THE 'EUROPEANISATION' OF EASTERN CENTRAL EUROPEAN PARTY SYSTEMS

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Introduction

The study of the interactions between European integration and national party systems is a fast developing research field.¹ This is so in spite of the fact that national political institutions tend to be resilient to the transformational effects of integration² and many scholars accept Peter Mair's dictum that party systems are 'most impervious to change'.³ There is a growing body of dissenters who claim that the range of EU effects on parties has been larger and deeper than is normally described.⁴

Obviously, most of the existing studies in the field are on Western Europe, but there is a growing interest in the developments induced by integration on the eastern part of the continent. Eastern European party systems are, on average, more fragile and fragmented than the Western ones. The party competition is more open than in the West, the profile of the parties is less crystallised. Therefore the impact of the integration process on the parties is widely expected to be larger than in the West.⁵ The focus of political parties on the issue of national sovereignty, and the fact that the prestige conferred by the association with Western political structures can be a larger electoral asset than in the West, may also strengthen the impact of the EU.

Moreover, one may argue that the parties in Eastern Central Europe do not simply adapt to the process of European integration: they are part of it from the very beginning. Membership in European Union was widely regarded as a major societal goal already before the establishment of the present day political parties. While in the West the principal question is how the new challenges posed by European integration will be answered by long-standing ideological traditions, in the East the very first programs were drafted with an eve on the accession. seen already at that time as imminent.

One of the most influential agenda-setters in the field, Robert Ladrech, suggested that the research should focus on five fields: (1) policy and programmatic content (the increase of references to EU and to EU level actors): (2) party organisation (incorporation of EP and federation delegates); (3) patterns of party competition (development of positions on the EU-issue,⁶ establishment of new anti- and pro-EU parties, divergence of party systems at national and European levels); (4) partygovernment relations (strained relationships between government personnel and parties, loosening of links between parties and interest groups); and

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(5) relations beyond the national party system (legitimisation of national parties by the emerging Euro-parties).⁷

While this agenda draws indeed attention to some of the most important developments in the field, I think the focus of researched can be and should be broadened further. Already the points advanced by Ladrech can be understood in a broader way. One should, for example, not focus on references to EU only in detecting programmatic changes, but research also the spread of norms prevailing within the European Union in all policy areas (e.g. treatment of minorities). The research on party organisation should not be confined to the status of actors related to the EU either, but also to, for example, the borrowing of general mobilisational organisational and techniques from parties that are members in the same party federations.

Below I will discuss eleven different areas around which empirical research can be structured. There is no single underlying or unifying theory behind this list of topics: they rather reflect where the most relevant findings and the best argued expectations are coming from in today's literature. I focus on these areas also because in all cases one can see arguments, as I will show below, that go in both directions. That is, the outcome of the interaction between national and European arenas is far from clear in these areas, and therefore there is ample room for research.

The areas are: the status of parties within the political system, the salience of the EU issue, the parties' position vis-à-vis European integration, the structure of mass attitudes, the pattern of party competition, fragmentation and polarisation of the party system, the relative strength of party families, transnational cooperation, party organisation, and, finally, the accuracy of political representation on integrationrelated attitudes.

The Status of Parties

In Eastern Europe the degree of democratic consolidation and the role of parties played in political representation is positively related: countries where parties are marginal actors (e.g. Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, etc.) tend to be less democratic than countries where political parties dominate over other organisations.⁸ There is no surprise here: consolidated democracies are, by and large, partycentred democracies, particularly in Europe. Therefore, the deepening of interaction with Europe may contribute to the importance of parties in the new democracies.

But the opposite scenario is also imaginable. Peter Mair speaks of the decline of parties in modern democracies in general, but within the European Union in particular.⁹ EU politics promotes civil society, interest organisations, advocacy and lobby groups, but undermines the partisan channels of representation. As Eastern Central Europe's integration into the indirect, elitist and depolarised politics of EU progresses, so may the general alienation from political parties increase.

Time has been too short to evaluate this aspect of change. Turnout is decreasing in the region, and the EP elections have been "boycotted" by even more citizens than in Western Europe. These phenomena point towards the detrimental effect of integration on parties, and may have something to do with the fact that the policy options, and therefore responsive and accountable party competition is more constrained in this region - by the European Union - than in Western Europe.¹⁰ Lewis also finds Mair's "indirect effect" theory (that is, that integration has little effect on parties and party relations, but it alters the scope of party competition) applicable to Eastern Europe as far as the elite-mass linkages are weakening further in some of the countries due to the improper channelment of Eurosceptic voices into party politics.¹¹ But these developments have had no discernible impact yet on the power position of parties, and interest groups have not become more influential than parties in the region.

The Salience of the EU Issue

Membership in EU turns domestic players into EU actors. The decisions made in Strasbourg and Brussels impact on the life of the citizens of the new member states as much, if not more, than of the citizens of the EU15. Therefore, it is highly probable that the salience of EUrelated issues will increase in Eastern Central Europe.

At the same time one should not forget that, in spite of some evidence indicating a more pronounced role of issues related to integration, one is still

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inclined regard the European to dimension as a "sleeping giant" (to use the expression of van der Eijk and Franklin) throughout Europe. Moreover, expecting the opposite development in Eastern Central Europe, that is, a decline of the salience of "Europe", is not without foundation either. After all, the most important question concerning the EU, whether a country joins it or not, has been decided. All subsequent decisions carry a smaller weight. As the stakes became smaller. so may interest vanish, decreasing the salience of Europe in party competition.

At the moment more observers emphasise the low salience and the lack of politicisation of the European issue in Eastern Central Europe,¹² at least as far as the mainstream parties are concerned. EU issues played a marginal role also at recent EP elections.¹³ This was so largely because accession was the main EU issue, and a consensus for a yes prevailed across the region. EU integration was seen as a civilisational imperative. But since the tensions came to the surface within the EU itself, parties have a wider range of options available. This development is likely to provide more room for a genuine debate and for a growing importance of EU issues in party competition. Some scholars draw attention to the growing variance of party positions, and question whether integration can be still considered as a valence issue.¹⁴

Position of Parties vis-à-vis the European Integration

In cases where parties have a clear position towards the EU, this position may be determined either by the parties' ideological tradition (particularly on dimensions that are directly relevant for integration, such as economic liberalism, or nationalism) or by their relations to European party families, or by their strategic position within the party system. Only the first option implies a principled position. The existence of a communist and of a nationalist party family in the region creates good opportunity for this sort of ideological opposition to emerge. Various researchers found that party ideology indeed informs the degree of Euroscepticism.15 But not all of those who find ideology important identify party family as a useful categorisation of ideological traditions. McElroy and Benoit for example, conclude that party family

membership explains Euroscepticism very weakly.¹⁶

The second explanation is typical of those parties that see enough benefit from the association with a European party federation to adopt the federation's position. Given the high prestige of Europarties in Eastern Central Europe, one expects relatively many parties to be influenced by similar considerations. The adaptation of the sister parties' positions may happen on other issues as well, but it is most likely to happen on the EU issue. I am not aware of systematic studies that explored this possibility.

Finally, the third option implies that a party's position on the EU varies depending on the temporary configuration of the domestic competition. Dominant parties are typically not expected to emphasise the EU issue or to occupy radical position in the debate, while minor and opposition parties, particularly whose main competitor has a built-in advantage on the principal domestic issues, are much more likely to do so. Evidence for this explanation comes from a number of sources, including Bielasiak: Taggart and Szczerbiak; and Sitter.¹⁷ Bielasiak claims that the weakness of cleavage structures, and the lack of long standing identities and of structured political environment, necessarily lower the role of ideology.¹

The existence of contradictory findings is partly due to the fact that Euroscepticism is а complex phenomenon. In certain cases it can be very misleading to model it as a dichotomy (for and against) or as a continuum (more or less). Parties coming from different traditions see Europe differently: as "Christian", or as "Welfare" or as "Cosmopolitan Europe", for example. Given the general lack of information, in Eastern Central Europe there is probably more possibility to project one's value system onto the EU than in the West. A number of major parties (ODS. Fidesz. PiS. Kesk) developed recently a rather conditional and complex attitude on the subject.

Structure of Attitudinal Dimensions

The overall level of ideological crystallisation among the masses is relatively high in the region, at least higher than in Latin America.¹⁹ The closeness to Western European politics is perhaps

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partly responsible for this state of affairs (although note that Kitschelt provides different explanation). The ideological oppositions within Western Europe are often used as standards of "normal" politics in the discourse of Eastern Central European discourse.

In the long run the gravity of European patterns may undermine those divides that are specific to the region. For example, membership in a community where communism is not an issue may weaken the salience of the anticommunist divide. The decline of this attitudinal cleavage in the last years (see Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland, etc.) seems to confirm this tendency, although domestic reasons surely played their role in these developments.

The most obvious sub-question in this area is how the attitude towards European integration becomes related with other attitudinal dimensions. The literature suggests that the ideological correlates of the EU dimension depend on the particular socio-political context of the nation states.²⁰ The variance across Eastern Central Europe may very well be a function of whether cultural or economic issues dominate the domestic agenda, the former being better able to absorb the integration issue.

The dimensions of political values and attitudes of the masses and elites are well mapped for the old member states and for the European Parliament²¹ and one of the emerging finding seems to be that opposition to integration comes increasingly from neo-liberal circles. The existing embryonic research on ECE indicates, however, that Euroscepticism is typically fuelled by authoritarianism and nationalism, while neo-liberal ideas are often glued to cultural libertarianism, cosmopolitanism and Euroenthusiasm.²² The conflict between neo-liberal and social-democratic EU agendas is likely to materialise only in those ECE countries where economic issues dominate the domestic agenda.²³

One must note, however, that the literature on the relationship between left-right and Euroscepticism in the religion is highly contradictory. Bielasiak, for example, finds that in the region Euroscepticism tends to be more pronounced on the right, and among liberals, although in general Euroscepticism tends to cross-cut the left-right dimension.²⁴ But exactly the opposite

is established by Taggart and Szczerbiak and Marks et al. who detect a correlation between leftist orientation and Euroscepticism.²⁵ Again contrary to Bielasiak, Kopecky and Mudde and Marks et al find the liberals to be the most pro-EU party family.²⁶

Since after the fall of communist rule anti-communism was one of the principal attitudinal cleavages in the region, it will be particularly interesting to follow the relationship of this issue with the EU issue. If anti-communism is part of a clerical-nationalist package (like in Hungary and Poland) then the relationship between anti-communism and anti-EU is likely to become positive.²⁷ Where large unreformed communist parties exist, the relationship will most likely be negative. Geopolitical status and ethnic structure seems to be very important for the combination of attitudes. Where there is a sizeable large Russian minority (i.e. in the Baltic states), the anti-Russian and the pro-EU feelings are expected to correlate positively, although the most anti-Russian nationalists are likely to criticise EU.

The accession to EU may make the contact with kin groups living beyond the borders either easier or more difficult, depending, among other factors, on whether the neighbouring country also joins the Union. In the former case nationalists are likely to be more positive, in the latter more negative about the EU.

Patterns of Party Competition

The preferences of international actors within the EU system and the position of parties and voters concerning the EU may trigger a change in the coalition preferences of the parties. The coalition alternatives are constrained by the international environment, and the EU institutions are in a particularly good position to exert pressure on domestic actors not to ally with extremist, particularly extreme right. forces. Beyond that, however, the logic of choosing coalition partners must to be determined mainly by domestic considerations. At the same time, the widespread consensus concerning the issue of accession can provide a basis for various coalitions, and lead therefore to more cooperation.

The direct encounter with European politics can help the party systems in the region to consolidate,²⁸

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but, alternatively, it can also undermine the little stability that exists. While the association with European party families may cement the identity and the legitimacy of certain parties, the introduction of new arenas of contestation (EP election. selection of ΕU Commissioners, may etc.) cause turbulence. The consequences of these new elections and selections is likely to be larger than in the "Old" Europe because parties tend to have more tenuous links with their voters and with each other, and because the positions in Strasbourg and Brussels have a higher relative value.

Grzymala-Busse and Innes claim that EU constraints on domestic policies are partly responsible for high volatility and the emphasis on personalities.² Lewis also lists a number of examples indicating the presence of a destabilising tendency, like the resignation of a number of PMs after the first EP election.³⁰ Potentially, however, the ruling political elites could benefit from the EP election in treating them as a dress rehearsal for national elections: collecting information about the voters' preferences and experimenting with new campaign techniques. If so, the EP elections may even lead to more responsiveness, flexibility and adaptability on behalf of the (ruling) parties.

Fragmentation

The fragmentation of the party systems is affected directly by the EU if new parties appear or old ones disappear because of their attitude towards the EU.³¹ None of this is very probable, as the Western European example shows. But it is certainly a possibility, and not only for the anti-EU side, as often expected. In the Czech Republic there is already a new party with the *raison d'être* of supporting integration.

Splits are somewhat more likely to occur. In ECE a large number of parties exist that have, from a Western point of view, idiosyncratic ideological platforms. Statist conservatives and authoritarian left wing parties are cases in point. The integration of these parties into the European Parliament is likely to place them under pressure. Those party leaders who try to keep together authoritarian nationalists and neo-liberals on the right or social democrats and communists on the left face new tensions, which may result in factionalisation or splits.

But the links to EU federation may actually decrease fragmentation. Europarties discourage electorally harmful rivalry between parties belonging to the federation. The leadership of these federations, together with the rich German and Dutch foundations, possess the incentives necessary for exerting pressure on the parties to cooperate and/or to, eventually, unite.

Actually, empirical evidence gives somewhat more support to the latter expectation. There are recently more fusions than fissions in the region. The number of parties is declining.³² Obviously, most of the changes concerning party system fragmentation have little to do with the integration process, but if such a link can be established, that is rather working towards the concentration of the party systems.

Polarisation

If the technocratic and consensual governance of EU³³ becomes indeed incorporated into the national political systems, we must expect decreasing polarisation. The EP elections may have a similar effect. In many Eastern Central European countries the public regards the MEPs as the ambassadors of the country, who are supposed to work together for the national interest. Where this approach prevails, the EP election may be dominated by a fight over competence, and the contrast among ideological positions may receive a smaller relevance.

This tendency is likely to be true only for those parties that accept the EU and are themselves accepted by the EU. Parties that oppose the mainstream consensus on integration and/or are regarded by the European Union as extremists, who should not be included into governments, may form an ostracised group. Citizens and politicians know that the victory of such (typically communist or nationalist) parties may have detrimental consequences of the country's future. This means higher stakes, and may trigger more bitter opposition and higher level of polarisation.

Grzymala-Busse and Innes observe that technocracy and populism go hand in hand in Eastern Europe.³⁴ Mair's thesis about the "hollowing out of party competition"

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predicts exactly this: depolarisation in the centre and the rise of radical forces on the margins.³⁵ Note that the latter is not supposed to change the depolarised nature of party competition, since radical-populist parties are not expected to have an impact on the executive power. But in Eastern Central Europe, due to the fragility of norms and the high electoral volatility, the possibility of radical forces taking over governmental power is not as remote in Western Europe.

Relative Strength of Party Families

Probably the least theorised consequence of integration is the rise and/or fall of certain parties and party families. Integration is most in line with the values of liberal and cosmopolitan parties.³⁶ Therefore, the most evident expectation is that these parties will capitalise on the process of integration, succeeding in convincing the voters that within European Union only such parties are *comme il faut*.

At the same time accession to the EU means that one of the fundamental causes of these parties has been fulfilled, and therefore cannot motivate their voters any longer. Even worse, citizens who experience the difficulties of membership may blame exactly these parties and turn to populist ant-European movements, as indicated above. Some of the policies advocated by these parties (e.g. tolerance towards homosexuals) have never been popular, but accepted as the prize of the accession. The fact that the liberals were helped by external allies (i.e. EU) meant that they did not need to mobilise a critical mass of citizens behind their agenda. This configuration has brought them short term policy successes, but may lead to long terms electoral difficulties.

There are in fact few examples (most notably the rise of the Polish Selfdefence and the return of the Slovak National Party) that illustrate the expected rise of populists. Otherwise radical nationalist parties seem to be adversely affected. Some of them lose popularity because are regarded as not compatible with EU norms and therefore lacking coalition potential. They are, therefore, abandoned by their more rational voters. Others go too far in satisfying the taste of the European elite, and consequently lose their appeal among the more radical supporters. Ironically, parties like Vladimir Meciar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia and Corneliu Vadim Tudor's Greater Romania Party seem to suffer from both: they did radically change their discourse towards a more moderate one, but the result was the loss of credibility.

The centre-left and centre-right are likely to be influenced to a different degree by the Western ideological patterns. Eastern European left wing politicians are rather comfortable with the social and cultural program of Western Social Democracy. More ideological conflict can be expected on the right, since in Western Europe this ideological spectrum is more fragmented, and therefore less able to act as a socialising force towards the Eastern European sister parties. This doesn't mean, of course, that the electoral support of these parties should decrease. Actually, the first EP elections in the region showed the success of centre-right parties and the modest performance of the centre-left. This may be a function of the fact that centre-left parties happened to be the in government is many of these countries. But it seems that the left is luckier with the European Union institutions than with the sentiments of its own voters: the leftist voters may demand from their parties more state oriented, redistribution-centred programs that they can deliver.

Transnational Cooperation

Transnational party federations play a particularly important role in socialising Eastern European parties into the norms of particular party families.³⁷ As indicated above, it may be more difficult for the right wing forces to develop intensive cooperation with European parties. The Polish right-wing MPs, for example, contribute to a particularly large extent to the non-affiliated group. At the same time, the ascendance of the People's Party in the European Parliament may alter this trend, making the imitation of EPP a particularly attractive option. The role of German parties and their foundations seems to be particularly consequential in assimilating, or at least socialising, Eastern Central European parties into western patterns.

As in all aspects discussed above, the parties are expected to exploit the structures offered by EU in order to attain domestic success. Therefore the choice between Euro-parties will be

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motivated as much by ideological sympathies as by opportunistic reasons. The search European partners in case of the UDF and MRP in Bulgaria, and the Democratic Party, the Greater Romania Party and the Liberals in Romania, or the Centre party in Estonia attest the significance of rational calculations.

Party Organisation

Speaking about political actors in general, Goetz and Hix highlighted the impact of informational disparities due to links and relationships with European level actors and institutions.³⁸ Following this argument, Ladrech expected the strengthening role of party elites and of EU specialists, and the weakening of the party on the ground.³⁹ The penetration of the European arena into the domestic political landscape also involves changes in the party statutes to accommodate the party's EU representatives by providing them with a seat in the party leadership. They EU specialists are expected to be the winners also in the sense of acquiring more staff, more resources, more autonomy, and more influence on general policy making.

Next to these changes related to the specific EU components of the parties, the diffusion of other organisational techniques is also expected to speed up after enlargement. The import of techniques that are associated with democratic norms (gender quota, internal referenda) may also have consequences for the internal balance of power. But given that there is no "conditionality" concerning organisational matters (nor, for that matter, concerning anything in party politics), the elites are likely to adopt these techniques only if their position is not threatened by them.

The literature also expects that the internal hierarchies may be affected by the growing informational asymmetry between leaders and members and by the appearance of EU politicians within the parties. These developments do not lead, however, necessarily towards more hierarchy. Eastern Central European MEPs are likely to be less under the control of their national headquarters because of the lower salience of the EU issues in national politics. As a result, Eastern Central European parties may become more stratarchic as far as the European and national components are concerned.

Political Representation

The party representation of public attitudes towards the EU is becoming increasingly relevant for the general quality of representation. There seem to be sharply contradicting assessments concerning whether elites and constituencies converge or diverge on the European issue. This is so for the old member states as well, but even more for members. Taggart the new and Szcerbiak; and Bielasiak found a large discrepancy between partvand population-based Euroscepticism in Eastern Central Europe.⁴⁰ Lewis also detected less Euroscepticism at the party level than in the public, explaining this the generally low level of with representativeness of the party systems.41 Grzymala-Busse and Innes went even further, claiming that politicians either genuinely represent voters or cooperate with EU: and they tend to choose the later.42 On the other extreme, however, some empirical studies⁴³ concluded that Eastern European parties represent their voters even more accurately than their Western counterparts.

As far as intra-regional variance is concerned, I would expect the degree of correspondence in the ECE to depend on the significance of nationalism and authoritarianism in the party competition – the larger their weight, the higher the degree of congruence. The attitudes of the elites are likely to be more policyrelated, while the attitudes of the voters, though to a decreasing extent, is expected to be holistic. Left-right identity is expected to constrain only elite attitudes, while authoritarianism is likely to be relevant at both mass and elite levels.

Given the elitist nature of the accession process, it is more likely that voters follow the parties' lead on this issue, but as integration advances, we can expect that parties will also have to adjust to their voters' preferences.

Concluding Remarks

The European Union is both an actor and an environment. Vis-à-vis the parties it is more often the second, since

the EU institutions are not supposed to directly address national parties and party systems. As an environment it is not easily distinguishable from other elements of the international context. This is particularly so in East-Central Europe, where globalisation, Americanisation and Europeanisation appeared together.

At the same time, parties react to various elements of European integration. If these reactions have consequences for their position on other issues, their electoral chances, the profiles of their electorates, their inter-party relations, etc., then one can claim that the EU shapes these party systems. It is probably too early to judge whether this has indeed happened in Eastern Central Europe. The paper tried to show that there are many potential effects and that these effects may go in different directions. Obviously systematic. hitherto missing data collection is required to come up with definite answers, but the paper has hopefully provided ground for the generation of hypotheses.

The "Europeanisation" research tradition assumes the existence of an EU dynamics, and equates Europeanisation with the incorporation of this dynamics into domestic political life.⁴⁴ This sounds as an acceptable definition, but the changes induced by European integration go beyond the process of incorporation, and the European Union does not seem to produce one single identifiable logic: definitely not in the realm of party politics. Therefore, studving the interaction between national and European arenas one must be explicitly open to unintended and counter-intuitive processes and to diverging tendencies across the nation states

This is so because European structures and norms are as much as opportunities as constraints. Politicians incorporate new structures and discourses in order to advance their own goals and interests. Their capacity of exploiting the new opportunities depends on the already existing domestic institutional barriers and interpretative frameworks. While the stimulus may be the same, the party systems of the region are expected to give different answers to this stimulus. Some elements of the party systems may indeed converge, but at other levels differences within East and between East and West, may survive or even become larger.

Notes

1. Goetz and Hix, 2000; Bartolini, 2001; Ladrech, 2002; Marks and Steenburgen 2004, Knill and Lehmkull 1999, Risse et al. 2001, etc.

2. Anderson 2002 3. Mair 2000: 28

4. Conti, 2005, Marks and Wilson 2000, etc.

5. Lewis 2005, Mudde 2004, Henderson 2005, Bielasiak 2006, etc.

6. I refer to debates over the need for further integration and enlargement as the 'EU-issue' or the 'European issue'.

7. Ladrech 2002, 390-6.

8. Enyedi 2006

9. Mair 2000, forthcoming, etc.

10. Grzymala-Busse and Innes 2003

11. Lewis 2005.

12. Innes 2002, Grabbe and Hughes, 1999; Grzymala-Busse and Innes 2003, Bielasiak 2006, etc.

13. Chan 2004.

14. E.g. Bielasiak 2006, Kopecký and Mudde 2002, etc.

15. Marks et. al 2006; Kopecký and Mudde 2002; Benoit and Laver 2006; Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2004.

16. McElroy and Benoit 2005, 15.

17. Bielasiak 2006; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004; Sitter 2002.

18. Bielasiak 2006.

19. Kitschelt 2003, 18.

20. van der Eijk and Franklin 2004; Dauderstädt 2004.

21. Thomassen and Schmitt 1999, Hix and Lord 1997, Hooghe and Marks 2001, etc.

22. Anderson 1998; Kitschelt et al. 1999; Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2004.

23. Hooghe and Marks 2001.

24. Bielasiak 2006.

25. Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004; and Marks et al. 2006.

26. Kopecky and Mudde 2002; and Marks et al 2006.

27. Cf. Benoit and Laver 2006, 167.

28. Pridham 2002.

29. Grzymala-Busse and Innes 2003.

30. Lewis 2005.

31. Mair 2000.

32. Bielasiak 2005.

33. Mair 2000, Ágh 2004.

34. Grzymala-Busse and Innes 2003.

35. Katz and Mair 1995, Mair 2000.

36. Henderson 2001.

37. Pridham 1999.

38. Goetz and Hix 2000.

39. Ladrech 2002

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40. Taggart and Szcerbiak 2001; Bielasiak 2006.

41. Lewis 2205.

42. Grzymala-Busse and Innes 2003.

43. e.g. Mattila and Raunio 2005.

44. Ladrech 1994, Radaelli 2000.

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