

Chapter 4 d4

Playing with Europe; the Impact of European Integration on the Hungarian Party System

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The literature on the impact of the European integration (see Lewis, 2005; Mudde, 2004; Henderson, 2005) highlights the fragility of the post-communist party systems, suggesting the possibility for a more robust EU influence in the region than in Western Europe. The present chapter investigates one of the more stable, crystallized party systems of Eastern Europe, searching for processes triggered by European integration in a case that should be a fairly difficult one for the robust impact hypothesis.

THE HUNGARIAN PARTY SYSTEM

Without a single genuinely new parliamentary party in the post-communist period, the Hungarian party system seems indeed to be unusually stable. Even the principal issues that define left and right are the same today as 16 years ago. But from the original moderately fragmented party system a strongly polarized quasi-two party system has developed. The relative significance of individual parties has also fluctuated drastically prior to 2000 (Tables 1 and 2).

Tables 1 and 2 here

In 1990 the *Hungarian Democratic Forum* (MDF) was the largest party. After an early democratic nationalist phase it turned into a Christian-Democratic and conservative party, but conflicts between its liberal and populist, moderate and radical right wing groups have wracked the party throughout its career. The party has managed to survive only by relying on various

forms of cooperation with the ascending force of the right, Fidesz.

Since 1997 *Fidesz* has been the dominant right-wing party of the Hungarian party system. After left-libertarian (1988-90) and mainstream liberal (1990-94) periods, the party moved to the right. Today it is a conservative, culturally right wing, economically centrist party that often relies on populist/anticapitalist, anticommunist and nationalist slogans.

The *Independent Smallholders' Party* (FKgP) was the major player in the brief democratic period after WW II. After the collapse of the communist regime, FKgP reorganized itself as a populist party, representing agrarian interests. The autocratic leadership of József Torgyán (which lasted until 2002) appealed to many discontent voters, but finally provoked rebellion within the party. During the 1990s it was a middle-sized party, popular in the countryside and among lower status groups, but the scandals that surrounded the party finally eliminated it from the political scene in 2002.

The other 'historical' party is the *Christian Democratic People's Party* (KDNP). It represents the active churchgoing population, mainly Catholics. KDNP has always been a small party, but since 1998 it has not been able to cross the five per cent electoral threshold, and now exists as a satellite organization of Fidesz.

MDF MPs who rejected the party's moderate course established the radical nationalist *Party of Hungarian Justice and Life* (MIÉP) in 1993. Anti-semitism, chauvinism, anti-communism, anti-liberalism and clericalism characterize their ideology and rhetoric. MIÉP cleared the five per cent threshold only once, in 1998, but until recently it used to be able to mobilize large crowds for street demonstrations.

The left side of the spectrum has been less fragmented. The *Alliance of Free Democrats* (SZDSZ) polled around 20 per cent until the mid-1990s, but since then has received only 5 to 7 per cent of votes. The party has its roots in the anti-communist opposition of the 1970s and 1980s, but it has cooperated since 1994 with the Socialists. The Free Democrats are leftist in

cultural values and right wing in economic policy.

The principal party of the left is the *Hungarian Socialist Party* (MSZP), the successor of the former ruling communist party. Since 1994 MSZP has been a large, and often the largest party, and so far the only one to win two elections. The main popular appeal of the party resides in its pragmatism. While inherited assets and nostalgia for the communist regime play an important role in its success, the MSZP's actual economic programme has been centrist or even centre-right.

Orthodox communists set up their own party in 1989. The *Munkáspárt* (*Labour* or *Workers' Party*) has a nostalgic, anti-capitalist rhetoric. Though its discourse reflect the attitude of many voters, the party never managed to enter parliament.

In terms of cultural issues the parties provide distinct alternatives. Anti-communism, clericalism, nationalism, libertarianism are the principle issues that differentiate left and right. Economic attitudes play some role in party choice, but as government incumbents are more pro-market than the opposition (Tóka, 1997 and 2004) economic issues have not produced a stable division between the parties.

The drop in the number of effective electoral parties from 6.7 to 2.4 shows that, in terms of voter support, the country is very close to a two-party system. The number of parliamentary parties also decreased from 3.7 to 2.2, but there are still more than two players as far as the government is concerned. Although the two major groups occupy nearly 90 per cent of the seats in the 2002-06 parliament Hungary has never had a single-party government. But the nature of party competition has become more predictable over the years. The major electoral stake since 1998 is whether a Fidesz-dominated right-wing bloc or an MSZP-dominated left-wing bloc rules the country.

THE PARTIES' EUROPEAN PROFILE

The central role of cultural issues provides optimal ground for opposing positions. Yet, there has been little variance on this issue until 2002.

Joining the EU was a fundamental goal for most parties (particularly MDF, Fidesz, MSZP and SZDSZ) in 1989. MSZP, SZDSZ and, to a large extent, MDF continued to be to the fore in accepting EU norms and regulations. This also applied to Fidesz until the late 1990s, when the party's position became more ambiguous. For most of its career KDNP also cultivated a pro-European image but in a radical period, between 1996 and 2000, it became Eurosceptic. The Smallholders (FKgP) never possessed an elaborate vision of Hungary's role in the European Union but always regarded the defence of domestic agricultural producers as the primary task of government. They were characterized by Kopecky and Mudde (2002) as Eurocynical, lacking a genuine positive attachment to the EU. The extreme right MIÉP and the extreme left Labour were the only parties that opposed Hungary's integration with NATO and the EU, a position derived from their common radical stand against the influence of multi-national corporations.

Although Taggart and Szczerbiak (2001) characterize Hungary as the country with most party-based Euroscepticism in Europe, the political class was in fact united in supporting accession. Even parties that regarded accession as disadvantageous under current conditions did not rule out future membership. Views that integration was beneficial for Hungarians in neighbouring countries prevented the emergence of strong nationalist opposition to the EU.

Motives and arguments for joining the EU varied because interpretations of what the EU stood for ranged from a cosmopolitan (left) view to a traditionalist, anti-communist (right) approach. Right-wing parties associated the EU with the fight against communism, Christian Democratic principles and economic benefits. The left emphasized the EU's anti-nationalist credentials and its provision of an optimal framework for further modernization. Politicians on both sides could claim to represent integration more genuinely than their counterparts.

Accession became a contested topic in 2002 when Brussels decided to give the new accession

countries lower agricultural subsidies. The Socialists, then in opposition, criticized Fidesz for mishandling the negotiations, while some Fidesz leaders expressed their indignation about the attitude of EU officials. In a much-quoted statement Fidesz leader Viktor Orbán stated that Hungary could also have a life outside the EU. Between 1994 and 1998 Orbán had been the chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Integration Affairs, but after losing the election in 2002 he joined those right-wing intellectuals who criticized not only the way Hungary was treated but also some of the cultural norms prevailing within the EU. Fidesz accused the left of submitting to Brussels just as it used to obey Moscow. The party's pro-integrationist programme did not change, but the gap between official policies and the gestures of Fidesz politicians widened as the party tried to capture the Eurosceptic vote while preserving its mainstream status. Given the pro-EU orientation of the average citizen the party had to manoeuvre very carefully, especially as Fidesz had a young electorate which was seen as the major accession winner (the party's fear of being seen as too Eurosceptic was reflected in a question and answer brochure distributed during the EP election. 'Question: Fidesz is regarded as anti-EU by many and is not liked within the EU. So why does it run in the EP election? Answer: Fidesz has never been anti-EU, but it isn't hoping for miracles either....Fidesz is a respected member of the center right and Christian Democratic EPP that has a majority in the European Parliament. The vice-chairman of the EPP is Viktor Orbán).'

The complexity of the party's current attitude is reflected in the fact that the party displays itself as committed to the 'Europe of Nations' model while party leaders often call for more cross-national uniformity in foreign policy. The party likes to appear as a principled defender of national sovereignty, but welcomes any gesture by European bodies against the left-wing Hungarian government.

It is important to recognize that there is virtually nothing in Fidesz's official programme or actual deeds that would justify describing the party as anti-EU. Its Euroscepticism appears only

in symbolic gestures and ambiguous statements. Orbán went furthest in 2002 when he named a number of preconditions for voting in parliament for the constitutional changes required by accession, but this demand also turned out to be sheer rhetoric. The preconditions (increased wages, protection of Hungarian land from foreign purchase, etc.) were not met by the government and Fidesz had no choice but to approve the constitutional changes. But, in further gesture-politics, prominent party leaders were absent when parliament ratified EU accession.

Figures 1 and 2 here

Figures 1 and 2 show the differentiation of parties on the EU issue and the relationship of this issue to the left-right continuum. The data come from two expert surveys organized in 2003/4 in Hungary, one coordinated by Kenneth Benoit and Michael Laver, the other conducted by Robert Rohrschneider and Stephen Whitefield.¹ The first study had a question about the position of parties on membership of the EU, the second about their position on EU integration. According to both data sets right-wing orientation is negatively related to attitudes towards the EU, with one fundamental exception – that of the Labour Party. If this (extra-parliamentary) party is included one observes the horseshoe model familiar from studies of Western Europe. It is important to note that both studies had further questions concerning various aspects of European integration, but there was very little difference in the parties' position across the issues. For example, in the Rohrschneider-Whitefield study party positions on 'integration of the country with the West', 'EU integration' and an 'integrated EU market' have practically coincided.

While issues related to unemployment, welfare, corruption or pensions determine electoral outcomes, cultural dimensions continue to define party identity. Accordingly, Hungarian parties are most ready to join Europe-wide debates when these debates are about moral-cultural issues. The proposed reference to Christianity in the Constitutional Treaty offered an excellent opportunity to re-emphasize party identity. SZDSZ strongly campaigned for a 'no' vote, while right-wing parties supported its inclusion and Orbán regarded the issue as one of the utmost

importance. He repeatedly expressed the view that the EU could not succeed if it did not recognize its Christian heritage and, in debates about the new EU Commission, Orbán expressed his sympathy with Butiglione. The behaviour of Fidesz in these debates shows that the dichotomy (or continuum) of pro- and anti-EU attitudes is insufficient to describe the range of party positions, and parties may accept EU membership with the ambition of moulding it from within.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS EUROPE

The Hungarian public has always been in favour of accession, and in 1990 the Eurobarometer already found 81 per cent to be in favour of EU membership. The proportion of respondents who were uncertain or rejected the European Union rarely reached a third, with transition losers and the rural population constituting the most sceptical segments (Csepeli and Závecz, 1997). As in the region at large (Cichowski, 2000) those who were more enthusiastic about democratization and market liberalization also supported the EU. The greatest enthusiasts are found among the young and the educated, although social structural variables explain only a small portion of the variance on this issue (Karácsony, 2004).

Positive orientations towards the EU are not based on an 'open' national identity. The group of citizens with only national and no European identity in Hungary was larger than in all other accession countries according to the Candidate Countries Eurobarometer (2001 October), although a lower proportion than elsewhere (only eight per cent) thought that the EU posed a threat to cultural identity. The EU was mostly associated with positive phenomena like the freedom to travel, peace, democracy, etc. Among the negative phenomena listed in the questionnaire (bureaucracy, wastage, inadequate border control, losing cultural identity, etc.) only criminality was associated with the EU to any significant extent (Candidate Countries Eurobarometer, 2004). Public trust in EU was superseded only by that for UN and the police,

with the EU commanding more respect than any national political institution (parliament, government, parties), even though they are valued more than the East European average.

As a result of tough negotiations with the EU and increasing party polarization on the issues the 64 per cent approval rate declined to 45, and negative opinion increased to 32 per cent just before accession (Candidate Countries Eurobarometer 2004). But while diffuse support declined Hungarians were still found to be in favor of all major EU projects (EMU, common foreign policy, common defense, enlargement) and, after a brief period of Euroscepticism, support has again risen. Given the high general level of support for the EU, any association with party preference is not very strong. In accordance with the profile of party elites, MIÉP, Smallholder and KDNP electorates have been repeatedly found to be somewhat less, and SZDSZ supporters somewhat more, pro-EU than average voters. Supporters of the parties in government were found, in general, to be more enthusiastic about accession than the opposition.

But the more critical attitude of the right wing elite left some mark on citizen orientations, and after 2002 Fidesz voters also became more Eurosceptic (Table 3). In 2004 the distribution of pro- and anti-EU groups was respectively 62 versus 6 per cent among left-wing identifiers and 45 against 19 per cent among the right wingers. Karácsony (2004) observed that the left had finally found its own positive value, that of European integration. Orientations towards the EU showed an increasing degree of correlation with the principal issues of Hungarian politics, including anti-communism, which was now associated with anti-EU views (Karácsony 2003).

Table 3 here

While the regular government-opposition shift seems to support Cichowski's (2000) point that voters have no strong opinion on the subject and use party affiliation as a cue, the evolution of a left-right polarization tends to substantiate the alternative perspective (Tucker et al., 2002) that parties adjust their position to the orientation of their followers. Yet, in spite both of growing polarization and the existence of hard Eurosceptic parties, anti-EU segments of the population

have not found yet their party. The bulk of anti-EU voters are still without a party preference.

VOTING ON EUROPE

The referendum

Attitudinal distributions have potential importance, but politics is shaped by actual behaviour. The EU referendum was regarded by the media and the elite as a major watershed, a final exit from the communist past. Accordingly, the campaign before the referendum was organized more by the state than by individual parties. The government put a considerable amount of money into informing the citizens, but also in convincing them to vote 'yes', while the few 'no' campaigners did not receive support from the state budget. Prior to the referendum the opinion polls predicted around 65 per cent support and a moderately high turnout of around 60 per cent. Campaign speeches and advertisements in fact focused more on mobilizing voters than on advocating membership.

Orbán was conspicuously silent on the issue during the first part of the campaign and then finally urged voters to say yes, 'in spite of the bad conditions and the unfair attitude of the EU'. Like most politicians he treated accession as a historical inevitability. This general feeling of not having a real stake in the issue must have been widespread as, contrary to predictions, only 45.6 per cent of citizens went to the polls, an even smaller number than at the NATO referendum (49.2 per cent). The 'yes' vote won more comfortably than predicted with 83.8 per cent and 16.2 per cent voting against (these ratios coincided almost perfectly with the results of the NATO referendum). Anti-EU parties could not mobilize their followers at the referendum, but there was not much sign of enthusiasm either. Government parties blamed Fidesz for discouraging voters, while Fidesz blamed the government for the clumsy campaign. Politics was back to normal.

The European Parliament election, stakes and strategies

Euroscepticism was defeated at the referendum, but it was widely expected to flex its muscles at the European Parliament election. At the 2002 national election the vote given to Eurosceptic parties reached 7.4 per cent, but none of them made it into the parliament. The EP election, with its low stakes, was seen as an ideal playground for them.

But the real focus of attention of both actors and observers was directed more to the established parties. The outcome of the 2002 elections placed a particularly heavy pressure on the right to finally resolve some of its long-standing dilemmas. One of them was the relationship between MDF and Fidesz. The two parties had cooperated since the middle of the nineties, but the decline in electoral support for the MDF and the dominating style of the Fidesz leadership made the relationship increasingly asymmetric. In 2004 MDF decided to run independently of Fidesz. For a party that has regularly failed to reach the five per cent threshold this was a risky choice. But given the relatively low stakes of the EP election, its president managed to convince the rank-and-file that a good electoral performance without Fidesz would greatly increase the party's weight. MDF was also able to enlist the support of minor centre-right parties (Party of Entrepreneurs, Smallholders, Hungarian Democratic People's Party). The ability to put this coalition together signaled the potential for a new centre-right pole.

The party president, Ibolya Dávid, used references to Western standards to carve an ideological niche for the party. She emphasized that the Forum was the country's only genuine centre-right organization in the European sense of the word (see Hanley 2004), combining moral conservatism with pro-capitalist policies and a moderate style of competition. The MDF's EP manifesto was entitled 'For a Normal Hungary', already indicating in its name the peaceful, rational, pragmatic, non-corrupt, no-nonsense image the party wanted to project. MDF also used the EU issue to differentiate itself from the Fidesz, emphasizing that it lacks any sort of Euroscepticism.

Fidesz's anti-EU phase proved to be also short-lived, however. By 2003 the party realized that

nationalism was inferior to leftist populism when it comes to winning elections. Etatism, criticism of privatization and the privileges of the banking sector have always been part of the Hungarian traditionalist right-wing repertoire, but typically as secondary issues, and Fidesz was originally particularly opposed to the use of this discourse. But in 2004 it became the main theme: the party even called for a complete halt to privatization. The EP elections seemed to be an excellent testing ground for the new strategy.

The party prepared the ground for the election by circulating a ‘National Petition’, which demanded lower prices and more jobs. The election slogans were: ‘work’, ‘home’, and ‘security’. The party showed, for the first time, understanding of those who were nostalgic about the Kádár era. alongside other popular demands (like withdrawal of Hungarian troops from Iraq), the party mainly emphasized anti-capitalist themes.

But parallel to the populist domestic campaign, Fidesz also ran an EU-centred ‘European’ campaign. As part of this second, less visible campaign, the party produced a 120-page long manifesto, spelling out its vision of Europe. This vision was nation-centred, similarly to the programme of the other right wing parties. But its length and quality indicates that Fidesz took its European face very seriously – as opposed to the other Hungarian parties that came up with short leaflets. The party customarily regarded to be the most ‘European’, SZDSZ, for example, wasted no words on the EU and concentrated on polishing its ideological profile in the manifesto, The Liberal Charter.

On the radical right the election was seen as a final test of MIÉP’s ability to regain the support of its erstwhile supporters. The aging leadership of the party was challenged from both within and from outside by a new force called Jobbik (literally meaning ‘better, but also containing a reference to the ‘right’). Jobbik had earlier campaigned against the EU, but decided not to contest the EP election.

For the internal and external party politics of the left the EP election seemed to be much less

critical. The identities of SZDSZ and MSZP were relatively fixed, and the parties used the election to strengthen them yet further. SZDSZ campaigned with a message against intolerance, oppressive family structures, nationalism and high taxes, targeting its educated, liberal urban clientele by calling for a redistribution of the EU budget in favour of the cities. It also warmed up one of its old ideas: that citizens should be able to choose between churches and NGO's when they gifted one or two per cent of their taxes to them. The mainstream churches had always been bitterly opposed to this solution, and since the Socialists were known to be reluctant to upset the existing church-state regime, the proposal had no other purpose than to remind voters of the anti-clerical credentials of the SZDSZ.

MSZP won the 2002 national elections with a message of harmony and peace among citizens of different political persuasions. The EP elections seemed to be a good opportunity to repeat the same message, since elected MEPs were widely expected to work in Strasbourg for the interest of the country. Prime Minister Medgyessy went so far as advocating a common list for all the four parliamentary parties. This proposition ended up in embarrassment after heavy criticism from almost the entire political class, and even the European Parliament. The end of the MSZP campaign turned negative as Fidesz was accused, among other things, of spoiling the long-awaited celebration of accession. MSZP tried to present the EP election as another referendum on EU.

Fidesz thought otherwise. The party's leaflet distributed in the campaign included the question: 'What is this election about?' The answer explained: the election is about a 'domestic political fight' and the results may have grave consequences for the national elections in 2006. Fidesz's greatest fear was that its Eurosceptic voters would not see the point in voting for the European Parliament. Another question was 'I voted 'no' to the EU, why should I vote now?' The answer was that accession is not an issue any more, the real question is who will represent the country. The correlation of anti-EU attitudes with anti-communism after 2002 also presented a danger to

Fidesz in that voters might find it odd that anti-communist politicians wanted to continue their career in Strasbourg. Fidesz counteracted this danger by reminding voters that the European Union can also be conceived as an anti-communist project.

During the campaign anti-EU rhetoric was mainly concerned with the issues of agricultural subsidies and foreign ownership of land, and its main target was not Brussels but the indifferent and incompetent Hungarian government. Probably due to the prominence of these issues, voters living in villages indicated as much readiness to vote as those living in large cities (Gallup 2004). The domestic focus of the elite matched public expectations. In the 2004 Candidate Country Eurobarometer two-thirds of respondents agreed that the campaign should concentrate on 'specifically Hungarian issues', and often referred to agriculture. Questions of EU institutional reform were ranked lowest on the list.

The institutional rules produced a playing field that was favorable to established parties and disadvantageous for individual political entrepreneurs. This does not mean, however, that personalities played no role in the contest. The first positions on the lists were supposed to be filled by personalities of symbolic relevance, and the skills needed to do the job in Strasbourg were regarded as secondary. Moreover, some of the top candidates openly declared that they have no intention of leaving national politics. The president of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (Ibolya Dávid, former Minister of Justice) and the two top leaders of the Socialist Party (László Kovács, party president, Foreign Minister and Gyula Horn, ex-prime minister) led their party lists respectively. All three of them were thought to be optimal for mobilizing the party base. Gábor Demszky, mayor of Budapest, and former president of the Free Democrats, also decided to stay in national politics after leading the party list and being voted into the European Parliament. His story was somewhat different from the others, though, because he did actually start to work at the European Parliament, and only after finding out that the position of mayorship and of MEP are incompatible did he decide to step down. But the presence of a

number of politicians who had ambitions to continue with their Hungarian career confirmed the general understanding that the election was about domestic affairs and domestic stakes.

The parties also made some attempt to produce lists that satisfied the 'European' taste. The MSZP nominated a large number of women, who therefore had a majority in the MSZP MEP faction. The SZDSZ and Fidesz nominated Roma candidates, as a result of which the only two Roma MEPs of the European Parliament come from Hungary. MSZP also nominated a politician who was involved in Roma politics.

Results and implications

Electoral turnout was lower than predicted, as in the EU referendum. But this time, at 38.5 per cent, Hungary ranked high among the new accession countries. The domestic focus seems to have helped. The number of voters at the EP election was the same as the number of those who said 'yes' at the referendum (three million).

The unequivocal winner of the election was Fidesz (Table 4). Its result, 47.4 per cent, was higher than ever before. Had it achieved this result at the national election it would have gained a two-third majority in the parliament. Fidesz and MDF received almost 12 percent more than in 2002: the right-wing opposition humiliated the government (Table 5). MDF only barely cleared the five per cent threshold, but since most predictions suggested otherwise this was perceived as a major victory of Ibolya Dávid over the internal opposition. SZDSZ could also celebrate, as the party won two per cent more than at the national election in 2002.

Tables 4 and 5 here

The results of the election strengthened some previously existing tendencies but also set a new dynamic in motion. Those parties that failed (again) to reach the threshold suffered a severe blow in the eyes of the public, as the EP election was widely seen as the last chance for such parties to prove their relevance. Their poor result (they received less than five per cent overall) is

somewhat paradoxical, as they were the ones who claimed to represent the Eurosceptic Hungarian public.

For Fidesz the election proved that the leftist-populist turn of the party was well received by the public, and it has followed this new course ever since. SZDSZ also interpreted its seven per cent as a relative success and confirmation of the focus on classical liberal themes. While the election results simply stabilized the already existing strategy and internal balance of power in these parties, for the Hungarian Democratic Forum clearing the threshold meant the elimination of internal opposition and the ultimate decision to pursue a strategy that separates MDF from Fidesz. The big loser of the election, MSZP, found itself in a deep leadership crisis. Its president resigned, and the Prime Minister's position weakened considerably. After a few months of internal bickering, the Prime Minister handed in his resignation. Post-communist Hungary has never had a mid term test for its governments, nor a prime ministerial resignation. Although the resignation of the PM had its specific immediate reasons, it would be difficult not to see the link with the lost election.

The information provided by the EP election results can be used to improve the party's position, but if misinterpreted it can set the party on a self-destructive trajectory. MDF's decision, to run alone at the next election may prove to be disastrous for the party in 2006, because it overlooks the difference between the context of a first and a second order election. MSZP, on the other hand, seem to have read the voters' mind correctly. Under the new leadership it has radically improved its standing in opinion polls, and has entered the parliamentary election campaign in 2006 with the same level of support as its rival.

The EP election results also had an influence on the choice of the Hungarian commissioner. Originally a technocrat linked to the Socialist party was supposed to fill this job. After the election Fidesz demanded a right of consultation (practically a right of veto), but instead of looking for a consensual candidate the government nominated the freshly resigned president of

MSZP.

EUROPEANIZATION OF HUNGARIAN PARTIES

Embeddedness in European structures

Hungarian parties have been actively seeking links to Western party alliances from the very beginning of their existence (Table 6). But the first election already proved that international links are no substitutes for domestic roots. The two parties that most emphasized their international embeddedness, the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats (who used the EU flag in their campaign), emerged from the founding election as marginal players. While European party structures do not seem to be able to sustain otherwise unpopular actors, they do prove to be able to inflict damage on parties that deviate from European norms. The representatives of the European People's Party and the EUCD repeatedly urged the Smallholders and the KDNP to return to a more moderate course, and at one point they publicly distanced themselves from both these parties. While it is difficult to prove that these gestures caused the marginalization and ultimate disappearance of these two parties from the parliamentary scene, the party elites were definitely embarrassed and the internal opposition was provided with a powerful weapon.

Table 6 here

At the other end of the spectrum the ex-communists, now Socialists, fought very hard to acquire a democratic image through the association with Western and European party structures. In 1989 the MSZP accepted the program of Socialist International, in 1995 it became full member of it and, finally, in 2003 the party joined PES as full member. Fidesz and SZDSZ had no such problems with their democratic reputation. They both became members of the Liberal International and affiliate members of ELDR during the early nineties. At that time the two parties competed fiercely for influence within European liberalism. Ironically, the party that was

more successful in this regard, Fidesz, finally decided to withdraw from the liberal organizations and joined right-wing alliances, such as the EPP, the EDU and the CDI.

This movement across federations illustrates beautifully the interlocking of the European and domestic political arenas. Fidesz by this time has conquered the right wing segment of Hungarian politics, gradually adopting an anti-liberal discourse. Membership of the Liberal International and ELDR was increasingly embarrassing, particularly as it entailed an association with SZDSZ, an archenemy of the Hungarian right. The domestic situation clearly called for a different position in the international sphere. Interestingly, the main reason that Fidesz leaders referred to in public had nothing to do with the inter-party relations or ideological position. The party emphasized rather that it would be better able to represent Hungarian interests in the EPP, the most powerful European political grouping. The leaders of Fidesz obviously conceived the Hungarian voters as indifferent, or even hostile to ideological argument, and they also wanted to divert attention from the discrepancy between the party's past and present orientation.

After Fidesz's departure, SZDSZ remained the only official liberal party. Given that the number of voters who identify as liberals greatly exceeds the number of SZDSZ voters, the party tries to capitalize on its international credentials as 'the' liberal party. Apart from its membership of ELDR, SZDSZ provides the faction leader of the liberal group in the Council of Europe and one of the vice-chairmen of the Liberal International. The party has recently renamed itself into SZDSZ – The Liberal Party, reemphasizing its ideological pedigree as well as its location in European political structures.

But it is not just that Hungarian parties need international backing; European parties also need local affiliates. In the run-up to the 2004 elections even minor parties like the Green Democrats and the Labour party were tracked down by their respective European federations and duly incorporated into them. The only relevant party not to have formal links with like-minded parties is MIÉP, although the party did participate in a number of European extreme-right events and

had particularly good relations with Jean-Marie Le Pen.

During the EP campaign a number of European politicians appeared on the Hungarian scene, with Fidesz receiving the most spectacular support. The Chairman of the EPP-ED Group in the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering, issued a joint statement with Orbán underlining the common values of Fidesz and EPP; Orbán received the Mérite Européen prize; Wilfried Martens, president of EPP, publicly expressed his shock that spirits of the communist past should still haunt Hungary. He even called for the ‘old red fighters who masqueraded as social-democrats’ to ‘disappear into the darkness of history, where they belong’. The message to the Socialists could not have been clearer.

Organization

Over the years Hungarian parties have imported a number of organizational techniques from Western sister parties and received direct campaign support in various ways. The Socialists introduced a gender- and age-based quota system similar to that existing in many Western European parties, and both Fidesz and MSZP introduced the institution (though not the practice yet) of intra-party referendums. The diffusion of organizational techniques is acknowledged by politicians: when the Socialist party president set up a permanent programme committee within the party his argument was that such committees exist in other EU socialist parties. Fidesz has established sections for various social strata in the party with explicit references to the practice of European people’s parties.

Since the rules of the EP election gave all the power over nomination and campaigning to party headquarters one could have expected an increase in elitism and centralization within the organizations. But Hungarian parties were so centralized that further moves in this direction were difficult to envisage. In the only relatively factionalized and decentralized party, the MSZP, the emergence of a new layer of power (that of the Europoliticians) has contributed rather to increasing complexity and stratarchy. In the leadership battles that followed the EP election

some of the Socialist MEPs were particularly outspoken, exploiting the relative security and autonomy of their new position.

After the election the MEPs were integrated into the individual party structures, but this process was filtered through the organizational culture of the parties. Integration went furthest in Fidesz. The leader of the Strasbourg faction, as well as the chair or vice-chair of the European Parliament and the chair or vice-chair of the European People's Party, are all automatically members of the party's presidium if they come from Fidesz. MDF did not regulate the status of its (only) MEP, while the statute of the SZDSZ stipulates that the first person on the EP list can participate in the leadership meetings but without the right to vote. The same possibility is given to the EP faction leader in the MSZP.² In MSZP the EP faction can delegate representative to the National Board as well.

While MDF, SZDSZ and MSZP leave selection of the parliamentary group leader to the MEPs, in Fidesz he or she is selected by the party's National Board following proposal by the party's top leadership. In general Hungarian parties try to control their parliamentary groupings, but this degree of subordination does not exist at the level of national parliamentary groups. Whether this control ends with the nomination of the EP group leader or extends beyond remains to be seen.

Both in terms of self-definition and organization, it is the statutes of MSZP and Fidesz that contain most references to EU and to the European party system. Fidesz has even redefined its membership on the basis of its membership in the European People's Party. According to the statute, members of other parties cannot join Fidesz, but the National Board can exempt applicants from parties that are affiliated with EPP. This clause was motivated by domestic concerns (Fidesz intended to siphon away the MDF activists), but the justification was given in terms of European party politics. The European focus is symbolized by the party's website where viewers can choose between three sites given equal status: party, national parliamentary group and EP parliamentary faction. In other parties the MEPs receive a symbolic lower status.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion let us enumerate both the European influences that can be identified and those not present.

1. No new party emerged in Hungary with a specific pro- or anti-Europe rationale. But one must hasten to add that in fact no new party emerged at all.
2. The identity of parties has been unaffected by accession. But it is again important to note that the lack of recent change is due to the fact that an orientation towards Europe was part of most parties' core identity already in 1989.
3. The format of the Hungarian party system has changed considerably due to the drastic decline in the number of parties, but this has had little to do with the EU.
4. The fundamental relations between parties have been unaltered, and the level of polarization within the party system has remained high. The hostility between MDF and Fidesz increased after 2002, and although this might have happened because or in spite of their joint membership in EPP I would rather regard the two phenomena as unrelated.
5. Finally, there are no observable changes in party-government relations.

To conclude that European integration had no discernable impact on the Hungarian party politics would be nevertheless a mistake. European integration seems to have set firm constraints within which mainstream parties can move. It delegitimized from the outset nationalist and the communist forces. Neither citizens nor elites support parties that may 'rock the boat'. The vice-chairman of Fidesz has explicitly acknowledged that a coalition with MIÉP is not possible because it would cause the country too much international damage.

The marginalization of the extremes may seem to be too obvious consequence of integration, but in fact a considerable part of the literature predicted the opposite. Gryzmala-Busse and Innes claimed, for example, that 'the demands of enlargement have both constrained responsive and

accountable party competition and, as the character of enlargement became apparent, encouraged populists and demagogues...The successful competitive strategies have been those of technocracy, populism, and nationalism—the last two tending to be combined.’ For Hungary, Navracsics (1997, p. 3) predicted the following scenario: ‘Hungarian political parties have so far failed to define a coherent strategy. The absence of such a debate may offer a strong opportunity for marginal political forces to gain support by exploiting and revitalizing some anti-western traditions. These newly emerged and so far insignificant political actors base their ideology on protection of national independence and national sovereignty against EU membership, and thus may prepare the ground for the emergence of a genuinely anti-European movement.’

Instead, due probably to the high legitimacy of the EU for voters and the skillful integration of the Eurosceptic voter by Fidesz, the radical parties have virtually completely disappeared. The consolidation and concentration of the party system continues. But the absence of more Euroscepticism in party politics is puzzling given the growth in popular anti-EU sentiments. These feelings seem to translate with low efficiency into party representation for three reasons:

1. EU-issues have a secondary relevance for most voters.
2. Even those who reject the EU may consider their opinion to be inadmissible.
3. Anti-EU attitudes happen to be a characteristic of the least active voters.

According to Bielasiak (2004) the degree of contestation may be linked to the presence of Euroscepticism, since parties under intense competitive pressure may turn more attention to the European issue. The Hungarian case, with a fairly competitive structure and a relatively low salience of the European issue seems to contradict this expectation. But in fact as the degree of competitiveness, as measured by the declining margin between frontrunners, increased so did the polarization of attitudes towards the EU.

While party identity has not changed spectacularly, there have been slight modifications in the

self-images projected. MDF, SZDSZ and MSZP strengthened references to the party family they belonged to, advertizing themselves as ‘conservative’, ‘liberal’ and ‘social-democratic’ respectively. But the pull of European standards has proved to be far from universal. Fidesz shifted in the opposite direction: the rhetoric of the party recently turning towards denying the relevance of left and right and regards ideological labels as ‘old-fashioned’. To some extent this is, of course, a general European phenomenon.

European integration has also affected intra-party politics. A new career path has opened for politicians, and parties can use the new positions to resolve internal tensions (the appointment of Kovács as commissioner is one example). Organizational techniques can now be justified by reference to the practice of European sister parties. The EP election, as a mid-term national election, changed the dynamics of party politics. Hungarian prime ministers are practically unremovable, and this fact has contributed to the unusually high stability of the governments and of the party system. The EP elections resulted in the replacement of the prime minister and caused open conflict within the major governing party. More frequent elections may, however, create conditions for even higher government durability in the long run, as government parties have the opportunity to change leaders and become more attuned with the public mood. The existence of a low-stake interim election also allows parties to experiment with new strategies and rehearse for the next national election, thus preparing them to fend off new challengers more effectively.

It is difficult to group these phenomena into direct and indirect forms of EU impact, and probably better to see the significance of European integration as providing politicians with new sets of tools. Parties exploit the newly opened opportunities, but mainly in order to strengthen established organizational and ideological identities. For an innovative party leadership Europe provides plenty of new resources, a development that is true irrespective of the party’s ideological colouring. It is significant that Fidesz, the party that among mainstream contenders

has made most critical gestures towards the EU, models its official identity most closely on European Union actors and has developed the highest degree of integration between its national and European components. Hungarian experience also shows that a simultaneous presence in several arenas allows parties to form different images and attract divergent groups of supporters. It seems that playing with Europe is a potentially promising activity even if Europe as an issue has a relatively low salience. In coming decades the winners are likely to be the parties that acquire the skills relevant to this new environment and its particular dynamics.

Note

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TABLES

Table 1. Percentage distribution of list votes in Hungarian parliamentary elections,

1990-2002

	1990	1994	1998	2002
FIDESZ	8.95	7.02	29.45	41.07*
MDF	24.73	11.74	2.80	
FKgP	11.73	8.82	13.14	0.75
KDNP	6.46	7.03	2.31	-
MIÉP	-	1.59	5.47	4.37
MSZP	10.89	32.99	32.89	42.05
SZDSZ	21.39	19.74	7.57	5.57
Others	15.85	11.07	6.37	6.8

*joint list

Table 2. Percentage distribution of seats in Hungarian parliamentary elections, 1990-2002

	1990	1994	1998	2002
FIDESZ	5.7	5.2	38.3	42.5
FKgP	11.4	6.7	12.4	-
KDNP	5.4	5.7	0	-
MDF	42.5	9.8	4.4	6.2
MIÉP	-	-	3.6	-
MSZP	8.5	54.1	34.7	46.1
SZDSZ	24.1	17.9	6.2	5.2
Others	2.1	0.3	-	-

Table 3. Support for European Union in the electorates of Hungarian parties

percentage support	2004	2005
Fidesz	71	71
MSZP	77	79
SZDSZ	95	87
Others	74	73
no party	66	65
Average	72	71

Source:

Median

Polling

company.

http://www.median.hu/eu_parlament/2005_egy_ev/eu_egy_ev.html.

Table 4. Results of the EP election 2004

Party	Number of votes	percentage of votes	EP-seats
Fidesz-MPSZ	1 453 138	47,41	12
MSZP	1 051 624	34,31	9
SZDSZ	236 603	7,72	2
MDF	163 480	5,33	1
MIÉP	71 996	2,35	0
Labor	56 114	1,83	0
Hungarian National Alliance	20 198	0,66	0
SZDP	12 178	0,40	0

Table 5. Vote difference between 2002 and 2004

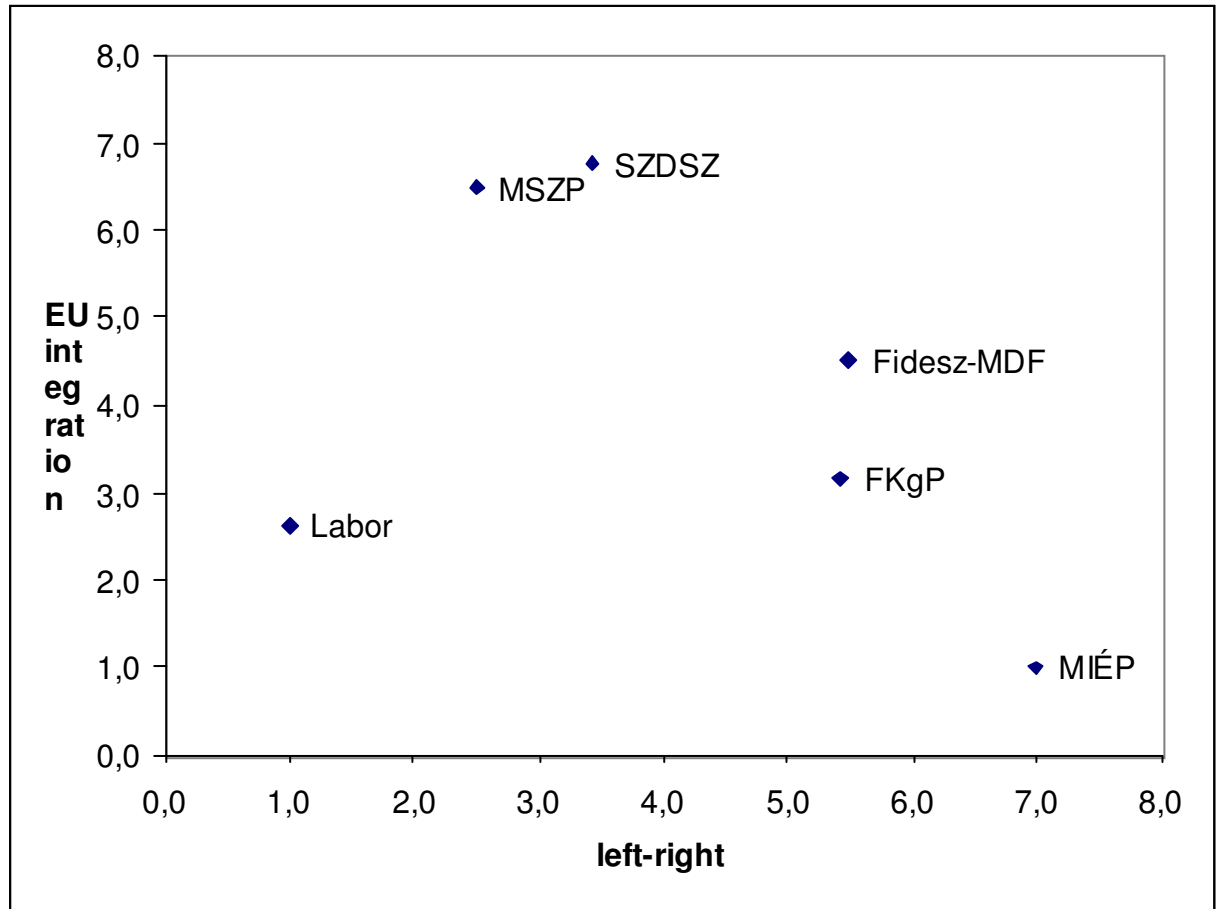
Party	2004 vs. 2002
Fidesz-MPSZ and MDF	+11.7
MSZP	-7.74
SZDSZ	+2.15
MIÉP	-2
Labour	-.33

Table 6. Membership of Hungarian parties in European Party Alliances

Party	Membership
Fidesz	European People's Party
MDF	European People's Party
MSZP	European Socialists
SZDSZ	European Liberal Democratic Reform Party
Labour Party	European Left
Green Democrats	European Greens

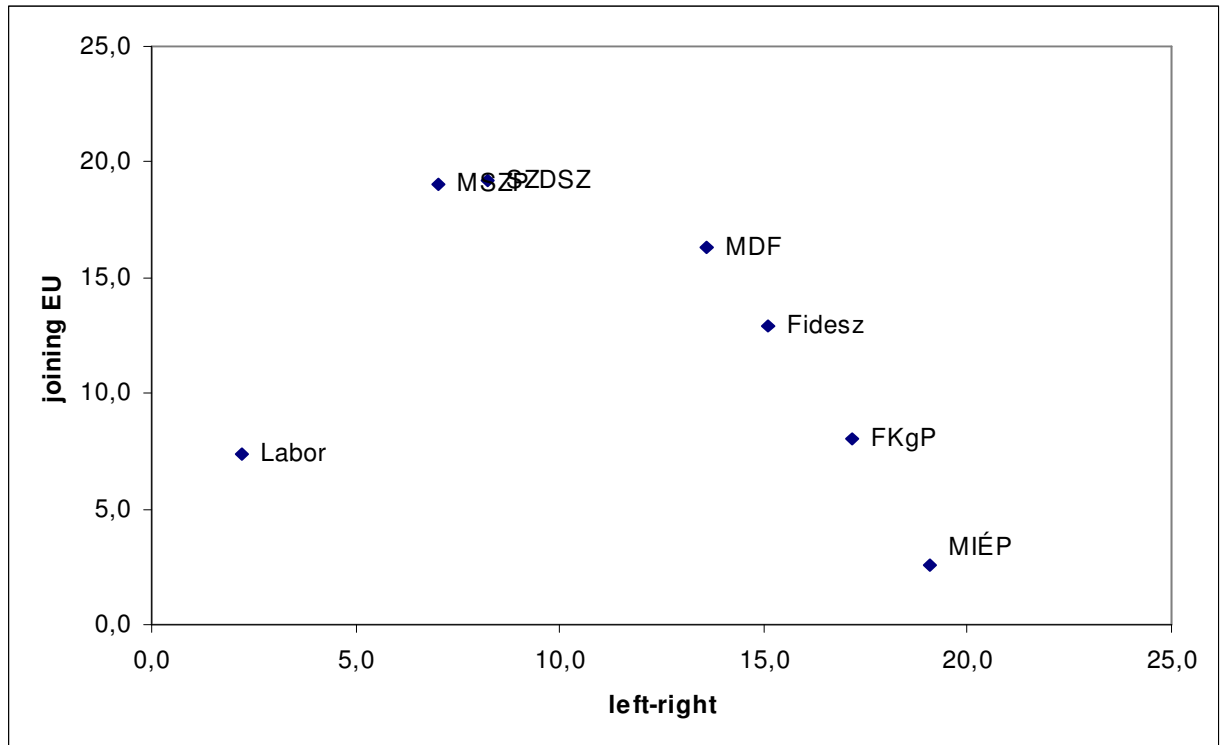
FIGURES

Figure 1. Expert location of Hungarian parties, 2003/2004. Rohrschneider and Whitefield*



* Fidesz and MDF were treated as one unit because they ran on a joint list in 2002.

Figure 2. Expert location of Hungarian parties. 2003/2004. Benoit and Laver research



¹ I am grateful to the organizers of these studies for permission to use their data.

² There is some inconsistency in the statute of the MSZP, because at one point it gives the same status to the parliamentary groups in the EP and in the Hungarian Parliament, but at another point treats the two faction chairs differently: one is given voting right in the presidium, the other one not.