The Eastward Enlargement of European Parties
Party Adaptation in the Light of EU-enlargement

av

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Abstract


The aim of the study is to map out and analyse the integration of political parties from Central and Eastern Europe into the main European party families. The prospect of eastern enlargement of the EU implicated opportunities and above all challenges for the West European party families. The challenges consisted of integrating new parties with a different historical legacy. The study focuses on mainly how the European party families handled these challenges and what motives that have driven them in this engagement. At a more general level the thesis sketches two alternatives interpretations of the process: Western neo-colonialism and contribution to democratisation. The method used for the study is comparative case-study method and the main sources that have been utilised are party documents and in-depth interviews. The study is delimited to the three main European party families: the Christian democrats, the social democrats and the liberals. The countries of interest in Central and Eastern Europe are those post-communist countries that became EU-members in 2004 and 2007: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. The time-frame is limited to the first party contacts in 1989 to the final inclusion of the new parties in 2000-2006.

The results suggest that the European parties have responded with ambitious means to the challenge of integrating new parties from a post-communist context. They have set up new coordinating bodies and organised educational programmes for the applicant parties, mainly directed to young politicians. The Christian democrats and the social democrats have also used parallel organisations as buffer-zones, which provided certain flexibility. As for motives, the Christian democrats stand out as the party family with the clearest power-oriented motives. At the other end, the liberals stand out as the party family that is most steered by ideology and identity. The social democrats went through a change with ideological considerations dominating the early phase and became increasingly power-oriented as the EU enlargement drew closer. When it comes to the two alternative interpretations of this process, the main conclusion is that they are intertwined and more or less impossible to separate from each other.

Keywords: Transnational political parties, European Union, Central and Eastern Europe, Christian democracy, social democracy, liberalism.

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