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Laure Neumayer

“Euroscepticism as a Political Label: the Usages of EU Issues in Political Competitions in the New EU Member States”¹

Three phases can be distinguished in the debates about EU affairs in the Central European Countries (CECs): a broad consensus in favour of the “return to Europe” in 1989-1990 was followed by dissensions about European integration, as new parties emerged in the political field and unpopular socio-economic reforms were justified by the preparation for EU membership. The last period, starting with the launching of the accession negotiations with six countries in 1998², saw the success of “Eurorealism”, i.e. support for the principle of European integration and disapproval of the accession conditions offered to the CECs. The development of these ambiguous political views on European integration generated a large scholarly interest. The study of Euroscepticism, broadly defined as “[*expressing*] the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration” (Taggart, 1998: 366) became one of the main bodies of a growing literature on parties’ attitudes towards European integration. Research on Euroscepticism, which initially focused on old EU member states³, extended to the Central and Eastern European states in the late 1990s (Harmsen and Spiering, 2004, Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2005).

This paper offers a critical analysis of the category of Euroscepticism based on several arguments. First, “Euroscepticism” is simultaneously a buzzword in scholarly literature and a term coined by politicians for political purposes. Because of its normative and polemical dimension, it is difficult to use as an analytical notion. Second, this term presents a risk of “conceptual stretching” because it lumps together parties that have various political identities, express diametrically opposed views on European issues and show different degrees of opposition to the European project. Third, academic work to date has produced conflicting

¹ A first version of this paper was presented as the ECPR General Conference in Budapest in September 2005. The author wishes to thank participants in the ECPR panel “The political actors : parties and party systems”, and two anonymous referees, for their helpful comments.

² Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Estonia and Cyprus.

³ In Western Europe, Euroscepticism has been analysed through its strategic (Taggart, 1998), sociological (Cautrès and Sinnott, 2000), institutional (Sitter, 2001) and ideological dimensions (Harmsen and Spiering, 2004).

interpretations of the reasons for Eurosceptic party positions. The existing literature mainly highlights the institutional (marginal position in the political system, opposition to the government) and the ideological (nationalism, xenophobia, economic protectionism) dimensions of Euroscepticism. It centres around a ideology-versus-strategy dichotomy: some authors consider that critical approaches to European integration mainly derive from the parties' origins, ideologies and identities (Kopecký and Mudde, 2002), while others stress positions in the party system, electoral strategies and coalition tactics (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2001, Sitter 2001). Writers on both sides of the argument accept that both set of factors interact in reality (Batory 2002, Batory and Sitter 2004). But these typologies have a limited explanatory power because they don't fully grasp the relationship between these two variables. Breaking with the taxonomic approach, this paper does not try to determine which parties are Eurosceptic or suggest a new definition of Euroscepticism, but demonstrates how the words "Euroscepticism" and "Eurorealism" were used in political competitions in Central Europe.

A broader research design focusing on the usage of European issues in political competition goes beyond the ideology-versus-strategy dichotomy that informs the existing approaches to Euroscepticism. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, ideology and strategy are closely related because ideology is created through inter- and intra-party competitions, by political actors seeking to differentiate themselves from their rivals and gain political capital (legitimacy and various forms of support from citizens such as votes, party members, etc). This competition between various "political offers" takes place between parties, as well as within each party (Bourdieu, 1979, Bourdieu, 1981). Politics is essentially a competition to impose one's "representations of the world" in order to legitimate certain lines of division within the political field. In the CECs in the 1990s, references to European integration allowed politicians to shape and reshape political lines of division, and to classify themselves - and their rivals - along those lines. Thanks to their normative dimension as a symbol of postcommunist changes, European issues initially helped distinguish legitimate, *mainstream* political actors, from illegitimate, *protest* politicians. They were used subsequently in various forms of power struggle such as competitions for an electorate, for office positions and intra-partisan rivalries. Depending on their party's position in the domestic political field, political actors used labels such as Euroscepticism and Eurorealism to define positively their party identity and disqualify their competitors. Considering these terms as classification tools helps

understand why parties adopted positive, negative or ambiguous positions on European issues. It contributes to a better understanding of the Europeanisation of political competition, understood as the inclusion of European issues in domestic politics (Radaelli, 2001). This paper starts with a critical review of the literature on Central and Eastern European Euroscepticism based on theoretical and empirical arguments. It then offers a relational approach to the usages of European integration in political competitions in the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary since the fall of communism⁴.

EUROSCEPTICISM: AN AMBIGUOUS ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Two main theoretical perspectives can be distinguished in the research on Euroscepticism conducted in the CECs: analyses based on socio-political cleavages and typologies that take into account the position of parties in the political system⁵. Both approaches lack empirical precision because their analytical categories are difficult to operationalise. Many parties hover between different kinds of Euroscepticism distinguished in these typologies, and several political organisations located in one category in one research are classified differently in another. Moreover, these studies rest upon a conception of political parties as “black boxes”, i.e. monolithic entities with clear, stable, unchallenged ideologies. As a result, they don’t fully bring to light the links between ideology and strategy in political discourses on European integration.

European integration and cleavage theories

⁴ The empirical data used in this paper consist of party manifestos and a set of 39 semi-structured interviews conducted in 1999-2000 with Hungarian, Polish and Czech politicians for a PhD in political science at the Institute of Political Studies in Paris. The politicians were selected based on their leading positions in EU matters, either in their party or in their national Parliament. This institutional criterion ensured that the views they expressed were as close as possible to official party lines. Using politicians’ own words presents the risk that they reconstruct the past according to the present’s needs, and express their perceptions of the reality rather than a strict account of the reality. Yet the purpose of the interviews was precisely to assess how political actors used European issues as classification tools in their discourses. On a theoretical level, the words politicians choose give precious information about their positions in the political field: whether they use the mainstream terms or contest them mainly indicates to what extent they accept the existing lines of political division (Bourdieu, 1981).

⁵ Other researches focus on subnational political elites (Hughes, Sasse and Gordon, 2002) and on the link between public opinion and levels of support for “Eurosceptic” parties (Rupnik, 2004).

The “political cleavages” approach states that Western European party systems were shaped by a series of historical conflicts about state building, religion and class that took place from the Protestant Reformation to the Industrial Revolution (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). Party systems are meant to be structured by political families (liberal, conservative and social-democratic) that represent different sides of these cleavages. In this perspective, postcommunist party systems have been analysed as the re-emergence of political cleavages dating back to the pre-communist or the communist period (Lawson *et al.*, 1999). Scholars disagree on the dimensions of contestation that best explain the political families’ positions on European integration in old member states of the EU. Some have demonstrated the absence of pro-integration/anti-integration cleavage that would coincide with the internal divisions of political systems. According to Stefano Bartolini, conflicts about European integration do not match domestic political cleavages: party politics is associated with the process of boundary closure that characterised the development of the modern state, whereas the principle of European integration is precisely an opening of national socio-economic systems that disrupts the traditional lines of political conflict (Bartolini, 2001)⁶. On the contrary, Marks and Wilson argue that pre-existing patterns of politically salient cleavages, if not ‘frozen’, are largely undisturbed by the European dimension. In an analysis of the 1984-1996 period, they consider that European integration has been assimilated into pre-existing ideologies of party leaders, activists and constituencies that reflect long-standing commitments on fundamental domestic issues. Therefore “political parties have significantly more in common with parties in the same party family than they do with other parties in the same country” (Marks and Wilson, 2000: 459)⁷.

In the CECs, the cleavage theory has been applied to the Hungarian case. György Márkus claims that the Hungarian party system is structured around a normative conflict between

⁶ In an analysis of the EU as a “multi-level party system”, Deschouwer similarly states: “the cleavage structure at the European level is directly linked and affected by the national political competition. Whether parties of the left and of the right are pro or against further European integration depends on their position at home (...) that produces a non-symmetrical picture. The ways in which the national level is linked to Europe and the consequences of it vary per country (and per party)” (Deschouwer, 2000: 20).

⁷ In a later work Marks, Hooghe and Wilson argue that ‘although there is a strong relationship between the conventional left/right dimension and party positioning on European integration, the most powerful source of variation in party support is the *new politics* dimension, ranging from Green/alternative/libertarian to Traditional/authoritarian/nationalist’ (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson, 2002 : 965).

“nation” and “modernisation” that coincides with the division between anti/pro-integration attitudes (Márkus, 1997). He labels liberal parties “moderniser” and “pro-European”, whereas conservative parties are called “national” and “Euro sceptic”. This analysis is to some extent based on a circular reasoning that classifies a party according to a previously defined ideology, before explaining its positions on European integration by this ideology. In addition, a strict cleavage theory fails to take into account the changes in the patterns of party competition during the pre-accession period. A detailed empirical analysis of party manifestos during the 1990s in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic does not confirm the thesis of stable links between broad ideologies and positions on European integration (Neumayer, 2006). Many parties changed their vision of European integration during the 1990s, going either from criticism to full support (some ex-communist parties) or the other way round (some conservative parties lost their enthusiasm for the EU as the pre-accession process unfolded, although all conservative parties were not Euro sceptic). Third, this classification of parties’ ideological references is based on terms such as “liberalism” or “conservatism” which lack a precise definition that would be valid in different countries over time. Consequently, trying to deduce party positions on European integration based only on their political identities is misleading.

Typologies of Euro scepticism

One of the aims of the taxonomic approaches to Euro scepticism is to assess the relative impact of ideology and strategy in party criticism of European integration and/or EU membership. In their seminal work, Taggart and Szczerbiak distinguish two types of Euro scepticism in the CECs (Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2003):

- *hard* Euro scepticism is a disapproval of supranational integration as such, i.e. a “principled opposition to the project of European integration as embodied in the EU, in other words, based on ceding or transfer of powers to a supranational institution such as the EU”. This party position is called “Euro scepticism” by CEC politicians.
- *soft* Euro scepticism is a disapproval of the European Union as a specific political system, i.e. an “opposition to the EU’s current or future trajectory based on the further extension of competencies that the EU is planning to make”. There is no principled opposition to

membership here, but concerns or criticisms are expressed as regards EU policies that amount to a “qualified opposition”. CEC politicians call this party position “Eurorealism”.

Taggart and Szczerbiak formulate two hypotheses that are empirically valid in the CECs:

1. A party’s position on the left-right scale is not decisive when determining whether a party shall be considered as Eurosceptic or not⁸.

2. The place in the party system plays a crucial role: there is a marked tendency for Eurosceptic parties to be located on the peripheries of party politics.

This typology convincingly invalidates the political cleavage theory by showing the lack of congruence between parties’ ideologies and positions on EU issues. But it offers a partial view of the logics of positions on European issues because it exclusively takes into consideration the parties qualified as Eurosceptic or Eurorealist in the political and academic field. This perspective rightly points to the uses of European issues by *protest parties* but says very little about the usage of European integration by *mainstream* political organisations.

Kopecký and Mudde offer an alternative typology of Euroscepticism based on the distinction of different party families and types of support for European integration (Kopecký and Mudde, 2002). They draw on Easton to distinguish a *diffuse* support for European integration (opposing “Europhiles” to “Europhobes”), and a *specific* support for the European Union (opposing “UE-optimists” to “UE-pessimists”). Four general types of party position are put forward:

- *Euroenthousiasts*, who are simultaneously Europhiles and UE-optimists, approve of European integration and are optimistic as regards the trajectory of the EU development.
- *Eurosceptics*, who are Europhiles and UE-pessimists, favour European integration in principle but criticise the actual development of the UE.
- *Europragmatists*, who are Europhobes and UE-optimists, are not supportive of the broad project of European integration but nevertheless are positive about the current EU insofar as it is deemed to serve particular national or sectoral interests.

⁸ In his 1998 paper centred on Western Europe, Taggart draws on Tönnies to establish a typology of Euroscepticism along two ideological dimensions. “Identity politics” opposes those who conceive of the nation as the primary source of identity to those who identify more broadly as “Europeans” or “citizens of the world”. The second opposition concerns a “collective” versus an “individualist” orientation, depending on whether the individual is believed to derive from the community or the community is seen as a collection of individuals. Euroscepticism is expected to be more frequent for “national-community” and “global-community” orientations, and to a lesser extent, for “national-individual” ideologies. The parties that support the current European integration mainly have “individual-global” ideologies (Taggart, 1998).

- *Eurorejects*, who are Europhobes and UE-pessimists, simultaneously criticise the idea of integration and the specific form it has taken in the European Union.

Ideology is believed to determine a party's support for the ideas underlying the process of European integration, whereas strategy plays an important role in explaining a party's support for the EU. Parties may change in their *specific* support dimension (support for the EU) but any evolution in the *diffuse* support (support for European integration in principle) is very costly and therefore not probable. But this classification brings together parties that don't have much in common ideologically, and support or oppose European integration for different reasons - such as the far right and the far left, or the liberals and the social-democrats. For example, the Polish parties PSL (Polish Peasant Party) and PO (Civic Platform) belong to the *Euroenthusiast* category although they held very different positions on the future of the EU. They don't share the same degree of enthusiasm for European integration: the PSL avoided taking any clear stance on EU integration throughout the 1990s, whereas the PO's identity was based on a strong promotion of EU membership. Last but not least, why consider the PSL as *Euroenthusiast*, whereas the Hungarian agrarian party FKgP (Smallholders and Rural Workers Independent Party), whose views on the EU were very close to those of the PSL, is classified as *Europragmatist*?

Although these typologies show the many nuances of criticism of European integration, the proliferation of concepts and their conflicting classifications of party positions are confusing. More importantly, their analytical categories are difficult to operationalise because they rely mainly on guesswork as to the substance of party positions. As regard Kopecký and Mudde's distinction between *specific* or *diffuse* support for European integration, one might wonder how to assess empirically a *diffuse* support for Europe integration, if not through an analysis of the party's *support* for membership in the EU (Kopecký and Mudde, 2002). Similarly, Taggart and Szczerbiak differentiate between "underlying party positions on Europe" and the "usage of the issue of Europe in party competition". The former are "determined by a blend of the party's ideology and what it perceives the interests of its members to be", whereas the latter depends on "the party's electoral strategy and coalition-formation and government participation tactics" (Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2003: 21). Yet "underlying party positions" are not developed in a political vacuum where parties would be isolated from each other, but in highly competitive political fields.

Euroscepticism as a classification tool

A relational approach to political competition considers political parties as collections of individuals, groups and coalitions that hold partly divergent views and interests. These currents compete internally to define the dominant identity and ideology of the party, while the party as an organisation competes for votes with the other organisations. Party positions are defined according to strategic purposes, depending on the lines of political division and the expected position of the party in the political field. A political organisation never has a clearly defined, fixed ideology unanimously accepted by all its members in order to defend the interests and values of a given electorate (Offerlé, 1997). Ideologies do not reflect pre-existing social interests because parties don't automatically emanate from the social groups they claim to defend. On the contrary, social groups are shaped by political actors who define them in such a way as to be recognised as their "natural" representatives (Bourdieu, 1981, Boltanski, 1982). Consequently, ideology and strategy are closely related because ideologies are created by politicians in order to differentiate themselves from their competitors and gain political capital.

Although communist societies were internally differentiated, political parties redefined the main political lines of division after 1989 in order to accumulate political capital. European integration, as a general symbol of the changes that occurred after 1989 in the geopolitical, political, social and economic spheres, was a tool to classify political actors along these political lines of division. In all CECs, politicians created overlaps between European integration and the evaluation of the communist regime. Controversial issues - such as the links between religion and politics in Poland, the protection of Hungarian minorities in Hungary, or socio-economic policy preferences in the Czech Republic, were reinterpreted through a European lens. Postcommunist political identities, whether they were labelled liberal, conservative or social-democrat, were determined by domestic patterns of competition but included a European dimension. All political actors, even the ones not qualified as "Eurosceptic" or "Eurorealist", framed European issues in a way that would disqualify their competitors and improve their own position in the political field. Since these country-specific patterns of competition evolved over time, there was a limited congruence between parties' ideologies and positions on EU accession.

THE USAGES OF EUROPEAN ISSUES IN POLITICAL COMPETITIONS

European issues played a crucial role as a classification tool but they could be used only according to some general rules of competition which evolved during the 1990s. Supporting EU integration was a condition to take part in the new political games right after the fall of communism. As early as the first free elections, a pro-European stance was a *normative theme*, i.e. a general rule that determine political actors' behaviours (Bailey, 1969). Political parties could not "cross the line" and criticise the EU as such, for fear of being accused of "anti-Europeanism" and excluded from political competition. As a result, they created new political categories, such as "Eurorealism", that would shed a positive light on themselves⁹. For example, the head of the Polish party ROP (Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland) Jan Olszewski distinguished three political currents according to their attitudes to European integration. The first was the "naive Euro-enthusiasm" of liberal parties such as the UW (Freedom Union), "eager to join as quickly as possible and at any cost". The "Euro-sceptic" national-religious parties were described as threatened by "the atheism of the liberal European Union". To avoid being stigmatised as "anti-European", Olszewski presented his party's position as "pragmatically Eurorealist":

"The last group, to which my party belongs, has a position that is simply Eurorealist. We want to see the European Union as it really is, we don't want to frighten the Poles. On the contrary, we want to seize the opportunity to see things within the limits of reality. We are against false promises, against illusions that are bound to be dangerous in the perspective of accession"¹⁰.

Although European issues could be fully used as a distinction tool only by parties situated at the margin of the political fields, new rules for using European themes emerged as the pre-accession process unfolded. After the opening of the accession negotiations in 1998, domestic policies were increasingly influenced by EU rules. The shift from foreign policy to socio-economic controversies increased the value of European issues as a political resource, because EU accession was framed more directly according to voters' interests. Saying "yes, but" to

⁹ The proliferation of labels such as "Eurorealist", "Euro-naive", "Euro-enthusiast" shows the normative constraint that made it impossible for a politician to express "Euro-sceptic" views.

¹⁰ Interview with the author, Warsaw, 14.12.1999.

accession to the EU became a *pragmatic rule* of political competition during the late 1990s, i.e. a set of rules of a lesser importance that actors could freely define and redefine, without any risk of exclusion from the game. Widespread Eurorealism was the result of this tension between a necessary *collusion* that forced parties to moderate their criticism of European integration in order to appear legitimate political actors, and *instrumentalisation* of EU issues to gain electoral support at the expense of competitors (Bailey, 1969).

The following quotation by a member of the Czech party ODS (Civic Democratic Party), who claimed a right to debate freely about EU membership without being criticised as “Euro sceptic”, shows the tension between the pro-European *normative theme* and the *pragmatic rule* that allowed for criticism of the EU:

“The European issue has been politicised, especially towards my party. We were labelled Euro sceptic, but ODS’s Euro scepticism has never been as strong as to try to slow down EU accession. This is not what we are about. We just talk about the EU’s problems and we criticise some of its aspects from a practical, policy-centred point of view, not as regards the integration process as such. (...) Europe does not mean that we should always say yes, that we all have the same ideas, the same conceptions (...) There is no conflict among Czech parties about Europe. There is a conflict between the “unitarists” who conceive Europe as a single political space and us, who see realistically that Europe is a spectrum of ideas, ideologies and nations. It should not be conceived in a socialist way, we remember the Soviet bloc, when there was just one flag, just one ideology – precisely, that’s not Europe, that Europe doesn’t suit us”¹¹.

European issues were used in the definition of domestic political lines of division, along three dimensions: as a tool for inclusion and exclusion from political competition; as a source of distinction between *mainstream* political actors; and in intra-party oppositions. These lines of division will be successively analysed in the following sections.

European integration as a tool for inclusion and exclusion from political competition

¹¹ Jaroslav Zvěřina, member of ODS, head of the Czech Parliamentary Committee for European Integration. Interview with the author, Prague, 16.03.2000.

Because European integration was a symbol for peace, prosperity and democracy, political parties have been classified as legitimate or illegitimate political actors based on their attitude towards the EU since the beginning of the 1990s. This distinction was based on two partially overlapping principles of exclusion: the association with the communist regime and the stigmatisation as *protest party*.

Association with the communist regime

On the basis of their position on European integration, political actors symbolically associated with the communist regimes were distinguished from politicians coming from the dissidence or from newly established parties. Initially, former communist parties were not in favour of a quick association, not to mention integration to the European Community (EC). During the cold war, communist regimes had not had any contacts with the EC, considered as the “economic arm” of American imperialism. As a result, parties that succeeded to former ruling parties (the SLD in Poland, the MSzP in Hungary and the KSČM in the Czech Republic) did not take a pro-European stance right at the fall of communism. But they could not bear the cost of an anti-European position that would have highlighted their connection with the former regime. As a result, they were very vague as regards their countries’ relations with the EC and more vocal in their criticism of NATO. For example in its 1990 manifesto, the Czechoslovak KSČ (Communist party of Czechoslovakia)¹² called for the simultaneous dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and NATO, but expressed only vague conceptions of international relations: “support for peace, freedom, democracy, the independence of nations and states, and social justice”¹³.

Later on, former communist parties took part in the European debates according to their conversion strategy. European issues, as a sign of support for democracy and market economy, were a major tool in the construction of a “social-democratic” identity for the Polish SLD (Alliance of the Democratic Left) and the Hungarian MSzP (Hungarian Social-Democratic Party). Both parties promoted a political integration of Europe as well as the establishment of a “social market economy” within the EU. Support for EU accession was framed as breaking with the past while remaining faithful to the values of equality and social justice inherited from the former ruling parties. This conversion, imposed through a tight

¹² The KSČ was renamed KSČM (Communist party of Bohemia and Moravia) in 1990. It kept this name after the 1993 split of the Czechoslovak federation.

¹³ KSČ, “Volební program” (Electoral Program), 1990.

official pro-European line, helped them soften a harmful distinction between “old” and “new regime”. The Czech case was very different. The KSČM (Communist party of Bohemia and Moravia) did not follow the same path to social-democracy and developed a “neocommunist” identity (Perottino, 2000). In the early 1990s, this party rejected EU accession because it considered that such an unequal partnership would only accelerate the domination of the Czech economy by foreign capital and increase social inequalities. This negative attitude to European integration was used as an argument by its detractors who denounced the KSČM’s lack of break with the past. Simultaneously the historical party ČSSD (Czech social-democratic party), which had existed in exile during communism, got revived. Promoting European integration helped this organisation gain international recognition, develop a new political offer and distinguish itself from the KSČM.

Distinction between *mainstream* and *protest* parties

Political organisations that rejected postcommunist transformations used European issues to distinguish themselves from “governmental” parties. These *protest parties* tried to structure political competition around a single principle of division which coincided with positions on European integration.

Far right parties rejected European integration as the symbol of liberalism and claimed that remaining outside this organisation would protect national sovereignty and economic independence. For example, the Hungarian party MIÉP (Hungarian Justice and Life Party) was created in 1993 after a split from the conservative MDF (Hungarian Democratic Forum) that was partially motivated by European issues. One of the MDF leaders, István Csurka, disagreed with the party’s support for a “Europe of Fatherlands”. As head of the MIÉP, he presented European integration as a threat to the independence of the Hungarian nation and even as a “second Trianon Treaty”¹⁴. The MIÉP also interpreted the broad consensus of political and administrative elites on EU membership as a sign of neglect of “national interests”. Zoltán Balczó, vice-president of the MIÉP parliamentary fraction, presented his party as the only political organisation challenging this broad collusion:

“The politicians and civil servants in charge of European integration claim that our national interests, our interests as a country, are less important than the interests of the whole European Union. On the contrary, the MIÉP thinks that we can integrate only if we protect our national

¹⁴ István CSURKA, “A nemzetépítő állam – a MIÉP programja” (The nation-building State - The MIÉP programme), *Havi Magyar Fórum*, 1998.

interests (...) Historically, Hungary's national interests have always been neglected. Hungary was never able to promote its own interests because it was a small and weak country. It was its destiny. It defended Christian Europe against the Turks for centuries, and then Europe threw us in the Soviet zone of influence. These elites behave in the same way towards the EU»¹⁵.

On the contrary, some *protest parties* toned down their criticisms of European integration in order to gain a new classification as *mainstream* political organisations. For example at the very end of the 1990s, when EU accession grew closer and it was excluded from power despite its good electoral results, the Czech communist party KSČM shifted to a “Eurorealist” position in an attempt to be recognised as a potential coalition partner for the ČSSD. The party used several arguments to implicitly admit EU accession while avoiding any clear stance on the issue. When asked whether they supported joining the Union, its leaders replied that they could decide only on the basis of a “thorough costs-benefits analysis”. During the 2003 accession referendum, the KSČM didn't give any instruction to its voters but announced that it would accept the referendum results. And during the 2004 European elections, KSČM candidates claimed that their aim was to establish an alliance with other left-wing parties in the European Parliament, in order to change the EU from within and make it “more social”¹⁶. Although it didn't go as far as the SLD or MSzP on the road to social-democracy, the KSČM used its tacit acceptance of EU membership and its good results at the 2004 European elections (where it received 20, 26% of the votes) to claim a legitimacy to govern¹⁷.

European issues as a source of distinction between *mainstream* political actors

During the 1990s, domestic political struggles led some parties to alter their positions on European issues in order to frame a new political offer. Several lines of distinction about European integration existed simultaneously in Central European political systems, owing to inter-party competitions for votes and for governmental positions.

¹⁵ Interview with the author, Budapest, 30.03.2000.

¹⁶ KSČM, « S vámi pro vás, doma i v EU » (With you and for you, at home and in the EU), May 2004.

¹⁷ Miloslav Ransdorf, « Nebyl by horší než Špidla nebo Klaus » (It wouldn't be worse than Špidla or Klaus), *Mladá Fronta Dnes*, 18.06.2004.

Parties that compete for the same electorate

Positions on European integration strongly depended on rivalries between parties occupying close positions in the political field. For example parties that competed to be recognized as the only representative of “liberal”, “conservative” or “liberal-conservative” social groups used their positions on European integration to disqualify their competitors. According to their emerging political identity¹⁸, they accused their rivals either of being too flexible and “servile” towards the EU, or too tough and “nationalistic”. Conservative and liberal-conservative politicians especially tried to delegitimise liberal parties by accusing them of neglecting “national interests” in the name of European integration. The liberal-conservative political identity was shaped, among other themes, by a critical opinion of European integration and of the terms of accession offered to the CECs. Because they were determined by changing lines of division in domestic political games, these party positions on European integration evolved during the 1990s.

The discussion of EU membership by Hungarian parties provides a clear example of the multiple uses of European themes between close competitors. When it was created in 1989, the FIDESz (Alliance of Young Democrats) framed its identity as “liberal” in economic and political terms. It defended a conception of European integration based on economic deregulation and a limited political integration. Its direct competitor for a liberal identity, the SzDSz (Alliance of Free Democrats) was constantly pro-integration since its creation in 1988 in dissident circles. During the 1994 legislative campaign, the SzDSz accused the FIDESz of being “Euro sceptic”. After winning the elections, the SzDSz became the junior partner in a government led by the former communist party, the MSzP (Hungarian Socialist Party). The FIDESz could not criticise the SzDSz for its pro-integration position as such, because it would have been stigmatised as “anti-European”. Therefore, it compared the “servility” of the MSzP-SzDSz government towards EU member states with Hungary’s obedience to Moscow before 1989. By accusing the SzDSz of betraying liberalism and its dissident past, the FIDESz appeared as anti-communist and concerned about the fate of the nation. These two issues were the common ground of the government coalition formed between 1998 and 2002 by the

¹⁸ In the three countries under study, the first elections after the fall of communism were won by ill-defined “conservative” forces united by their rejection of communism. Later on, they differentiated themselves in their attitudes towards traditional values and economic reforms (Schöpflin, 1991, Hanley, 1999).

FIDESz with two minor partners, the MDF (Hungarian Democratic Forum) and the FKgP (Smallholders and Rural Workers Independent Party) (Fricz, 1999).

Similarly, positions on European integration were used to justify the split of the Czech liberal party US (Freedom Union) from the conservative-liberal ODS (Civic Democratic Party) in February 1998. In order to attract former ODS voters, the leaders of the new party highlighted two points of distinction: a greater respect for ethics in politics (the US had been created after a corruption scandal) and a more pro-European stance. The new party attempted to create a political identity by defining itself as the only Czech “pro-European centre-right liberal party”. It accused the ODS of “Euroscepticism” and criticised the governing social-democratic party, the ČSSD, for a supposed gap between a pro-European discourse and public policies that did not conform to the *acquis communautaire*. Thus US thus disqualified its main competitors and opened the way to an electoral alliance with the Christian-Democratic party (KDU-ČSL) based on the promotion of European integration. The US leader Michal Lobkowicz stressed European issues as an element of distinction that explained the creation of his party:

“On the one hand we have the social democrats, who say formally that they are in favour of EU integration, but this government doesn’t do much, it doesn’t do enough. They just justify unpopular measures by a reference to the EU. On the other hand we have the Eurosceptic ODS, which plays the nationalist card by talking about national interest and the loss of identity in the EU, and frightens people (...) As a matter of fact, their Euroscepticism was a reason for our split. There were two currents of thought inside the ODS. Although the direct reason for our split was the 1997 financing scandal, actually all pro-integration politicians left and only Václav Klaus’ current, the Eurosceptic current, stayed in the ODS. European integration was clearly a factor of division between us because contrary to them, we really believe in European integration”¹⁹.

On the other hand, the ODS claimed that its conception of European integration was the only truly “liberal” one because it rested upon a realist vision of international cooperation based on free trade, economic deregulation and protection of national interests. The theme of national interests enabled the ODS to define itself as simultaneously “liberal” and “national” in its 2001 European manifesto: “[National interests] don’t mean any form of nationalism or any

¹⁹ Interview with the author, Prague, 15.06.2000

outdated category from the XIXth century. National interests are a reality in today's world and today's Europe, not a dream from the past. We know how to define them and therefore, we know how to protect them". This reflection led to a criticism of the "current sources of inspiration of the EU", i.e. "Hapsburg nostalgia, German federalism or pan-Europeanism". The party then called for new directions for European integration to be developed with British and Scandinavian political partners²⁰.

Liberals and liberal conservatives also used European issues to compete for the political capital derived from the filiation with the democratic opposition. Two Polish political organisations that originated in the Solidarity movement, the UW (Freedom Union) and the AWS (Solidarity Electoral Action)²¹, established differently the link between European integration and the former dissidence. In 1994, the UW was created by the merging of several groupings that held different views on social and economic matters - some of them were closer to liberal ideas, others leant towards Christian-democracy or social-democracy. A pro-European consensus was the common basis for the new party, which presented the dissidence as a movement of defence of "European values" and a prologue to EU accession. This strong pro-European profile also allowed the UW to distinguish itself from some other Solidarity "heirs" who created the AWS in 1996. Because of even stronger internal dissensions on political and economic issues, the AWS held a vague and rather critical position on EU membership. Support for EU issues strengthened the image of the UW as the "party of the liberal intelligentsia". Włodzimierz Puzyna, the UW Secretary for Foreign Affairs, thus contrasted his party's high level of expertise in European affairs to the "confused" position of the AWS:

"The UW not only supports the process of accession to the EU, but it is one of its main advocates. Our party leaders are among the most important members of the Polish political elite, who were active in the dissidence and now prepare this integration process, manage it each every day - such as Professor Geremek or Professor Mazowiecki. We also have some prominent experts like Professor Piotr Nowina-Konopka. These people are the ones who define the Polish doctrine of European integration. (...) As regards the AWS, one cannot say

²⁰ Jan Zahradil *et al*, "Odpověď kritikům Manifestu českého eurorealismu" (Reply to the criticism of the Manifesto of Czech Eurorealism), October 2001.

²¹ A similar competition occurred in Hungary between two parties created in 1988 by distinct dissident groups, the SzDSz (liberals) and the MDF (conservatives). The SzDSz claimed that European integration was what the dissidents had fought for, whereas the MDF criticised the EU for its lack of concern for the "national cause". The link between EU accession and the dissidence was not so strongly established in the Czech Republic, where the main conservative party, the ODS, based its identity on a rejection of the dissident ethos.

what their policy on European integration is, because the AWS is not united. And it would be good if the AWS worked on a solid vision of European policy. As far as I know, to date there is no such vision”²².

Parties that compete for government positions

European issues were used by parties that had been marginalised in the political field and needed to regain some legitimacy in order to be considered as potential coalition partners in a future government. On the contrary, some parties that lost power criticised more sharply the EU accession. These shifts, which sometimes created internal tensions and splits, occurred in parties with various ideologies.

As noted above, former communist parties like the Polish SLD and the Hungarian MSzP moved towards pro-integration positions that allowed them to regain power, respectively in 1993 and 1994. In return, governmental responsibilities fixed their pro-European positions: these parties managed to turn a European constraint into a resource.

Agrarian parties, such as the PSL in Poland and the FKgP in Hungary, also moderated their criticism of European integration in order to be considered as potential junior partners in coalition governments. The FKgP had first adopted a strong anti-European discourse, especially during the 1995-1996 economic crisis that its leaders attributed to the EU's negative influence. As of 1997, the party softened its criticism of European integration and adopted a “mainstream” position that allowed it to form a government with the FIDESz after the 1998 elections. It then advocated a “Europe of nations” that would protect the interests of the Hungarian agriculture. The FKgP kept its political identity as a representative of farmers' interests, while its leaders got ministerial portfolios that were crucial to the preparation for EU accession. Yet some internal party currents adopted a more radical position, for fear of losing their constituency's support. The divisions between party members who were reluctant towards EU membership and those who advocated compromise with the FIDESz, in order to stay in office, contributed to the collapse of the FKgP in 2001 (Batory, 2002).

²² Interview with the author, Warsaw, 15.12.1999.

Conflicting institutional and ideological logics of party position on EU membership also provoked splits in governing parties that allowed them to stay in government without being challenged from within. The Polish conservative party ZChN (National Christian Union), which was part of the AWS coalition, experienced such a split. Acceding to power after the 1997 legislative elections led the ZChN to moderate its criticism of European integration. This caused a conflict between the party leadership and anti-integration factions. Ryszard Czarnecki, one of the leaders of the party who was known for its criticism of the “materialism” and “atheism” of the European Union, became head of the Office of the Committee for European Integration²³. This decision, linked to power sharing issues inside the AWS-UW government coalition, was meant to reassure the “Eurorealists” by giving them a say in the management of EU affairs. As a matter of fact, the ZChN toned down its disapproval of European integration. Yet the dismissal of Mr Czarnecki in 1998, after Poland lost a large amount of EU pre-accession funding, strengthened the most radical current within the ZChN. Claiming that the ZChN was no longer able to protect Polish national interests, its members created a radical group called the PP (Polish Agreement)²⁴ that fully rejected joining the EU. After the split, the ZChN could more easily participate in the government, where it stayed until the 2001 legislative elections.

Intertwined lines of division

The pattern of European debates varied from country to country because multiple lines of division intertwined in domestic political fields. Opposition parties used EU affairs to criticise governing parties, particularly after 1998, when the European Commission started to release “Regular Reports on the progress of [each candidate country] on the path towards accession”. Governments quoted their positive elements, while oppositions picked up on the Commission’s reproaches to strengthen their own stances on various issues. These reports were external sources of legitimacy that were converted into domestic political capital. But parties constructed lines of division over European issues in a unique way in each country, as is shown by the comparison of Poland and the Czech Republic between 1997 and 2001. At that time Poland was governed by a coalition formed around the liberal party UW and the conservative coalition AWS. Three lines of division coexisted: a distinction between the former communist regime and the former dissidents (SLD versus AWS + UW) that coincided

²³ This Office was in charge of the coordination of the preparation of Poland for EU accession.

²⁴ To continue fighting EU accession, some leaders of the PP created the LPR (League of Polish Families) in 2001.

with a split between the government and the opposition; a distinction between the pro-integration and the “Eurorealists” (SLD + UW versus AWS); a distinction between liberals, conservatives and social-democrats (UW versus AWS versus SLD). Although the UW and the SLD presented themselves as the “most pro-European parties”, they could not fully cooperate with each other because of their different positions relative to the communist past. The SLD, on the other hand, denounced the internal conflicts over European issues within the UW-AWS coalition as a source of weakness for Polish positions in Europe. Some leaders of AWS criticized the “hidden coalition” between SLD and the UW and suspected them of seeing European integration as a “left-wing utopia” instead of a “Christian Europe”²⁵. This led the UW to distance itself ostensibly from the SLD for the sake of governmental stability. In the Czech Republic, the tense relations between the government and the European Commission were used differently in domestic political games. The 1998 and 1999 Regular Reports for the Czech Republic criticised the slow adoption of the *acquis communautaire* in this country. But the expected line of conflict between the social-democratic government (ČSSD) and the opposition (ODS and US) was disrupted by ideological factors. The conservative liberal party ODS, instead of criticising the ČSSD for failing to meet the EU requests, denounced the “interference” of the European Commission in domestic affairs. The ČSSD accepted the Commission’s reproaches, while the liberal party US criticised its competitors, respectively for their Euroscepticism (the ODS) and their lack of pro-European will (the ČSSD).

Intra-party oppositions

Ambiguous party positions on European integration derived from the pro-European *normative theme*, but also from the internal divisions that split even the parties showing the greatest support for EU membership. Party lines resulted from compromises made by currents which had different views of the EU, according to their leaders’ personal histories and ideological preferences. Two examples of parties that strongly stressed their commitments to European integration, while being internally divided, will be given here.

²⁵ During the 2000 presidential campaign, the AWS candidate Marian Krzaklewski denounced the “unionist ideology” developed by the SLD and the “west wing of UW”, cf “Unijna ideologia” (The unionist ideology), *Unia&Polska*, 24.07.2000: 4.

According to an advisor to the Foreign minister Bronisław Geremek, the Polish liberal party UW was unable to provide a precise conception of European integration because it was divided on EU issues along ideological lines:

“ Four factions can be distinguished in their visions of European integration: the liberals like Jan Krzysztof Bielecki, who are in favour of accession but have some doubts because they find the EU too social-democratic (...). The main current is the one of Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Piotr Nowina-Konopka, who had a Christian-democratic youth and would join the EU at any cost. They don't use the term “federalism”, which is used mainly by politicians opposed to integration. There are some federalists inside UW, such as Jan Maria Rokita, but they are very weak since Bronisław Komorowski left the party in 1997. Then there is the “social liberal” group, very weak at the party's head but strong among the militants, which is very pro-European. All these currents agree on the need for a “stronger and more integrated Europe”, but not a federal Union. We want to share our sovereignty and join the EU as it will be in the future”²⁶.

Social-democratic parties, although they broadly supported supranational integration, were divided as regards socio-economic European norms between “statist” and “liberal” currents. The ČSSD Secretary for International Affairs, Vladimír Müller, claimed that his party was split into ideological groups that represented different generations:

“ In our party, some currents are rather liberal and some are rather statist as regards economic policy. It's a broader ideological question. Some people don't understand that the European internal market is different from economic liberalisation on the world market or in the WTO. These are different traditions or schools of thought. The statist may have some doubts about the EU but there is also a younger generation, more open to liberalisation and globalisation, a generation that wants to use the opportunities of European integration. (...) These two positions exist in the party. In other words, the question is not “yes or no to Europe”, but rather a choice between social security and interventionism on the one hand, or liberalisation, on the other hand”²⁷.

The outcomes of these internal power struggles reshaped patterns of party competition on EU membership in several ways.

²⁶ Mikołaj Wodgielewicz, interview with the author, Warsaw, 14.12.1999.

²⁶ Interview with the author, Prague, 11.09.2000.

Splits happened when party leaders or would-be leaders seized the EU as an opportunity to distinguish themselves and start a new political career based either on a more pro-European stance or a more critical position on EU accession. Although it developed vague positions on EU accession to allow for internal differences, the AWS coalition experienced such a split. In the run-up to the September 1997 legislative elections, the former Foreign minister Andrzej Olechowski denounced the hesitations of the coalition leaders about accession to the EU. He left the AWS in June 1997 and he advocated a deepening of European integration²⁸. On the other hand Ryszard Czarnecki, the former head of the Office for the Committee for European Integration, left the ZChN to run for Samoobrona (Self-Defense), a radical agrarian party strongly critical of European integration, in the 2004 European elections.

Slighter changes in the internal balance between party currents over time also caused softening or sharpening of criticism of EU integration, such as in the Czech conservative-liberal party ODS. The party's increasing stress on "national interests" after its 1999 Ideological Conference²⁹ resulted from several factors. The most "Eurorealist" current, around the party president Václav Klaus and its vice-president Jan Zahradil, was strengthened by the November 1997 split that led to the creation of the US (Freedom Union). In addition, the accession negotiations started in March 1998 and the ODS lost the legislative elections in June that year. Asserting Eurorealist positions had several goals : not only did it contribute to a broad ideological shift towards a "more socially conservative-national direction", but it also helped unite the new ODS around its leaders and counteract "weak party institutionalisation" (Hanley, 2004). Yet this sharply critical current was weakened after Klaus became President of the Republic in February 2003 and Zahradil was elected MEP in June 2004. A more moderate group around the new leader of the party, Mirek Topolánek, then got the opportunity to frame a milder discourse on European issues³⁰.

Conclusion

Cleavage theories and typologies of "Euroscepticism" have been used to account for the development of political debates about EU affairs in the CECs after 1989. Cleavage theories tend to downplay the evolutions of party positions on European integration during the 1990s.

²⁷ « Odchodząc z AWS » (Leaving the AWS), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 13.06.1997.

²⁹ ODS, « Zpravodajská zpráva z jednání zahraničně bezpečnostní sekce » (Report on the meeting of the Section on External Security), Ideological Conference, 1999.

³⁰ Although Václav Klaus and Jan Zahradil used their new functions to express strong criticisms of the euro, the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe and the proposed EU budget for 2007-2013.

On the other hand, typologies of Euroscepticism use over-inclusive categories that are difficult to operationalise. Both approaches lack a precise understanding of the links between ideology and strategy in party positions on European integration. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, the main hypothesis of that paper was that the main logic behind party positions on European integration, be they positive or negative, is distinction from competitors. Attitudes towards European issues were major tools for Central-European politicians to shape the lines of division that organised political competitions, and to classify themselves and their rivals along those lines. The success of ambiguous party positions called “Eurorealist” resulted from a tension between *collusion*, in order to abide by the pro-European *normative theme*, and *instrumentalisation* of European issues for tactical and strategic purposes.

Although different rhetorical arguments were used in discussions about European integration in the three countries under study, the comparative approach underlines the similar causal mechanisms that determined party positions on EU issues. EU accession was used for political classifications along three lines of division, which changed over time:

1. Non-communist parties versus former communist parties: this distinction became less prominent when some former communist parties became “social-democrat”, i.e. pro-European, or turned to “Eurorealism”.
2. *Mainstream* parties versus *protest parties*: this distinction, symbolised by the opposing labels “Eurorealism” and “Euroscepticism”, was valid during the whole pre-accession period.
3. Mainstream politicians against each other: this principle of distinction also remained valid during the whole period, as parties expressed ambiguous visions of European integration in order to create electorates, take office positions or manage intra-party rivalries.

These findings have wider relevance for the study of the Europeanisation of political competition because pre-accession process amplified logics that also exist in Western Europe. Central-European political fields incorporated a European dimension very early on, since the fall of communism immediately led to closer relations with the then European Community. EU issues were easily used as tools for distinction in political fields where lines of division, and political offers, were quite fluid. Of course, the widely perceived lack of alternative to EU accession and the strong normative constraint on political actors may have made party

positions very consensual. Yet the increasing overlaps between postcommunist transformations and pre-accession turned EU issues into a crucial political resource, since more and more topics of political debate could be interpreted through a European lens. Clearly, political conflicts over European integration in older member states oppose parties with more stable ideological profiles. But political identities in those countries are also permanently contested and reshaped by intra- and inter-partisan competition. Although a pro-European *normative theme* makes it impossible for *mainstream* parties to advocate withdrawal from the EU, European issues are used in domestic political struggles. Major shifts happened in party positions in several countries over time and the majority of political organisations are internally divided over EU integration. The label “Euroscepticism” and its numerous variations (“Eurocriticism”, “Europessimism”, etc.) are used by politicians to define their positions in the political field and to disqualify their competitors. There is a difference in degree, but not in kind, between the usages of the European themes in political competitions in new and in old EU member states.

Tables 1, 2, 3 about here

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