It is often assumed that the prospect of EU-membership has been a guiding-line and contribution to the democratisation process in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. However, what is less known is the parallel process of integrating the political parties in Central and Eastern Europe into the West European party families. This process took place in the shadow of public media and yet it has had implications for both the EU-enlargement and democratisation process in the region. This is the main theme of this book.

The purpose is to analyse how the Christian democrats, the social democrats and the liberals have managed to integrate like-minded political parties from Central and Eastern Europe into their European party organisations. The purpose should be seen against the context of the opportunities as well as challenges they faced in this context. The opportunities lay in a unique possibility to strengthen the party family by recruiting new members and to influence the potential member parties, of which many emerged in a political vacuum. The challenges were at the same time difficult considering the differences in historical experiences, organisational culture and ideological identity vis-à-vis the potential member parties. This book explores how the West European party families dealt with mainly the challenges and the dilemmas that arouse throughout this process. These dilemmas often involved a tension between egoistic and altruistic motives and this is the first theoretical theme of this study. The second theoretical theme is related to the possible impact of the European party families on the applicant parties and is discussed from two opposite views: a case of Western neo-colonialism or a case of a positive contribution to democratisation.