



Europe as an Issue Dimension in the Party Politics of Central East European Candidate States

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on political party discourses and developments *vis-à-vis* European integration in the former CEE candidate states for EU membership, with particular attention to the case of Romania. Exploring the domestic dimension of these countries' accession provides insights into policy-making, party strategies, and party interaction in the post-communist context. The key objective of the project is to examine a number of factors inspired by the Western experience that drive the responses of political parties in regard to European integration. More specifically, the relevance of parties' (1) ideology, (2) relations to electorates, and (3) interactions within the party system make the purpose of investigation here. First, the role of ideology is scrutinised across the CEE region using statistical methods as well as a combination of party manifestos and expert survey data. The main conclusion to be drawn from the CEE analysis is that parties' ideological makeup represents a necessary yet insufficient consideration for how parties react to Europe. Therefore, the thesis suggests that in order to arrive at a more compelling explanation of parties' EU attitudes, the importance of electoral links and competition for office needs to be factored into the discussion, alongside political ideology. Given a series of methodological constraints and opportunities, the dynamic interaction between these three factors in influencing parties' European stances is assessed in the case of Romania. This in-depth study relies on secondary literature, different opinion polls, and qualitative information from various party and media materials in order to map five Romanian political parties ideologically, establish their party-type, and review their European orientations. The overall conclusion of the Romanian case study is that only the interplay between the three features – parties' ideology, their relationship with voters, and inter-party strategies – can offer a reliable guide to the positions adopted by political parties toward EU integration.



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Bio

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