

Historical Legacies in the Ideological and Organizational Profile of Post- Communist Parties

The Visegrad Countries

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This paper focuses on the origins of the different ideological profiles and organizational structures of left and right post-communist parties emerged in the Visegrad countries between 1989 and 1994. In this regard, it argues that among all possible explanatory factors the major role is played by historical legacies. Specifically, it traces back these historical legacies to the communist and pre-communist political experiences of each country, underlying the causal connection existing not only between each kind of legacy and the post-communist parties' identities, but also between the two different past historical experiences.

1

Introduction

In developed West-European democracies the existence of different kinds of political parties is intrinsically linked to the theoretical paradigm of Lipset and Rokkan (1967). Specifically, while their birth is traced back to the translation of historical-societal cleavages into the political arena, their persistence is related to the subsequent freezing of each national party system (*ibidem*, 50).

Adopting Bartolini and Mair's multi-dimensional definition of cleavage (1990), this paper's starting point is that historical long-standing cleavages are missing in the post-communist political context. Indeed, the new democracies of Central-Eastern Europe are characterized by the presence of unfrozen party systems, since the freezing proposition – at least in its original form- it is not directly applicable to Central-Eastern Europe (Lewis 2000, 143). The **ratio** underlying this statement is twofold. On the one hand, the mechanisms which allow the freezing process of West-European party sys-

tems never have the chance to be fully activated in Central-Eastern Europe. In fact, during the first postwar period, a lasting overcoming of the four thresholds, which in Western Europe permits the complete translation of different cleavage structures in different party systems, is fully achieved only in Czechoslovakia (Grilli di Cortona 1997, 149). On the other hand, even where there is a minimal freezing process, the highly dismantling nature of the subsequent diverse forms of communist regime ‘not just destroy earlier parties, but also eliminate most of the cleavages they originally reflect, and transform the social structures in which they were set’ (Lewis 2000, 143).

Nevertheless, we cannot deny the influence of historical, political, cultural and organizational legacies in shaping the identity of political parties which emerge at the time of the fall of communism. Indeed, as Markowski points out (1995, 42), the political divisions in post-communist democracies are shaped not only by the new social-economic structure and political institutions (as well as by the different pathways to democracy), but also by the different experiences of pre-communist rule and subsequent communist governance. Indeed, I consider the identity of major post-communist political actors in the Visegrad countries as deeply influenced by pre-communist and communist legacies. Specifically, recognizing that their different electoral fortunes are more strictly connected to the transition dynamics and to the critical junctures of early post-communist political life, this paper traces back the origins of the organizational skills and ideological profiles of major post-communist left and right parties to the late type of former communist regime and to the national political experience of the interwar period.

I limit my analysis to the political forces emerged during the transition and in the following years of democratic consolidation (1989-1994), since it is reasonable to expect that at the beginning of post-communist era past legacies are the strongest factor affecting party formation (Kitschelt et al. 1999, 60). Indeed, as time goes on, other factors may have a stronger influence on parties’ organizational and programmatic profiles, such as the need of qualifying for the European Union membership or the incentives given by the adoption of new institutional arrangements, mainly the change of the electoral system. Finally, I refer to the legacies of the late type of communism for two reasons. First, it is only after the de-Stalinization process in the 1950’s that diversification of communist regimes takes place (Kitschelt 2002, 39). Second, the extent of the economic and/or political liberalization within the communist rule and the consequent level of toleration towards the oppositional forces are largely a function of the ruling elite’s reaction to the events, respectively, of 1956 in Hungary and Poland, and of 1968 in Czechoslovakia.

2

Theoretical Framework

Several authors stress the influence of different communist and pre-communist experiences on the patterns of political representation emerged in post-communist Europe (Kitschelt et al. 1999, Bózoki and Ishiyama 2002, Gryzmala-Busse 2002, Vachudova 2008). What differentiates this article from previous works moving from the same path-dependence perspective is the attempt, within a single analytical framework, to root the organizational and ideological profile of both right and left post-communist parties in previous historical legacies. Nevertheless, I do not deny the potential influence of short-term factors in affecting the development of post-communist political parties. Specifically, I agree with idea that historical legacies might be mediated (Haughton and Rybar 2006, 129) by the transition's mode and timing, the new institutional framework, as well as by leadership strategic decisions, since all contribute to shape post-communist political parties.

However, the explanatory prominence given to historical legacies is due to the fact that the causal connection, even if mediated by more recent intervening factors, is as follows. The historical patterns of the industrialization and the state-building process peculiar to each country affect the dynamics of interwar politics. The different interwar political experiences, in terms of both ideological divisions and parties' mobilization strength, not only shape the different kinds of subsequent communist regime, but also (quite often) directly affect the post-communist parties' organizational and programmatic profiles. Every authoritarian regime is characterized by a different type of communist ruling party as well as by opposition forces which diverge in terms of organizational strength and cultural orientation. Quite obviously, the type of communist ruling party is intrinsically linked to the kind of successor party playing in the new competitive political arena after 1989. Likewise, the opposition forces, covertly or openly active during the late communism, are the primary source of cadre-personnel, organizational skills and cultural baggage for newly emerged not-incumbent parties. In turn, the organization, support, and ideological clarity of these forces and of their communist counter-parts affect the institutional choices that configure the new polities (Kitschelt et al. 1999, 38).

The concept of **mediated legacies** enters the analytical framework at this point, as I do not argue that the past fully determines the future. Indeed, path-dependence explains the set of organizational and cultural constraints and opportunities that successor parties and recently emerged parties face at the time of the transition to democracy.

Then, there might be exogenous factors as international geopolitical situation or economic unexpected developments which mediate the historical legacies in shaping the nature of the post-communist parties. Moreover, there might be a sort of retroactive effect of the institutional choices made during the transition – in particular of the electoral system and the form of government- which induces a learning process of new strategies by major political actors. Finally, one cannot deny the importance of leadership's political decisions during the critical junctures of the transition period. These are some of the reasons why the organizational structure and the cultural programmatic profile of post-communist parties may diverge from the logic driven by communist and pre-communist legacies. In this regard, however, not only the alternative explanatory approaches do not explain much by themselves either, but the factors they take into account are more likely to affect the electoral fortunes of the political parties rather their organizational and ideological profile.

3

The Ideological Orientation of Post-Communist Parties: Origins, Programmatic Profile and Cultural Legacies

In Post-Communist Europe the origins of political parties significantly differ both from a historical and cultural-ideological point of view. On the one hand, in fact, in spite of the common return to democratic politics in 1989, the origins of several post-communist parties date back to previous political experiences. On the other hand, these different historical origins are intrinsically linked to divergent cultural legacies, reflected in parties' ideological and programmatic profiles.

As regards the historical origins, using as discriminant the legally continuative existence through the previous communist rule, one can distinguish between old and new political parties. While the first refer to the direct descendants of the former ruling parties and their satellite parties, the latter include newly formed parties as well as legally re-established ones. Gryzmala-Busse (2002, 14) labels as “successor parties” all the main political parties which arise from the ruling communist parties in 1989 and explicit claim their successor status. As regards the Visegrad countries, they are, respectively, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP), the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (SdRP), the Slovak Party of the Democratic Left (SDL) and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM). Differently,

the main direct descendants of former satellite parties are the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) and the Czech Christian-Democratic Party (KDU-CSL). They arise from parties which, after the World War II, are formally allowed to exist in exchange of 'unconditional acceptance of the leading role of the Marxist-Leninist party, the consistent application of the principle of democratic centralism, and unwavering support of the notion of eternal friendship and alliance with the Soviet Union' (Berglund et al. 1998, 37). Conversely, new parties do not rely on any legal organizational continuity through the authoritarian rule, either because they are **ex-novo** legally formed parties or because they are reconstituted historical parties. These latter are parties which, after the World War II, are either suppressed, namely the Hungarian Independent Smallholders Party (FKgP) and Christian-democratic People's Party (KDNP), or obliged to merge into the communist party, such as the Czech (former Czechoslovak) Social-Democratic Party (CSSD).

From the ideological point of view, the distinctions among post-communist political parties are more complicated than those concerning their historical origins. The main reason is that fifty year of communist authoritarian rule, with its monopolization of any official political discourse, have partly deprived left and right ideologies of oppositional meaning. In this respect, Hanley (2006a, 47) thinks that politicians in early post-communist politics can be seen not only as political entrepreneurs, but also as **ideological entrepreneurs**. Nevertheless, some parties' ideologies are more easily identifiable than others. Specifically, whereas it is quite easy to identify left-wing parties, defining who is on the right side of the political spectrum is a much more difficult task (Szczerbiak and Hanley 2006, 1). Indeed, with the only exception of the Czech CSSD, all major new left parties are identifiable in the communist successor parties. Differently, right parties include an array of nationalist, conservative, Christian, liberal and populist forces, which not only display significantly different ideological profiles, but also blur the boundary between far right and centre-right.

Moving from these considerations, in the next pages I will point out the major differences existing among left and among right post-communist parties. In this regard, I will take into account the explanatory power both of pre-communist and communist legacies, and their intrinsic causal relationship.

Left-wing parties

As said above, in Central-Eastern Europe, the main left political parties are those arisen from former communist ruling parties. The only exception is the Czech Social-democratic Party which, however,

does not play a major political role during the period considered here (1989-1994).

Ideologically, successor parties differ in terms of movements from communism to social democracy and from internationalism to nationalism (Bózoki and Ishiyama 2002, 6). Within this scheme, a **reformed party** (vs. **non-reformed party**) is a party which abandons the revolutionary orthodox Marxist-Leninist ideology to adopt moderate-leftist positions typical of western liberal democracy. Differently, a **transmuted party** (vs. **non-transmuted party**) is a party that moves away from the left cultural baggage towards nationalistic and anti-west ideology (*Ibidem*, 7).¹

Tab. 3.1: Typology of successor parties in the Visegrad countries

	Reformed party	Non-reformed party
Transmuted party		
Partly transmuted party	SDL (Slovakia)	
Non-transmuted party	MSZP (Hungary) SLD (Poland)	KSCM (Czech Rep.)

Source: Bózoki and Ishiyama 2002, 8.

In the literature on party identity change, different authors stress different explanatory factors, as electoral performance (Janda et al. 1995), existence of pretty close ideological competitors (Cox 1987), unexpected external challenges (Stewart 1991) and internal features of the party (Bózoki and Ishiyama 2002; Kitschelt 1995). As regards this last argument, Bózoki and Ishiyama (2002, 11) suggest a direct connection between the past regime type and the evolution of the corresponding successor party. According to them, successor parties rooted in communist regimes with tradition of internal contestation, interest articulation and bureaucratic institutionalization would be more likely to experience a social-democratization. Conversely, successor parties grown out of repressive and monolithic previous regime would be less able to implement this ideological shift.

I agree with the argument that the previous type of communist regime affects the level of ideological social-democratization in west-

¹ Differently, Gryzmala-Busse (2002, 14) distinguishes the successor parties between **regenerated** (MzSP, SdRP, SDL) and **not-regenerated** (KSCM). I adopt the typology of Bózoki and Ishiyama (2002) for two reasons. First, they consider the possibility of an ideological shift toward nationalism, while Gryzmala-Busse does not. Second, the focus of this paper is on the ideological identity, whereas Gryzmala-Busse uses some classifying criteria which are more related to the dynamics of party competition.

ern style of the successor parties², but I also state that the some explanatory power is also detained by the cultural and political traditions peculiar to each country. The empirical evidence from the Visegrad countries, in fact, suggests that some legacies of the interwar era persist through the post-1989 period, thus partly accounting for the different ideological pathways followed by the various successor parties. Moreover, the political dynamics – as well as the intrinsically interrelated economic patterns- of the interwar period have not only some direct influence on successor parties' identity, but also a casual effect on the subsequent type of communist regime. In particular, the variation in the kind of communist rule relies on older pre-communist patterns of state formation, economic development and political mobilization (Kitschelt et al. 1999, 21).

The main distinction in terms of communist rule is between the **national-accommodative** regime of Hungary and Poland and the **bureaucratic-authoritarian** regime of Czechoslovakia (Kitschelt et al. 1999, 23).³

In Hungary and Poland, during the interwar period, communist parties are marginal actors, led by urban intellectuals and lacking of mass-elite linkage through strong working-class movements (*Ibidem*, 22). In Poland, the communist party is rooted primarily among intellectuals and socially or ethnically marginal groups, being unable to broaden its support. In Hungary, the communist party is similarly weak, because of government repression, lack of socio-economic anchorage in a broader popular base and policies promoted by its party leaders (*Ibidem*, 97-99). The low level of industrialization of both countries accounts for the absence of a large industrial working-class, present only in the Budapest region and in the peripheral areas of Poland.⁴ Moreover, both communist parties are declared illegal by early 1920s. These are the reasons why, after the World War II, the Hungarian and Polish ruling communist parties cannot count on a strong working-class movement as natural power base (*Ibidem*, 22). This pre-communist legacy displays its effects from the 1950s onward. Indeed, after Stalin's death and the protest episodes in 1956, the decision of the Hungarian and Polish communist party to adopt accommodative strategies is rooted in the interwar communists' weak penetration of society, together with the experience of non-

² However, it must be recognized the role played also by the short-term dynamics of the transition period (Bózoki and Ishiyama 2002, 11).

³ There would be also the so-called patrimonial communism which characterizes, for example, Bulgaria and Romania (Kitschelt 1999, 23). Since this category does not apply to any Visegrad country, it is not taken into consideration.

⁴ Schöpflin (1993, 45) points out that the weakness of the Polish communist party is also related to the strong anti-Russian sentiment spread among the population.

communist civic and political association (*Ibidem*)⁵. This allows some form of economic and/or political liberalization. It also permits some degree of party internal pluralism, which accounts for the leadership replacement of old Stalinist cadres with new reform-minded figures in the late stage of the authoritarian regime. This new party leadership, in the late 1980s, engages a bargaining process with the opposition forces, which leads to a negotiated transition to democracy.

As regards Poland, in the 1970s, many leaders of the communist youth organizations move into lower leadership positions within the formal party. Hence, they later advance to top elite positions. They are more concerned by 'pragmatic problem solving, democratic voting procedures, and political bargaining and coalition forming' than by ideology (Gryzmala-Busse 2002, 46-7). This leadership's replacement permits, in 1990, the transformation of the Polish communist party into a social-democratic party. The Hungarian pathway to a new reform-minded party leadership is rather different. Within the Hungarian communist party, in fact, the concept of "constructive opposition" is developed already in the late 1960s, favoring early internal debates and some pluralism of expression (*Ibidem*, 55). Moreover, the party, instead of incorporating blue-collar workers, in the 1970s and 1980s 'deliberatively pursues the co-optation of the intelligentsia and administrative technocrats', whose know-how and professional experience is essential for the formulation and implementation of the party's reform policies (*Ibidem*, 54). Considering this background, it is not surprising that the Hungarian communist party is the first in the whole region to change into a social-democratic political force, already in October 1989.

The Czechoslovakian bureaucratic-authoritarian regime relies on a quite different pre-communist political experience. Indeed, Czechoslovakia has a comparatively industrialized economy during the interwar. Actually, the industrial activities are concentrated mostly in Bohemia and Moravia, where there is a substantial and class-conscious working class which favors the emergence of a powerful communist party. Indeed, Czech lands experience a high level of democratic pluralism during the interwar period and a wide working-class mobilization politically led by strong socialist and communist parties (Kitschelt et al. 1999, 40). Therefore, when liberal democracy is overthrown in 1948 and the socialist group compelled to merge with the dominant communist party, this could rely on a 'powerful, disciplined and thoroughly indoctrinated working-class organization' (*Ibidem*, 102). This permits the party to prevent the de-Stalinization process

⁵ For a further explanation on the national- accommodative communist regime, see the next section on the organizational legacies.

which, instead, takes place in Hungary and Poland in the 1950s. However, during the interwar, also the right-wing political parties have a strong mobilization appeal, thus representing a potential challenge for the subsequent regime. For these reasons the Czechoslovak communist regime is stuck to a strict ideological discipline and high repressive strategies against opposition till its sudden collapse in 1989. Yet, there is a major difference between the Czech communist leaders and the Slovak ones. The Czech leaders are more conservative, ideologically orthodox and promote till the end a career advancement process strictly limited to party ranks (Gryzmala-Busse 2002, 37). The Slovak leadership, instead, is less closed to external influences for two main reasons. First, the normalization following the Prague Spring is less deep in Slovakia than in the Czech lands⁶. Second, in spite of the decisional centralization desired by the Czech leadership, the federal framework of the country makes the Slovak communist leaders quite independent in actual activities. Specifically, the Slovak elite in power in the late 1980s comes from the Marxist-Leninist Institute of Bratislava, the Slovak party's main theoretical and programmatic organ, neglected by both central supervision and control commissions (*Ibidem*). As a consequence, at the time of the regime's collapse, the two federative components of the Czechoslovak communist party follow different ideological pathways. After the split of the party between the Czech KSCM and the Slovak KSS in 1990, this latter, shortly after renames itself "Party of the Democratic Left", thus officially marking its intention to become a western-style social-democratic party. On the contrary, its Czech counterpart never officially abandons the Marxist-Leninist ideology. The explanation for this divergence is identified primarily in the different kind of late communist leadership, which, in turn, relies on the Slovak more relaxed form of bureaucratic-authoritarian regime. However, the different levels of social and electoral entrenchment of the communist party in the interwar period in the Czech and in the Slovak Republics may also have some direct influence⁷. Indeed, during the interwar years, the communist party never plays a politically significant role in the still predominantly rural Slovak region (Kitschelt et al. 1999, 101). In this latter the dominant political divisions are related to nationalism and religion, because of the unsolved issue of state independence and nation-building, as I later will explain. In fact, after having been subjected to the Hungarian domination since the *Ausgleich* of 1868, in

⁶ For a further explanation in this regard, see the next section.

⁷ It must be said that Kitschelt (2002, 35) gives a different complementary explanation of this phenomenon. He traces it back to particular leadership choices during the transition, considering it a partial empirical anomaly which limits the explanatory power of the legacies-based approach.

1919 Slovakia becomes part of the federal Czechoslovakian state and so remains till 1989, with the only interruption of the Slovak Nazi puppet state experience (1939-1944). Therefore, while in the Czech lands there is a long-standing communist tradition on which the communist party in 1989 can try still to rely, in Slovakia, instead, the most viable political tradition is related to state-building and nationalistic issues. This is confirmed by the fact that, in 1989, many Slovak communists and separatists leave the communist ruling party and the anti-communist umbrella organization **Public against Violence** in order to found the populist-nationalist HZDS (Kitschelt 2002, 35).

Right-wing parties

Right-wing includes both centre-right and far right parties. In Western Europe, while the first emerge from the historical cleavages identified by Lipset and Rokkan (1967), the latter draw either from the refusal of post-fascist re-democratization in the mid-1940s (traditional far right), or from the opposition to the subsequent post-industrial evolution of the 1970s (new populist far-right) (Ignazi 2006). As already said, in Central-Eastern Europe the distinction between centre-right and far right is less clear. First, they both are products of the post-1989 re-democratization. Second, in several cases, they both reflect 'the legacy of the integral nationalism, authoritarian conservatism and collaboration with fascism that historically define the right in many states of the region' (Hanley 2006, 16).

However, empirically, it seems possible to distinguish the centre-right from the extreme far right on the basis of some electoral and programmatic peculiarities. In particular, in the early 1990s East-European centre-right parties appear: a) to usually rely on a larger and broader electorate; b) to have a 'coalition potential' (Sartori 1976, 325); c) to be affiliated (even if not members yet) to the European People's Party. Moreover, from an ideological point of view, the post-communist centre-right should be conceived as 'a set of parties seeking broad electoral support for programs fusing elements of (neo-) liberalism (including neo-liberalism) and varieties of conservatism, which balance the demands of post-communist social transformation, modernization, Europeanization with older historical identities and ideologies' (*Ibidem*, 22-3).

Consequently, in the Visegrad countries, between 1989 and 1994, the main centre-right parties are identified as follows:⁸

⁸ I do not consider regionalist and ethnic minority parties, such as the Movement for Self-Governing Democracy-Society for Moravia and Silesia (HSD-SMS) in Czech Republic and the Magyar Christian-democratic Coalition

- the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), the Independent Smallholders Party (FKgP), the Christian-Democratic People's Party (KDNP) and the Alliance of Young Democrats-Hungarian Civic party (FIDESZ) in Hungary;
- the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) and Solidarity's successors – namely the Democratic Union (UD), the Catholic Electoral Action (WAK), and the Center Democratic Accord (CDA)- in Poland;
- the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), the Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA) and the Christian-Democratic Union-Czech People's Party (KDU-CSL) in Czech Republic;
- the Christian-Democratic Movement (KDH) in Slovakia.

Differently, in the early 1990s, the extreme far right parties present on the post-communist political scene are the Czechoslovak Republican Party (SPR-RSC) and the Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIEP). Finally, in the middle, there are rightist political forces, such as the Confederation for an Independent Poland (KPN), the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) and the Slovak National Party (SNS), which share nationalist and (and in the two latter cases also populist) instances with the far right, but rely on a considerable electoral support and do have a coalition potential⁹.

All these parties have a common historical origin in the opposition to communist regimes before 1989 or the mobilization against them in 1989-90, but they differ in terms of relationship with pre-communist right-wing traditions (Hanley 2006, 15). Indeed, the identity of right-wing parties is shaped by both the dynamics of post-communist socio-economic transformation and older historical legacies. These latter are related to the late communist period as well to the pre-communist political experience. On the one hand, in fact, the level of anti-communism entrenched in right parties' ideology depends primarily on parties' origins. Specifically, whether they come from, respectively, strong anti-communist opposition movements, political forces mobilized just at the eve of the transition, or former satellites parties. On the other hand, the different inclination among right parties to adopt a specific programmatic profile relies mostly in older political traditions, which date back at least to the interwar pe-

(MKM) in Slovakia. Moreover, the anti-communist broad umbrella-organizations formed in 1989-1990 are excluded by this analysis, since they encompass liberal, conservative, environmentalist, nationalist as well as social-democratic forces, thus not displaying a specific ideological profile.

⁹ It must be said that the coalition potential is higher for the two Slovak parties, which actually govern together uninterruptedly from 1992 to 1998, than for the Polish one.

riod.¹⁰ However, as regards political parties directly arisen from the oppositional forces emerged in late communism, the kind of political counter-culture developed by their leaders may have more influence than long-standing political traditions in shaping parties' identity.

Before discussing the political-cultural legacies shaping the identity of the right post-communist parties, I suggest a classification of these latter based on a comparative revision of those proposed by major works on the subject.

Tab. 3.2: Classification of right parties in the Visegrad countries¹¹

	Centre-Right			Right		Far Right	
	Christian-Democratic	Agrarian	Traditional-conservative	Liberal-Conservative	Nationalist	Populist-Nationalist	Extremist-xenophobic
Hungary	MDF KDNP	FKgP	FIDESZ	FIDESZ SzDSz ¹²			MIÉP
Poland	CDA WAK	PSL		UD	KPN		
Czech R.	KDU-CSL			ODS ODA			SPR-RSC
Slovakia	KDH					SNS HZDS	

Sources: Comparative revision based on Bugajski (2002, 157-379), Hanley (2006, 13), Lewis (2000, 57), Minkenberg (2002, 349-52), Vachudova (2008, 392-4).

In the early 1990s, the presence of several and electorally significant right parties on the Hungarian political scene appears to be intrinsically linked to the long national tradition of right-wing politics. Here, during the interwar period, there is a dominant coalition of conservative parties which uninterruptedly rules the country from 1912 to 1939. Indeed, the experience of the “Hungarian Soviet Republic” in 1919 emasculates the already weak reputation of the left

¹⁰ Obviously, there is also an undeniable influence of the Western mainstream rightist ideologies, but these are consciously imported by East-European parties according to their affinity to the long-standing political traditions peculiar to each country (Hanley 2006, 15).

¹¹ This classification does not take into account the ideological shifts of some parties which take place after 1994. That is the reason why, for example, FIDESZ is classified as liberal-conservative (and not as traditional-conservative).

¹² SzDSz fits into this category only till 1992, when internal disputes between the liberal and the social-democratic wings, won by this latter, leads to the party's ideological shift towards a social-liberal profile (Agh 1999, 174).

political forces, causing the subsequent uncontested predominance of the Right (Grzybowski 1994, 170). In 1989, even if only the FKgP and KDNP have a direct continuity with pre-communist political actors, other post-communist right parties equally reflect ideological trends prior to the communist rule (Berend 1993, 111). Specifically, the agrarian FKgP is founded in the early 1920s and it has a quite broad electoral support, which leads to the party's victory in the first free postwar elections in 1945. This makes the party a too strong potential challenger for the communist regime which thus dissolves it. Its leaders are obliged to go in exile in the West or put in jail and if the party's activities partly continue, it is thanks to 'the persons of a few prominent fellow travelers' (Tökes 1997, 116). Instead, the post-communist KDNP relies on a shorter previous political experience, since it is founded in 1945 and dissolved in 1949. Nevertheless, its Christian-Democratic profile is rooted in a long-standing Hungarian Christian-ideology, which, in turn, is strongly linked to nationalistic issues deeply entrenched in the Hungarian political culture (Berend 1993, 124). In the early 1990s, right-wing populism based on Christian-national ideology strongly characterizes also the major ruling party, the MDF, as testified by the frequent irredentist references of its leader József Antall to the Hungarians living outside the national boundaries (*ibidem*, 122). Indeed, in 1993, the extremist MIEP splits from this latter, promoting anti-Semitic and biological-nationalistic policies and advocating the recovery of the old Hungarian territory that, on the basis of the Treaty of Trianon (1919), now belongs to the neighboring countries (Minkenberg 2002, 352). Finally, the two (initially) liberal-conservative parties, FIDESZ and SzDSz, are both rooted in strong anti-communist opposition movements. In particular, the origins of the latter date back to the 1970s, in an oppositional group standing for uncompromising anti-communism and the introduction of Western democratic values, right and liberties (Bugajski 2002, 351). These intellectual roots are subsequently reflected in the party's identity profile, which stresses anti-communist and liberal issues. FIDESZ is ideologically similar, since the only substantial difference is its marked youthful profile. Therefore, while the identity of the agrarian, Christian-democratic and far-rightist forces seems directly shaped by pre-communist political legacies, the programmatic profile of liberal-conservative parties appears more related to the previous communist experience.

In Poland, instead, the right political scene is less clear and crystallized. In fact, nowadays, the only Polish right party still electorally significant, among the four considered here, is the PSL. The primary cause of this situation relies on the fluidity and electoral volatility of Solidarity's descendant parties. In 1990, the main right parties emerged by the disintegration of Solidarity umbrella organization are

the Christian-democratic ACD and WAK, and the liberal-conservative UD¹³. Before assuming a more defined ideological profile in 1991-2, ACD and UD encompass different political tendencies. From this point of view, they seem to inherit Solidarity's internal structural problems. More precisely, the long permanence of their members within the ranks of Solidarity trade union, which from 1980 onwards rallies almost every anti-communist force and thus divergent ideological backgrounds, delays the parties' ability to rely on a coherent programmatic platform. In fact, it is anti-communism the only glue which keeps together the umbrella-organization, as testified by its rapid disintegration just one year after the fall of the authoritarian regime. As a consequence, the initial ideological vagueness of ACD and UD can be traced back to the political experience of their leaders during late communism. When, in 1991, ACD adopts a more clear Christian-democrat profile, it can rely on the long-standing strong Catholicism of the Polish people. This, in turn, is strictly linked to the political role historically played by the Catholic Church, which, till 1919, is the only institution representing the unity of the Polish people through centuries of partition of the national territory among foreign empires (Gueorguieva 2002, 49). Furthermore, during the communist rule, the Catholic Church is able to retain some autonomy and to be a privileged interlocutor of the regime. This is also the ideological base for the other formation grown out of Solidarity, the Catholic Electoral Coalition WAK. Its principal component is the Christian National Union (ZChN), a clerical-nationalist party 'which advocates that Catholic dogma should be the basis of the Polish politics and claims to embrace the interests of ethnic Poles in whole Eastern Europe' (Minkenbergh 2002, 349). Differently, the origins of KPN date back to 1979, when it clandestinely emerges challenging the communist monopoly of power and calling for an independent Poland (Bugajski 2002, 191). It is explicitly modeled on the ideas promoted by the General Pildulski, who, during the interwar, emphasizes the necessity of protecting the recently acquired national independence. Considering the Soviet Union as a threat to the Polish national sovereignty, it adopts since the beginning strong anti-communist tones, reflected in its subsequent calls for severe retributions against the deposed communist leadership and its accomplices (*Ibidem*). The PSL, as direct descendant of the former communist satellite United Peasant Party established in 1949, is even older than the KPN. The impact of historical legacies on its ideological profile is testified by its explicit attempts 'to legitimize itself by drawing on the traditions of, and seeking to establish an organizational and ideological conti-

¹³ There are other political forces arisen from Solidarity, but, until 1996 (when Solidarity Electoral Action is formed) they are unable to organize in a (at least electorally) unified formation, thus remaining insignificant in terms of popular support.

nunity with, the pre-communist peasant parties' (Zscherbiak 2002, 59). Poland, in fact, has a long and rooted agrarian political tradition, well illustrated by the fact that, in the 1920s, the most politicized conflicts are between urban and rural interests and there is a strong presence of electorally significant peasant parties (Kitschelt et al. 1999, 25). Therefore, the critical factors in defining the Polish Right are 'decommunization and attitudes towards the past, together with moral and cultural issues, particularly religiosity and the role of the Church in public life' (Hanley 2006, 60).

Looking at the Czech political arena, the oldest right political actor is the KDU-CSL, which originates from the merging of several Czech Catholic groups in 1918. Dissolved in 1938, it is restored in 1945 and during the communist rule is the only non-socialist party in Parliament. In 1989, it tries to overcome the negative impact of its subservience to the communist party emphasizing its long-standing Christian foundations (Bugajski 2002, 252). The two liberal-conservative parties, instead, arise from the disintegration of the Czech umbrella organization Civic Forum in 1991.¹⁴ Even if ODS is by far the most electorally successful party, they display a very similar ideological profile, basically conservative in the political orientation and liberal on the economic issues. Their leaders come from the dissident and technocrats communist counter-elites who, already in the 1970s, consciously import Western neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideologies as 'response to the failure of reform communism and as means for modernizing national political discourses' (Hanley 2006, 15). Thus, the ideological origins of the Czech liberal-conservative parties seem to rely more on the kind of oppositional forces emerged in late communism than on older historical rightist traditions. Indeed, the dissident movements of the 1970s develop an innovative political baggage, which encompass human rights, civil liberties and economic liberalism, instead of recalling pre-communist intellectual traditions (*Ibidem*, 36). Differently, the openly xenophobic and nationalistic profile of the extremist SPR-RSC does not seem to be rooted in any previous historical legacy. In fact, in interwar Czech Republic, support for antidemocratic parties is centered basically on the communist party and far right ideals, such as nationalism and anti-Semitism, have some popular appeal only in the areas with sizeable German concentrations (Wolchik 1993, 65). In this respect, the transfer of the Sudeten Germans in 1945-46 removes the basic historic focus of Czech nationalism. Therefore, SPR-RSC claims for an "ethnically pure" unified Czechoslovakia have no deep historical roots, representing an anomaly as to the explanatory framework proposed in this article.

Conversely, Slovakia enters the post-communist period with very

¹⁴ See the next section for further explanations.

different legacies in terms of Rightist political culture. Here the extreme Rightist traditions, related to the interwar People's Party and to the independent Slovak state of 1939, are still politically significant in terms of mobilization potential (Wolchik 1993, 65). At the republic-level, the Slovak People's Party (or **Ludaks**), a nationalistic, anti-democratic political organization centered on its leader's charismatic figure, is the main electoral force during the interwar. As it advocates Slovak autonomy and full independence as long-term goal, in 1939 it support the foundation of a Slovak Nazi puppet state (Bankowicz 1994, 145). The post-communist SNS, born in 1990, explicitly declares to rely on this political tradition and adopts the symbols, as well as the same nationalistic instances, of the **Ludaks** party (Wolchik 1993, 65). The historical viable issue of independent state-building affects also the ideological profile of the Slovak predominant political actor, HZDS, which grows out of the umbrella organization Public against Violence in 1991. At least till the late 1990s, HZDS is characterized by a strong populist and nationalistic rhetoric, which emphasizes the protection of the country 'from hostile alien influences' (Bugajski 2002, 292). Its leader Mečiar, who is also the Slovak Prime Minister from 1990 to 1998,¹⁵ develops a personality cult. He presents himself as "the father of the nation" and adopts an authoritarian political style, thus giving birth to the so-called "Mečiarism" (*Ibidem*). In this regard, Vachudova (2008, 388) suggests that the structural weakness of the Slovak anti-communist opposition not only accounts for the political predominance of such parties through the 1990s, but also allows them to appropriate the traditional nationalist discourse of the pre-communist right and to combine it with economic populism. Also the identity of KDH relies on a long-standing political tradition, that of Roman Catholicism. Indeed, interwar Slovak political divisions are based not only on national autonomy, but also on religion (Kitschelt et al. 1999, 101). Religious and nationalistic issues are intrinsically related, since Catholicism represents a distinctive character of the Slovak people **vis-à-vis** the predominantly atheistic Czech population. After being eclipsed by the establishment of the communist rule in 1948-49, the political Catholic tradition is able to remerge in the 1970s with the so-called underground "secret church", formed by Catholic anti-communist people and activist priests (Bugajski 2002, 305). The prominent figures of this Catholic dissident movement, especially Čarnougresský, become the driving-forces behind the creation of KDH in 1990 (Haughton and Rybář 2006, 119). In the light of these considerations, pre-communist legacies, mediated by the communist experience, seem to have a great influence on the ideological profiles of Slovak

¹⁵ There are only two short interruptions, one in 1991 and the other in 1992.

post-1989 right parties.

4

The Organization of Post-Communist Parties: Structure, Origins and Legacies

Authors generally agree on the fact that in post-communist Europe the most common form of party organization does not reflect the classic “mass party” model¹⁶. Kopecký (1995, 517), for example, argues that post-communist parties are formations with loose electoral constituencies, where the party leadership plays a prevailing role and party membership is subordinated. Likewise, Van Biezen (2000, 397), views East-European parties as largely dominated by office-holders and with a weak party organizational structure¹⁷. There are several explanations for the dominant presence of “catchall” or “electoral professional” parties in the post-communist political landscape (Ishiyama 2002, 273). I will point out just the ones directly related to the legacies of the past communist and pre-communist experiences¹⁸.

First, as already said, party systems of Central-Eastern Europe are unfrozen. This means that political parties cannot count on long-standing normative and organizational linkages with the electorate, differently from their Western counterparts, at least till the 1980s. These linkages have little chance to be built during the interwar years, since the rapid overthrowing of competitive democracy prevents the creation of a strong sense of identification between party and voters, at least in Hungary and Poland. Here, in fact, there are, at best, brief and erratic periods of competitive politics preceding the onset of authoritarian military rule (Rokkan, in Flora ed al. 1999, 366)¹⁹. Even where democracy lasts till the Nazi occupation at the

¹⁶ The reasons for the almost total absence of mass party types in post-communist Europe are quite different from those which have progressively led to the decline of mass party in Western democracies.

¹⁷ In this regard, it must be said that Lewis (2006, 140) disagrees, stating that, in spite of the top-down mode of party formation, in new Central-Eastern democracies – rather unexpectedly- **party in office** does not predominate over **party on the ground**. For the distinction among the party in public office, the party in central office and the party on the ground, see Katz and Mair (1993, 594).

¹⁸ Other explanations rely on the conditions of modern party activity (role of media, public funding of parties) and on the elitist attitudes of many party leaders (Lewis 2000, 103-116).

¹⁹ In this regard, Czechoslovakia is the only exception in the whole region, since here ‘we find an impressive series of regularly organized competitive elections after the independence’ (Rokkan, in Flora et al. 1999, 366).

end of the 1930s, as in Czechoslovakia, the subsequent communist authoritarian and monolithic rule, where almost no other party organization is allowed, does not permit the preservation of any kind of established loyalty between party and individual (Kopecký 1995, 518).

Second, at the time of the fall of communism East-European citizens are depoliticized and demobilized: they distrust parties and they do not identify with broad ideologies and party symbols. This means that, in the early 1990s, few people are willing to be engaged in party activities and to join party as members. On the one hand, this distrust can be considered a direct legacy of the communist regime for two different reasons. First, the communist experience leaves a large anti-party sentiment in the population, mainly in people not well integrated into the previous party-state (Rose 1995, 550). Second, in communist state party membership is often a prerequisite for occupational or educational advantage. In this way the regime, in constant search for public legitimization, co-opts citizens, thus making party membership a symbol of political manipulation (Toole 2003, 113). On the other hand, 'such sentiments often draw on deeply embedded feelings of suspicion and distaste for party political activity evident before World War II' (Lewis 2000, 103). In Poland, for example, there is a historically entrenched belief that political parties' foundation and activity are the primary cause for the unsuccessful attempt of building national unity through interwar years (Lewis 2006, 143).

In spite of these features, common to almost every post-communist party, there is a certain variation in the organizational structure between old parties – namely the successor parties of the communist parties and the descendants of their former satellite parties- and new parties established, or legally re-established, after the fall of communism (Kopecký 1995, 517). Moreover, some further variation in the organizational structure is also present among the different new political parties and among the different old parties. Thus, in the next pages, I will point out the main differences in terms of internal organizational structure between old and new parties, and within both category, outlining the divergent historical legacies which account for such variation.

New political parties

As regards the new political parties, while some are founded or legally re-established immediately after the fall of communism, others grow out of the disintegration of the so-called broad **umbrella movements**. All these new political actors rise from the oppositional forces against the previous authoritarian regime. With few exceptions, they generally are right-wing forces and, as Vachudova (2008, 395) points

out, the presence of a strong opposition to communism is essential to the rapid emergence of a dominant – and therefore necessarily structured – moderate right party²⁰. The strength of anti-incumbents forces before 1989 is affected by the type of communist regime into power in each country, and in particular by its level of toleration towards opposition (Kitschelt et al. 1999, 22). In this regards, there are pre-communist legacies which not only display a structural direct influence on new post-communist parties' organizational culture, but also have a casual effect on the level of communist regime's toleration towards opposition. Specifically, though each communist regime relies on a mix of repression and co-optation practices, after Stalin's death the different emphasis given to a particular compliance mechanism depends on the 'party bargaining power vis-à-vis actual or virtual opponents' (*Ibidem*). This, in turn, is linked to the mobilization and organizational skills developed by the different political forces in the pre-communist period and to the extent they represent a potential threat for the ruling communist party.

Generally speaking, new political parties – compared to old ones – are characterized by loosely affiliated membership associations and lack of strong organizational networks (Ziblatt e Bizziouras 2002, 290)²¹. This weak institutionalization is, in turn, connected to a strongly entrenched elitism (Lewis 2000, 104). Of course, their early acquisition of parliamentary representation does not favor the development of a solid organizational structure. However, there are other reasons more strictly related to communist and pre-communist legacies. First of all, new post-communist parties do not rely on a long-standing political and organizational tradition and therefore, their leaders lack the necessary skills to build political parties in western style (Lewis 2006, 144). Secondly, many new leaders have a marked disinclination towards party organization as form of political representation, because of the long experience of single party rule (*ibidem*). In Czech Republic, for example, the initial leaders of the Civic Forum, Vaclav Havel and Fedor Gal, are former intellectual dissidents with a distaste for formal party political organization which dates back to the normalization period followed to the Prague Spring (Held 1993, 67; Hanley 2006a, 40).

However, as the democratic consolidation advances, it is possible to distinguish different paths of new parties' organizational develop-

²⁰ There are only two major new political parties which are not right-wing: the Hungarian social-liberal SZDSZ (but only from 1992 onwards) and the Czech social-democrat CSSD.

²¹ According to Toole (2003, 113), the only exception to this general rule is represented by the Hungarian FKGP. See next pages for further details.

ment among countries. In fact, while in Hungary and Czech Republic there is an increasing pro-party attitude among politicians, in Poland anti-party sentiments persist even after the disintegration of Solidarity umbrella-organization (Lewis 2000, 142). Again, the major explanatory factors for this variation seem to rely on different historical experiences, characterized by a remarkable intersection between communist and pre-communist legacies. In this regard, it must be recognized that the different organizational trajectories of new parties are partly affected by other factors, mostly the strategic decisions of the communist ruling elite and their counter-elites in response to economic crisis or electoral defeats. However, these fundamental decisions can be understood only in the light of deeper structural legacies.

According to Evans e Whitefield (1993, 533), the variation among previous communist regimes in terms of opposition depends on the impact of the economic development on the patterns of interest articulation. This impact varies according to the type of communist rule. In this regard, the most fitting example is the divergent interest articulation of the oppositional forces in the late Hungarian national-accommodative and Czechoslovakian bureaucratic-authoritarian communist regimes, in spite of comparatively similar levels of economic modernization. In particular, while in the latter the opposition forces rally essentially in two broad umbrella organizations (Civic Forum and Public against Violence)²², Hungary experiences an early emergence of political parties with more defined programmatic and organizational profiles. Indeed, even though it is hard to find a common opinion among scholars, several authors distinguish the Hungarian Democratic Forum from other broad pro-democracy movements, stating that it is more similar to a political party than any other umbrella organization. First of all, it does not rally the majority of anti-communist forces, given the existence of several distinct political parties (Pisciotta 2004, 449)²³. Secondly, it is founded by conservative and nationalist exponents of the oppositional movements, who explicitly claim to have in mind the Austrian VPÖ and the German CDU as inspiring model (Fitzmaurice 1998, 155).

In Hungary, the early emergence of more organized political parties is the result of the intersection between the nature of its late communist rule and its peculiar historical experiences. Like Poland, Hungary sees a widespread open mobilization of non-communist forces during the de-Stalinization period. The post-totalitarian Hun-

²² The only parties present in the first democratic elections of 1990 are the regionalist HSD-SMS in Czech Republic, the nationalist SNS and the Christian-democratic KDH in Slovakia.

²³ The other political parties competing in the first democratic elections of 1990 are SzDSz, FKgP, KDNP and FIDESZ.

garian and Polish national-accommodative regimes, in fact, permit modest levels of civil rights and episodically elite contestation, relying more on co-optation than on repression in order to secure citizen's compliance (Kitschelt et al. 1999, 25). Here, during the interwar, socialist-communist parties are numerically and organizationally weak compared to bourgeois and agrarian ones. This pre-communist legacy displays its effects from the 1950s onwards. Indeed, after the death of Stalin and the protest episodes in 1956, the decision of the Hungarian and Polish communist parties to adopt accommodative strategies relies on the interwar communists' weak penetration of society, together with the experience of non-communist civic and political association (*Ibidem*, 22).²⁴

However, in Hungary the events of 1956 and the Red Army intervention deeply shock the ruling leadership, leading to a different kind of national-accommodative strategy (*Ibidem*, 100). Indeed, in the early 1960s, the ruling elite tries to obtain social consensus through economic liberalization and greater attention to consumers' demands rather than tolerating spaces of political dissent as in Poland. The economic liberalization has as indirect consequence the shift of political power away from the main economic institutions, thus helping the formation of skilled counter-elites (Evans e Whitefield 1993, 532). In the mid-1980s, the economic difficulties and the foreign indebtedness undermine regime popularity and compel the communist party to allow some political pluralism. As a consequence, some free labor unions are formed and already in the legislative elections of 1985 some independent candidates are admitted (Privitera 1996, 17). All this, together with the fact that the counter-elites can look back to the quite positive experience of interwar party politics (Lewis 2000, 143), accounts for the early emergence – between 1987 and 1989- of comparatively structured new political parties.²⁵ Among these, the agrarian FKgP is worth a special mention. Indeed, according to Toole (2003, 113), it is the only new political party with a quite large membership in whole Central-Eastern Europe, even though it cannot count on a professional bureaucracy comparably to that of old parties, an important legacy for the building of a large party organiza-

²⁴ In this regard, Poland experiences some intermittent higher repression against dissident movements than Hungary (Kitschelt et al. 1999, 40).

²⁵ Some authors point out also the role played by the defeat of Polish communists in the 1989 semi-free elections. This would induce the Hungarian communist reformers to call completely competitive and democratic elections, thus encouraging several political entrepreneurs to register their own parties instead of supporting a single anti-communist alliance (Kitschelt et al. 1999, 100). However, the formation of most Hungarian parties precedes the defeat of Polish communists in June 1989. In fact, MDF is founded in 1987, FIDESZ and SzDSz in 1988 and FKgP at the beginning of 1989. Only KDNP emerges in September 1989.

tion (*ibidem*). In this respect, the fact that FKgP is not a completely new-comer, but a party with significant political records in the interwar period and re-established in 1989 by some of its former leaders of 1940s, may have some explanatory power.²⁶

In spite of the presence of the same type of communist authoritarian regime, there are fundamental differences between Poland and Hungary which favor the early emergence of competing opposition parties in the latter. First, as above-said, in Hungary there is no encompassing movement like Solidarity, which rallies divergent opposition's orientations under a single umbrella and of which, in 1991, almost all new Polish political parties grow out (the only exception is the nationalist KPN). In this regard, a key explanatory factor for the political predominance of Solidarity within Polish opposition is the endorsement obtained by the Catholic Church at the time of its foundation in 1980 (Kitschelt et al. 1999, 98). Second, Solidarity is declared outlaw only after one year from its foundation. On the one hand, this does not prevent it from creating and maintaining an effective underground organization till 1989 (Korbonski 1993, 26). But, on the other hand, its perpetuated outlawed status does not enable its leadership, crystallized around the charismatic figure of Lech Walesa, to realize – and thus to face- the deep internal ideological divisions, which emerge on the surface only in the early transition period. These bitter internal divisions make ‘impossible to do anything other than put together a very loose and fragile construct’, first under the charismatic leadership of Walesa and then under the hegemony of Krzaklewski (Szczerbiak 2006, 73). Third, as already said, the Polish political culture is historically characterized by anti-party sentiments with roots in the first democratic experience of the interwar, which might explain the delayed formation of parties with coherent political appeals.

Differently from Hungary and Poland, communist Czechoslovakia is a bureaucratic-authoritarian regime, in which ‘the ruling party’s internal organizational strength and firm entrenchment in a broad industrial working class decrease its tolerance for political deviations’ (Kitschelt et al. 1999, 26). This difference in the type of communist regime is essential in order to understand both the birth and the first organizational developments of new Czech and Slovak political parties. The political experience of the interwar period is a key factor in explaining the low level of regime’s toleration towards opposition movements and its lack of economic and/or political liberalization. In Czechoslovakia, in fact, both socialist and communist parties as

²⁶ It is suppressed by communist in 1945. Even the Christian-Democratic KDNP has pre-communist roots, but not comparable to those of FKgP. The KDNP, in fact, emerges only in 1945 and it is compelled to dissolution in 1949.

well as their bourgeois opponents are well organized in mass parties before the advent of the communist rule. This makes anti-communist opposition forces potentially strong in mobilization terms, thus inducing the communist ruling party to adopt repression strategies and to tolerate little dissidence (*Ibidem*, 25). Yet, major differences exist between the Czech and Slovak pre-communist and communist experiences, which will be later pointed out.

Thanks to its high level of ideological and organizational discipline, the Czechoslovak communist party is able to prevail over the opposition forces till the very end. Even after the effort of a new party leadership in early 1968 to implement some economic reform, which culminates in the “Prague Spring”, hard-liners communists retake the control of the party in the name of the so-called normalization process. Differently from Hungary and Poland, here the “normalized” elite does not make any concession in the hope of greater popular inclusiveness and economic efficiency; instead, a highly repressive regime is re-established (*ibidem*, 27). In late communist Czechoslovakia, therefore, any opposition movement is forced to develop and act secretly underneath the surface till international circumstances are favorable enough to overthrow the communist rule in November 1989 (*ibidem*, 102).

Notoriously, the most famous Czechoslovak (predominantly Czech) democratic opposition group is Charter 77, a dissident movement founded in 1977. Charter 77, in order to avoid regime’s open repression, declares itself an intellectual a-political association (and not organization) without any statute, permanent organisms and enrolled members (Mink 1999, 104). Nevertheless, the regime adopts highly repressive countermeasures against its spokesmen, which, anyhow, continue their underground information activity till the end of the communist rule. The hard-line regime prevents the emergence of alternative political elites in spite of the relative high level of societal pluralism, thus impeding any early formation of proto-parties and forcing interest articulation into broad anti-communist umbrella organizations (Batt 1991, 35). The Czech Civic Forum and the Slovak Public against Violence legally appear on the national political scene in November 1989 led, respectively, by the most famous activist of Charta 77, Vaclav Havel, and by the father of the “Prague Spring” Alexander Dubcek (Bankowicz 1994, 157). The dominant Czech and Slovak new right political parties come from the disintegration of these umbrella organizations in 1991, even if in Slovakia there are two other significant right parties with distinct origins, namely the Christian-democrat KDH and the nationalist SNS.

Looking at the post-communist Czech political arena, the influence of the communist legacy on the organizational structure of new political parties is outstanding. Indeed, most leaders of the Civic Fo-

rum are people whose organizational skills and inclination towards party organization rely on communist experience. Indeed, they are former dissidents of the Charter 77 movement and members of the Forecast Institute, a communist economic think tank in Prague (Vachudova 2008, 395). While the former are philosophers and intellectuals with an anti-party conception of democracy, the latter are neo-liberal technocrats with a strong organizational culture. Their divergent visions about the future of Civic Forum, both in programmatic and organizational terms, lead, by the end of 1990, to internal conflicts and to the subsequent dissolution of the umbrella organization. On the one hand, a loosely organized non-partisan group (Civic Movement) is formed in the aim of preserving some of the original positions of Civic Forum. On the other, a hierarchically structured Civic Democratic Party (ODS), which still is the dominant Czech centre-right political actor, emerges under the leadership of the economist Vaclav Klaus (Wolchik 1993, 68). In this regard, the organizational and professional skills of ODS leading members evidently rely on their working activity within the technocracy of the old regime (Kitschelt et al. 1999, 102). There is another important party – even if it does not play a significant political role till the mid-1990s – which emerges from the disintegration of the Civic Forum, the social-democratic CSSD. It is a re-established party, which dates back to 1878 and which is forced to merge into communists in 1948. It initially emerges with deep structural problems, due to the presence of two internal distinct groups with quite different background legacies. One is led by the former Charter 77 dissident Battek, who initially decides to stay under the Civic Forum umbrella, and the other by the returned exiles Klaban and Horák (Bugajski 2002, 241). The successful re-organization of the party takes place only later, through the broadening of its extra-parliamentary support, which, at the end of the 1990s, relies on 18.000 party-members (*Ibidem* 2002, 242).

As regards the post-communist Slovak political arena, the organizational profile of new political parties relies on the peculiar status of communist and pre-communist Slovakia within the Czechoslovak federal framework. During the pre-communist interwar period, Slovakia does not develop a pluralistic civil society and the significance of the democratic experience is eclipsed by the growing resentment towards the Czech political and economic predominance (Wolchik 1997, 200). This produces a relatively little oppositional pressure to subsequent communist rule, thus accounting for the less punitive nature and more relaxed attitude of the authoritarian regime in the Slovak part of the federation (Haughton and Rybář 2006, 118). Even the “normalization” following the Prague Spring is less strict: the purge of supporters to democratization is less deep than in the Czech lands and the intellectual life not so tightly controlled (Wolchik 1997, 205).

In the 1970s, this allows the formation of the so-called “secret church”, within which the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) progressively develops. It is established from the bottom-up in 1990 (Haughton and Rybář 2006, 119) and its origins in the anti-communist broad catholic networks accounts, at least initially, for party members from both the countryside and several urban organizations with professional orientation (Bugajski 2002, 305). Differently, the strong national tendency in the Slovak communist ruling party provokes, during the transition, a transmigration of many former communist into the broad non-communist front Public against Violence (Kitschelt 2002, 20). Indeed, through the authoritarian rule, the republic-level communist leadership continuously fights for autonomy from Prague through local arrangements typical of national-accommodative regimes (Kitschelt et al. 1999, 41). Within Public against Violence, unlike the Civic Forum experience, the internal divisions concern more the ideological profile rather than organizational structure to be built. It breaks up in 1991 and its major heir is undoubtedly the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), a broad political party kept together by the charismatic leadership of Vladimir Mečiar.

Old parties

Compared to new political actors, they rely on considerable organizational resources and established social roots. This means that they are not merely what Bózoki and Ishiyama (2002, 3) call ‘clubs of notables or **couch parties**, where all members can fit on a single couch’.

As regards former ruling parties, at the time of the transition they can rely on a (comparatively large) residual membership, organizational resources and skills inherited from the previous regime. First of all, despite the significant reduction in their membership levels (since membership is no longer the **sine qua non** for career advancement), in the early 1990s successor parties still have a ‘reservoir of committed and locally organized members who can be electorally mobilized’ (Ziblatt e Bizziouras 2002, 290). Secondly, they can count on organizational resources such as local branches, regional councils and central commissions. Even if the new democratic rule imposes the immediate disbandment of their former workplace branches and the rebuilding of their organizations according to the new electoral districts, in several cases the new constituencies coincide with earlier administrative boundaries and thus with the former communist parties’ territorial structures (Whigtman 1998, 160). Thirdly, their long ruling experience favors the development of professional organizational skills among their personnel (Agh 1998, 117).

In 1990, the only not communist successor parties having a comparatively locally developed organizational network and a quite large membership are the direct descendants of former communist satellite parties, the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) and the Czech Christian-Democratic Party (KDU-CSL). Both parties already exist before the fall of communism and even in the pre-communist period. They share with successor parties organizational advantages in terms of personnel, material resources and infrastructure, even if the Czech KDU-CSL to a lesser extent. Thanks to their lasting organizational continuity, they are also able to retain some pre-existing level of party identification among particular segments of the electorate (Szczerbiak 2002, 557).²⁷ In particular, the Polish PSL, among all post-communist parties of the Visegrad countries, has the highest numbers of enrolled members, which in 1993 are 200.000, representing thus almost the 10% of party-voters (Jasiewicz 1994, 397-99).

Therefore, successor parties and the Polish PSL seem to fit into Kitschelt (1995, 457) category of “programmatic party”. Indeed, according to the author, the programmatic party shares with the classic mass party the continued influence of the organizational structure and of the activists. The membership is less crucial but continues to play an important role. However, in the programmatic party, the party in office does not merely act as delegate of the party organization, ‘since relations between party organization and the political elite are mutually supportive’ (*ibidem*).

In spite of these common features, it is possible to identify variation in terms of organizational resources among the successor parties. In fact, every former ruling party presents ‘different levels of membership, varying degrees of organizational capacity, and varying levels of financial resources’ (Ziblatt e Bizouras 2002, 299). I am aware that a focus merely on the communist legacies does not account for every aspect of this variation. But here the aim is to point out how the nature of the previous regime affects the type of transition, which in turn affects the type and the amount of organizational resources retained by successor parties after 1989. Indeed, the divergence among communist regimes in terms of distribution of political resources, mobilization capabilities and cognitive orientation influences the alternative pathways to the democratic transition undertaken in the different countries in the late 1980s (Kitschelt et al. 1999, 29). In particular, ‘varying in resources and orientations of the competing actors shapes opponent’s ability to challenge the incumbents and the in-

²⁷ The importance of the organizational continuity of KDU-CSL through communism is stressed by the fact that party’s officers explicitly state that the vast majority of party’s members “are old guard with identity going well back to the interwar period (Kopecký 1995, 524-5).

cumbents' propensity to make concessions to their challengers' (*ibidem*).

At the eve of the transition, in the Hungarian and Polish national – accommodative communist regimes, the communist leadership is largely composed by reformists. Moreover, both countries have already experienced some kind of liberalization process, either in economic or political terms. At the same time, the opposition, here, can count on strong public support and quite large – compared with other oppositional forces in the region- resources and organizational skills. These conditions lead to a negotiated transition, in which the counter-elites finally have the right to compete for power and the communist ruling party still has some political and economic assets (*ibidem*, 30). In Poland and Hungary, therefore, the extended period of bargaining and compromise allows the communist party to take preventives measures to maintain at least some moderate control over its resources (Ziblatt e Bizziouras 2002, 295)²⁸. Furthermore, during the so-called roundtable negotiations, the Hungarian MSzP and the Polish SdRP, the two respective successor parties, cooperate with their political competitors for the creation of a state-centered financing system on the basis of parliamentary representation, on which they can later rely (*ibidem*, 296-7). As a consequence, the Hungarian MSzP and the Polish SdRP do not necessarily need party membership for the maintenance of their organizational structure. Therefore, their quite low level of membership, however relatively high if compared to that of newly emerged parties, is not a problematic issue, as they can count on a state-centered financing system and other kinds of organizational assets.²⁹ In particular, they 'benefit from strong institutionalized links with trade unions, *nomenklatura* business elites, and other economically based interest groups' (Orenstein 1998, 474). Moreover, from the internal structure point of view, the Polish SdRP is characterized by a hierarchical structure, a homogenous organization at the national level and controlled member's mobilization (Markowski 2002, 58).

Differently, in the Czechoslovak bureaucratic-authoritarian communism, the ruling elite keeps repressing the opposition forces till the end. But, as soon as the international situation becomes favorable, the ruling party is overthrown by large waves of mass protest. The implosion of the regime leaves the former elites with low bargaining power, thus permitting to the civic oppositional forces, together with part of the technical-administrative personnel, to take power quickly.

²⁸ Markowski (2002, 55) points out how the SdRP retains most of the real-estate, funds and logistical apparatus of the former party.

²⁹ In 1993 the Polish SdRP counts 65.000 members, and, in 1995, the Hungarian MSzP on 36.600 (Toole 03, 106-107).

The sudden collapse of the regime allows anti-communist forces to confiscate all major communist assets before the party is able 'to arrange the transfer of whatever might be salvaged from its well-established holdings' (Lewis 2000, 111). In this regard, the refusal of the intransigent and monolithic communist party to come to an arrangement for change is the primary cause of its inability to rescue its resources in the democratic order, as the counter-elites, once in power, rapidly dismantle its organizational apparatus (Kitschelt et al. 1999, 31). However, the subsequent split of the communist party between the Czech KSCM and the Slovak KSS (shortly after SDL) in 1990 implies different consequences for the future of the two successor parties' resources. During the transition the main aim of the Czech KSCM is to retain as many of its members and resources as possible (Grzymala-Busse 2002, 91). In this regard, it can rely on a mass membership and organization to a significantly greater extent than the other former ruling parties in Eastern and Central Europe (Hanley 2002, 154). In fact, at least till 2001, the Czech successor party relies mostly on its member's contributions for gathering material resources (Ziblatt e Bizouras 2002, 298). Moreover, in spite of the properties' confiscation at the time of the transition, the KSCM is able to re-build a central apparatus and a national-wide organizational network by late 1990s. This network is based on local organizations, which are quite autonomous self-managing and often self-financing units (*Ibidem*). Differently, in the early stages of the transition, the main aim of the Slovak SDL leadership is the organizational centralization of the party and the creation of membership firmly contrary to the inclusion of radical ex-communist activists (Ziblatt e Bizouras 2002, 297). Consequently, on the one hand, the SDL statute stresses the centrality of the party congress, which is in charge of electing the party leadership (Fisher 2002, 131). On the other hand, the party intentionally and strategically participates in the creation of a state-based financing system, which provides some autonomy from member's contributions, thus enabling to restrict membership only to reform-minded activists (Ziblatt e Bizouras 2002, 297).

5

Conclusions

The aim of this article was to show how different historical legacies can help to explain the significant variation, in organizational as well as ideological terms, among the political parties emerged in the immediate aftermath of the fall of communism. Stressing the importance of communist and pre-communist organizational and cultural

legacies in shaping the identity of post-communist left and right political forces, I tried to underline the major explanatory power, though not exclusive, of the path-dependence approach. Indeed, I admit that these legacies might be mediated by short-term factors such as political actors' strategic decisions during the transition's critical junctures or the retroactive effects of the new institutional choices. In this regard, it must be recognized that the trajectory of communist rule itself (**national-accommodative** vs. **bureaucratic-authoritarian**) plays as much mediating role, since it 'creates the bridge between pre-communist and post-communist modes of political mobilization' (Kitschelt 2002, 39).

Variation among communist regimes in the levels of monolithic nature of the ruling elite, ideological orthodoxy and compliance strategies, is traced back to older patterns of state formation, economic development and political mobilization. The explanatory power of communist regimes' legacies towards the post-communist political parties' shape is twofold. On the one hand, they affect the level of successor parties' social-democratization as well as the size of organizational resources at their disposal in 1989. On the other hand, they account for the organizational skills, inclination to party politics and personnel recruitment of the oppositional forces from which emerge, with only few exceptions, almost any major right political organization.

Yet, even among communist regimes characterized by similar formal institutional arrangements, there are differences in the organizational and ideological development both of the communist ruling party and its oppositional forces. That is the first reason why longstanding pre-communist cultural and political differences must also be taken into account. Moreover, the explanatory power of pre-communist experiences goes beyond the simple variation among subsequent communist regimes, directly affecting the ideological orientation and programmatic profile of post-communist political parties. Indeed, these latter rely on cultural differences which reflect 'the subjective perception of history and politics, the fundamental beliefs and values, the foci of identification and loyalty, and the political knowledge and expectations which are the product of the specific historical experience of nations and groups' (Brown 1977, 1).

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