FIDESZ and PiS) won more votes, but other rightist parties also lost considerable numbers of voters.

Table 1: Changes in the electoral support of major political parties

	Rightist	Vote losses/gains (percentage points)		resulting vote share
		Pre-2008 to 1. post-08	1. to 2. post-08	
Croatia	HDZ+	-12.1	+18.6	33.5
Czech Republic	ODS	-15.2	-12.5	7.7
Hungary	FIDESZ	+10.7	-7.9	44.9
Poland	PO	-2.3	-15.1	24.1
Poland	PiS	-2.2	+7.7	37.6
Slovakia	SDKÚ-DS	-2.9	-9.3	6.1
Slovenia	SDS	-3.1	-5.5	20.7
	Leftist			
Croatia	SDP+	-2.3	-8.4	32.3
Czech Republic	ČSSD	-10.2	-1.6	20.5
Hungary	MSZP+	-23.9	+6.3	25.6
Poland	SLD+	-5	-0.7	7.6
Slovakia	Smer	+5.7	+9.6	44.4
Slovenia	SD	-20.0	-4.5	6.0

Vote shares obtained in parliamentary elections, party lists, first chambers. Parties with a + formed electoral alliances with smaller parties in one or several elections. Calculations of gains and losses are based on the shares of these alliances and include constituent partners competing separately in preceding or subsequent elections. Source: <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/>, accessed 8 June 2016.

Corruption scandals are likely to have contributed to these losses among rightist parties (HDZ, PO, ODS, SDKÚ-DS and SDS), but cases of high-level political corruption also induced voters to punish leftist parties (ČSSD, MSZP, SD) (Matthes 2016a). Another important factor behind the electoral losses is incumbency. Almost all of the parties listed in table 1 lost the largest numbers of voters when they were in government. In the elections immediately following 2008, a governing party was re-elected only in Poland (2011). The apparent inability of governing parties to use their position in office for electoral gains confirms prior findings about high levels of voter-party dealignment and protest voting (Pop-Eleches 2010, Tavits 2008). But the absence of incumbency status advantages also supports the above-mentioned proposition about the greater incongruence of responsible and responsive government, i.e., that governing parties increasingly fail to reconcile the expectations of international stakeholders and their domestic constituencies.

However, this general insight leaves two questions open: why have the Czech Republic and Slovenia experienced particularly large electoral landslides and why has Hungary's democracy become deconsolidated whereas other ECE countries have been more resilient with regard to populist challenger parties? To answer the first question, I draw on the relation between cleavage structures and party system institutionalization observed by Fernando Casal Bértoa (Casal Bértoa 2014). He argues that cross-cutting cleavages hindered, and coinciding (cumulating) cleavages fostered the institutionalization of party systems in four ECE countries. In party systems with cross-cutting cleavages, parties find it difficult to cooperate with ideologically contiguous partners and are characterized by lower partisan attachments (Casal Bértoa 2014, 22).⁷

However, Casal Bértoa's observation about the differing configurations of cleavages can explain why party systems with cross-cutting cleavages are more open to new parties. Political elites who consider establishing new parties can appeal to voters of existing parties more easily since these voters tend to be less ideologically tied to single parties and the ideological differences between parties are more constrained by affinities in other dimensions of the policy space. Party systems with cross-cutting cleavages are usually multipolar and the policy space in such systems is multi-dimensional (Rovny and Edwards 2012, 60). In contrast, party systems with cumulating cleavages tend to have a uni-dimensional policy space where voter-party alignments include more policy areas which makes it more difficult for newcomer parties to attract voters from established parties.

The dimensionality of a policy space can be measured by comparing the extent to which the policy positions of parties coincide or differ across different policy or issue dimensions (Benoit and Laver 2006, Casal Bértoa 2014, Marks and Hooghe 2006, Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2009). Following these authors, I have conducted an exploratory factor analysis of parties' policy positions on three issue dimensions that are considered as particularly salient for party politics in ECE: (1) European integration (eu_position); (2) democratic freedoms and rights (galtan)⁸; and (3) economic issues (Irecon). Based on the CHES carried out in 2006, prior to the economic and EU crises (Hooghe et al. 2010), the analysis investigates how well these dimensions are represented by a single underlying factor (dimension). The more variance this underlying dimension explains, the more uni-dimensional is the respective policy space.⁹ The results in Table 2, second row, show that the first dimensions (extracted factors) explain 84-87% of the variance in experts' ratings of party positions for Hungary and Poland. In contrast, the policy positions of parties in Slovakia, Slovenia and the Czech Republic are less well tapped by the first dimensions. In these cases, the second dimensions explain a much higher share of the overall variance in the data.

Thus, the policy spaces in these three countries appear to be more multi-dimensional, and this multi-dimensionality is closely related to the higher levels of electoral volatility (Table 2, bottom row) these countries experienced in the most recent elections. The difference between the relatively multi-dimensional policy spaces of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia on the one hand, and Hungary/Poland's more uni-dimensional spaces on the other is also confirmed by analyses of the 2010 edition of the CHES and by an earlier study of party systems (Benoit and Laver 2006, 120, 122).

Table 2: Electoral volatility and dimensionality of policy spaces¹⁰

	Hungary		Poland		Croatia		Slovakia		Czech Republic		Slovenia	
Variance explained by underlying dimensions	0.8 4	0.1 2	0.8 7	0.0 9	0.6 7	0.2 4	0.5 3	0.3 5	0.5 9	0.2 6	0.5 5	0.3 4
Volatility (elections)	9.9 (2010-14)		18.4 (2011-15)		19.1 (2011-15)		28.8 (2012-16)		30.6 (2010-13)		44.7 (2011-14)	

To interpret the meaning of these factors/dimensions, it is common to look at the correlations between the factors and the variables measured. These correlations are depicted in Table 3 which is based upon a varimax rotation of the extracted factors that implies that the second dimensions are orthogonal (not correlated) to the respective first dimensions. High correlations (factor loadings, shaded cells) indicate that a variable is well represented in a dimension. The table also contains the factor loadings for 2014 in order to trace changes in the configuration of policy spaces.

Table 3 shows that in 2014 EU integration had become a defining pole in the main dimension of party competition in Hungary and Poland. In 2006, the parties' positions on the EU were less clearly represented in the first dimension. Croatia's pattern of factor loadings is similar to Hungary and Poland although EU integration was more central to party competition already in 2010. Supporters of EU integration were opposed to advocates of traditional, authoritarian and nationalist ideas (see also Figure 1 above). The Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia differ from these three countries insofar as issues of EU integration were less divisive for party competition in 2006 and remained so in 2014, since the variable "EU_position" either loads on the second, orthogonal factor or is largely equally correlated to both factors (for an analysis of EU discourses in Slovakia, see: Malová and Dolný 2016). The more consensual, cross-cutting or valence character of EU issues in these countries is also reflected in their lower political salience.¹¹

Low or high salience of EU issues are, however, not related to more pro-European or more Eurosceptic positions. In 2014, the average party position on European integration (weighted by the vote shares of parties) was most pro-integrationist in Poland and most EU-critical in the Czech Republic. Slovenia notably differs from the other five countries (see also figure 1 above). Its policy space lost multi-dimensionality in 2014 which corresponds to Alenka Krašovec and Lars Johannsen's observation that party competition became more polarized (2016). However, the main axis of party competition does not run from pro-European to traditional, nationalist parties as in most other ECE, but is more "West European", that is, parties with leftist economic positions tend to advocate more libertarian and participatory (gal) positions on democracy. In contrast with the other four ECE, Slovenia and also Slovakia lack major center-right parties inclined to represent moderate Eurosceptic positions.

Table 3 Reconfiguration of policy spaces

	2006			2014		
	eu_position	lrecon	galtan	eu_position	lrecon	galtan
Hungary	0.37	0.88	-0.9	0.97	0.06	-0.97
	<i>0.93</i>	<i>0.41</i>	<i>-0.37</i>	<i>0.09</i>	<i>1.00</i>	<i>-0.03</i>
Poland	0.76	0.4	-0.9	-0.86	0.13	0.95
	<i>0.59</i>	<i>0.91</i>	<i>-0.38</i>	<i>-0.36</i>	<i>0.98</i>	<i>0.02</i>
Croatia (2010-14)	0.91	0.19	-0.9	0.92	0.01	-0.92
	<i>0.19</i>	<i>0.98</i>	<i>-0.23</i>	0.10	1.00	0.08
Slovakia	0.79	0.92	-0.01	0.00	-0.83	0.86
	-0.45	0.15	0.97	0.97	-0.30	-0.24
Czech Republic	0.13	0.91	-0.77	-0.59	-0.06	0.91
	<i>0.98</i>	<i>0.05</i>	<i>-0.38</i>	<i>-0.55</i>	<i>0.92</i>	<i>-0.08</i>
Slovenia	0.00	0.91	0.91	0.21	0.90	0.95
	1.00	0.12	-0.12	<i>0.98</i>	<i>0.32</i>	<i>0.15</i>

The figures represent the correlations between the underlying dimension and the respective variables (eu_position, lrecon, galtan). Figures in italics: loadings of factors with eigenvalues <1, that is, representing less variance than an average variable. For example, the first underlying dimension for Hungary in 2014 is highly correlated with parties' positions on EU issues (0.97) and sociocultural liberties (-0.97), that is, it represents the opposition between pro-EU, liberal and EU-critical, traditional-authoritarian-nationalist parties.

While the CHES points to remarkable structural similarities between the party systems of Poland and Hungary, right-wing populist parties and governments have been much more influential and momentous in Hungary than in Poland. Poland's "Law and Justice" party (PiS) advocated a fundamental transformation of society labeled as "Fourth Republic" when it won the 2005 elections, but failed to consolidate its governing majority and lost the 2007 elections. The party's return to power in 2015 began with "Orbán-style" measures to weaken the Constitutional Court and the public media. But FIDESZ relied on a two-thirds majority in parliament that allowed it to dismantle accountability institutions through changes of the Constitution.

I argue that three factors made Hungary's democracy more vulnerable than Poland's. First, Poles have been more satisfied than Hungarians with the functioning of democracy in their country. As Claudia Matthes notes in this issue (2016b), "there is a general and stable consensus on democracy that is based primarily on the material benefits of the system change and which correlates with the favorable economic development in Poland". These attitudes are rooted in a more positive memory of the political transition. For example, 53 percent of Polish, but only 24 percent of Hungarian citizens, polled by a cross-national survey in 2010 (EBRD 2011), declared they had done better in life than their parents. In Poland, democracy tends to be associated with the subjective experience of overcoming the economic misery of late Communism which has made it easier for the government of Prime Minister Donald Tusk to meet popular expectations in 2011 and achieve its reelection in the aftermath of the economic crisis.

In Hungary, late Communism has been perceived as a period of relative prosperity that has raised popular expectations with regard to the socioeconomic performance of democracy. These expectations exposed subsequent governments to public pressures, contributed to notorious public overspending and led to the massive electoral defeat of the Hungarian Socialist Party in 2010. The FIDESZ-led government effectively managed and evaded these expectations by appealing to the nationalist sentiments of Hungarians.

Secondly, during the political transition, political elites in Poland agreed on a proportional electoral system that initially generated a highly fragmented Sejm, but after some reforms led to a bloc party system with relatively stable governing majorities (Gwiazda 2009, Ziemer and Matthes 2010). In contrast, Hungary opted for a mixed proportional-majoritarian electoral system to provide governments with stable majorities. This electoral framework ensured a high level of stability, but gradually transformed the initial tripolar party system into a bipolar system that reinforced political polarization and populist campaigning. Moreover, the electoral system created opposed major political parties that were either unable to compromise on electoral reforms or interested in exploiting the disproportionality effects of the electoral rules. The disproportionality of Hungary's electoral system in 2010 was twice as high as in Poland (2011), and electoral reforms implemented by the Orbán government raised its disproportionality further to more than three times of the Polish value.¹² A tailored electoral system enabled the Orbán government to stay in office although it lost its absolute majority of the votes in 2014 (Ágh 2016).

Thirdly, the divide between former Communists and anti-Communists that dominated Polish party politics during the first decades after the political transition manifested a deeper socio-cultural, socio-economic and territorial cleavage in Polish society (Jasiewicz 2009). Administrative-territorial reforms in 1999 accommodated this cleavage by creating subnational self-government with significant powers. This regionalization evolved into an additional institutional safeguard of political pluralism in Poland as it equipped national opposition parties with institutional resources on the regional level. In contrast, the post-Communist divide in Hungary was not so deeply rooted in society which hindered the emergence of a broad societal coalition advocating regional self-government. The failure of a substantial regionalization weakened the institutional resources for political pluralism and paved the way for a further centralization under the Orbán government (Brusis 2014).

4. A preliminary conclusion and an overview of this Special Issue

Taken together, the empirical analysis in this section partially confirms my first proposition about established political parties losing credibility, since this drift process has particularly affected center-left parties and non-Eurosceptic center-right parties. The pattern of higher vote losses and frequent electoral defeats incurred by governing parties supports the second proposition about the increasing tension between responsible and responsive policymaking. The upheavals in the party systems of the Czech Republic and Slovenia provide some evidence for the link between dealignment and accountability (the fourth proposal), although other ECE party systems showed more stability. The cases of right-wing populist governing parties in Hungary and Poland exemplify the different options suggested in the third proposition on populists in office.

The electoral landslides in ECE and the deconsolidation of democracy in Hungary may also be viewed as indicating the increasing political impact right-wing populist parties have been gaining across Europe. These parties have effectively articulated widespread fears about globalization and immigration and they have expanded their electoral support by mobilizing nationalist resentments during the European economic and refugee crises (cf., e.g. Mudde 2013). However, I would maintain that the delegitimation of the integration-prosperity model of economic development, the incongruence between responsible and responsive government and the voter-party dealignment are more severe in the new ECE democracies than in other regions of the world. This distinctiveness originates in the trajectories of political and economic reforms since 1989, in the shared state socialist past and older historical-cultural legacies characterizing ECE.

The contributions to this Special Issue investigate whether and how the economic and European crises affect the dynamics of representation and accountability observable in ECE democracies. Given the challenges to democracy in ECE and for comparativist explanations, we believe that a systematic and contextualized analysis is necessary to improve the body of knowledge on this region and to situate country-specific developments in a broader context. The country studies analyze how domestic political actors cope with the consequences of unanchoring processes and how domestic conditions mediate their impact for the quality of democracy and governance.

The selection of country cases is based on the assumption that ECE countries still constitute a region in that they share more common features with each other than with, for example, other EU member states or other post-socialist countries (Rupnik 2007, Rupnik and Zielonka 2013). Due to these similarities, a comparative study of ECE may yield important insights into the troubles and struggles occurring in other European countries. While the country studies are not structured identically, all authors engage with the hypotheses and issues outlined in this introduction.

Attila Ágh's study of Hungary traces how the country diverged from the EU mainstream and how its formally democratic institutions became facades hiding practices of authoritarian rule. He carefully elaborates how the Orbán government extended its control to the economy and civil society. Despite the electoral victories of the governing parties in 2014, more citizens participated in anti-governmental demonstrations in that year. This mobilization, a growing international critique and tensions within the governing political elite yield, as Ágh argues, a perspective for a political change in Hungary.

Claudia Matthes shows that the unanchoring processes suggested in the present article did not have an impact on Poland firstly because there was no recession or fiscal crisis in the wake of 2008. Secondly, economic development has underpinned and reinforced citizens' beliefs in the legitimacy of democracy. Thirdly, increasingly effective and inclusive intermediary institutions (political parties, civic groups and interest associations) have become domestic anchors of democracy.

Darina Malová and Branislav Dolný also note a resilience of democratic institutions and practices in their study of Slovakia. While the economic and EU crises have exerted negative economic effects and increased popular distrust in EU and national democratic institutions, mainstream political parties have remained committed to European integration, thus retaining the EU's function as an external anchor of Slovakia's democracy. Originating from the EU's role for Slovakia's democratic consolidation and identity as a nation state, this elite consensus contributed to marginalizing the impact of populist challengers.

Alenka Krašovec and Lars Johannsen analyze in detail how the economic crisis hit a model of interrelated economic and democratic development in Slovenia that had begun to crumble already with the change towards a conservative government in 2004. They find that the decline of corporatist institutions buttressing consensual policymaking contributed to the failure of political elites to balance responsive and responsible policies addressing the economic crisis. As a consequence, citizens' dissatisfaction with democracy and electoral abstention grew, the party system destabilized, and a wave of political protests erupted in 2012/13.

In her comparative conclusions, Claudia Matthes argues that relatively robust economies in most countries, a persistent general support for democratic norms and mobilized civil societies participating in demonstrations and public protests have been the key domestic anchors that ensured the resilience of ECE democracies. While most party systems remain weakly em-

bedded in society and did not increase public confidence in democratic politics, the effectiveness of the other anchors suggests, in her view, that the democratic regression in Hungary will likely be an outlier within ECE.

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Appendix: List of parties

Acronym	Name	Translation
Croatia		
HDZ	Hrvatska demokratska zajednica	Croatian Democratic Union
SDP	Socialdemokratska partija Hrvatske	Social Democratic Party of Croatia
HSS	Hrvatska seljačka stranka	Croatian Peasant Party
HSLŠ	Hrvatska socijalno liberalna stranka	Croatian Social Liberal Party
HNS	Hrvatska narodna stranka—liberalni demokrati	Croatian People's Party—Liberal Democrats
IDS	Istarski demokratski sabor	Istrian Democratic Assembly
HDSSB	Hrvatski demokratski sabor Slavonije i Baranje	Croatian Democratic Assembly of Slavonia and Baranja
HSP	Hrvatska stranka prava	Croatian Party of Rights
HL-SR	Hrvatski laburisti—stranka rada	Croatian Labourists—Labour Party
HSP-AS	Hrvatska stranka prava dr. Ante Starčević	Croatian Party of Rights dr. Ante Starčević
ORaH	Održivi razvoj Hrvatske	Croatian Sustainable Development
Czech Republic		
ČSSD	Česká strana sociálně demokratická	Czech Social Democratic Party
ODS	Občanská demokratická strana	Civic Democratic Party
KSČM	Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy	Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia
KDU-ČSL	Křesťanská demokratická unie - Československá strana lidová	Christian Democratic Union- Czechoslovak People's Party
SZ	Strana zelených	Green Party
TOP 09	Tradice, odpovědnost, prosperita 09	TOP 09, Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity
ANO 2011	Akce nespokojených občanů	ANO 2011, Action of Dissatisfied Citizens
ÚSVIT	Úsvit přímé demokracie	Dawn of Direct Democracy
SVOBODNI	Strana svobodných občanů	Party of Free Citizens
Hungary		
MSzP	Magyar Szocialista Párt	Hungarian Socialist Party
Fidesz	Fidesz—Magyar Polgári Szövetség	Fidesz—Hungarian Civic Union
JOBBIK	Jobb Magyarorszáért Mozgalom	Jobbik—Movement for a Better Hungary
LMP	Lehet Más a Politika	Politics Can Be Different
E14	Együtt 2014	Together 2014
DK	Demokratikus Koalíció	Democratic Coalition
Poland		
SLD	Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej	Democratic Left Alliance
PO	Platforma Obywatelska	Civic Platform
PiS	Prawo i Sprawiedliwość	Law and Justice Party
PSL	Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe	Polish People's Party
RP	Twój Ruch (Ruch Palikota)	Your Movement (Palikot's Movement)
KNP	Kongres Nowej Prawicy	Congress of the New Right
Kukiz' 15	Ruch Kukiza	Kukiz' Movement
PR	Polska Razem	Poland Together
SP	Solidarna Polska	United Poland
Slovakia		
SDKÚ-DS	Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia—Demokratická strana	Slovak Democratic and Christian Union—Democratic Party
Smer-SD	Smer—sociálna demokracia	Direction—Social Democracy
SMK-MKP	Strana maďarskej komunity Magyar Közösség Pártja —	Party of the Hungarian Coalition
KDH	Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie	Christian Democratic Movement
SNS	Slovenská národná strana	Slovak National Party
SaS	Sloboda a Solidarita	Freedom and Solidarity
MH	Most-Híd	Bridge

OLaNO	Obyčajní Ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti	Ordinary People and Independent Personalities
NOVA	Nová Väčšina	New Majority
Siet	Sieť	Net / Network
Slovenia		
SDS	Slovenska Demokratska Stranka	Slovenian Democratic Party
SD	Socijalni Demokrati	Social Democrats
SLS	Slovenska Ljudska Stranka	Slovenian People's Party
NSI	Nova Slovenija-Kršćanska Ljudska Stranka	New Slovenia-Christian People's Party
DeSUS	Demokratska Stranka Upokojencev Slovenije	Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia
LGV	Državljska lista Gregorja Viranta	List of Gregor Virant
SMC	Stranka modernega centra	Party of the Modern Center
ZL	Združena Levica	United Left
ZaAB	Zaveznístvo Alenke Bratušek	Alliance of Alenka Bratušek
PS	Pozitivna Slovenija	Positive Slovenia

¹ Ratings, country reports and the methodology of the Index are available on www.bti-project.org, accessed 4 April 2016.

² While our cooperation in the framework of the Transformation Index provided the impulse for the present Special Issue, the contributions differ from the country reports prepared for the Index insofar as they focus on a few key problems of ECE democracies and seek to explain their emergence in the context of the European economic and integration crises.

³ http://hvg.hu/itthon/20140215_Fidesz_Gyurcsany_korrupcio, accessed 8 April 2016.

⁴ Cf. https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nemzeti_konzult%C3%A1ci%C3%B3, accessed 8 June 2016.

⁵ <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/PublicOpinion/index.cfm/Survey/index#p=1&instruments=STANDARD>, accessed 8 April 2016.

⁶ Slovenia's deviant pattern will be discussed below.

⁷ I do not share his operationalization of party system institutionalization which focuses on practices of government formation (Mair 1997, 206-214).

⁸ The acronym "galtan" has been coined by Gary Marks and colleagues (2006) to denote the opposition between green, alternative and/or libertarian and traditional, authoritarian and/or nationalist political orientations.

⁹ Note that the dimensionality of the policy space may be used as an imperfect proxy for cross-cutting cleavages, but that policy space and cleavage configuration are two different concepts. Since the argument here is focused on the (dis)incentives of party entrepreneurs (i.e., on agency), there is no need to engage in the extensive debate about whether the different stances taken by political parties represent divisions in the structure of society.

¹⁰ Electoral volatility was determined by summing the absolute values of percentage gains and losses by parliamentary parties, and by dividing this sum by two. The factor analysis was done based on the 2006 CHES expert-level dataset by using principal components as the method of extraction. This method was chosen because the distribution of the expert ratings violates the assumption of multivariate normality that is required to apply the maximum likelihood method of estimation. To simplify the table, all third factors were omitted. The principal components extraction defines the additional variance explained by them as 1 minus the variances explained by the first two factors. Since the 2006 CHES did not include Croatia, the values for Croatia are determined from the subsequent 2010 CHES.

¹¹ The CHES also asked the country experts to rate the political salience parties assign to different issues. In 2014, the average political salience of EU integration, weighted according to the vote shares obtained by parties, was 1.5 and 1.1 for Poland and Hungary, but only 0.6, 0.7 and 0.8/0.8 for the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Croatia/Slovakia, respectively.

¹² The so-called Gallagher Index of electoral disproportionality (the square root of half of the sum of the squares of the difference between shares of votes and shares of parliamentary seats for each of the political parties) was 5.7 in Poland (2011), but 11.9 (2010) and 17.4 (2014) in Hungary (Gallagher 1991).