

BOOK REVIEW

Tim Haughton (editor), Party politics in Central and Eastern Europe. Does EU membership matter?, Routledge, 2011, 192 pages, ISBN-13: 978-0415567497

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Although there has been some research in older EU member states into the impact of European integration processes on national party politics and Western scholars (particularly Robert Ladrech and Peter Mair) have developed theoretical frameworks for such research, this field is still under-researched. The 2004 EU enlargement has brought about a new wave of such research. However, these endeavours involving new EU member states' domestic experts tend to be more or less the products of book projects or special journal issue projects and have not been based on research projects as usually understood (e.g. volumes edited by Susanne Jungerstam-Mulders in 2006, by Lewis and Mansfeldová in 2006, by Fink-Hafner and Ladrech 2008, by Lewis and Markowski, 2011). The book edited by Tim Haughton continues this tradition and expresses the high commitment of both a few leading authors' from older EU members (and one from the U.S.) and more numerous collaborators from the recent EU member states.

The book consists in eight chapters starting with Tim Haughton's chapter defining some key questions on the role of EU membership on party politics in Central and Eastern Europe. It is followed by chapters on assessing the impact of the EU on party politics in Hungary (Agnes Batory), Poland (Aleks Sczerbiak and Monika Bil), Estonia (Allan Sikk), Slovenia (Alenka Krašovec and Damjan Lajh), the Czech Republic (Vít Hloušek and Pavel Pšejja) and Slovakia (Tim Haughton and Marek Rybář). The concluding chapter by Stephen Whitefield and Robert Rohrschneider attempts to answer the question whether the relationship of European and integration issues to the broader issue bases of party competition has changed in the period from just before and just after the EU membership.

As some previous publications have already addressed the question of whether EU membership matters for national party politics or not, it is important to reveal the particular contributions to this volume.

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First, the volume contributes to fill the gap in the empirical basis needed to answer theoretically interesting questions. The country chapters provide such a basis and moreover, offer a more sensitive insight that makes additional distinctions in the otherwise general assessment of the rather weak EU impact. The Slovenian chapter, for example, shows that generally, the EU impact on Slovenian party politics is rather weak; however, governmental parties are more frequently pushed into a situation when they need to take a stand on EU related issues. Also, political parties which gained MEP seats have been more pressured to organizationally adapt to their supranational level activity through their MEPs. According to Agnes Batory, individual parties in Hungary differ in terms of the high scores of some indicators of Europeanization and low scores on others. What seems to be the only obvious impact is the introduction of European elections and the related phenomena. However, if there have been any EU impacts they seem to have added to the already existing national developments. Similarly, when Aleks Szczerbiak and Monika Bil estimate that an overall direct EU impact on Polish party politics has not been significant, they also note that the impact varies among parties - parties being members of the large European party federations and EP groupings being more affected by »Europe« than those which are not members of Euro-level party groupings. Polish political parties also seem to vary in the level of openness toward EU influences although it could be generally estimated that »Europe« has been assimilated« into the logic of domestic party politics. The Czech example also seems to be complex. Although Vít Hloušek and Pavel Pšeja stress on the limited Europeanization impact on party programmes, organizations, the structure and content of party politics and policy, they still recognize the potential of the (indirect) Europeanization impact via inter-party contest in the policy field. Similarly, Tim Haugton and Marek Rybář find not only limited impact of EU membership on party organization and programmes of Slovak political parties, but also in terms of using Europe as a reference point in inter-party competition over particular policies. On the contrary, Allan Sikk (when analyzing the case of Estonia) estimates that the EU impact is very limited due to national political parties preoccupation with pre-existing patterns of party competition and Tallinn's business rather than their business in Brussels. Expert survey data presented in the chapter by Stephen Whitefield and Robert Rohrschneider does not contradict the overall country expert analysis on the limited impact of the EU on parties in Central and Eastern Europe. Furthermore, it stresses the similarities among CEE as well as similarities with established democracies.

Second, the volume addresses methodological issues in measuring the EU impact on national party politics. While in the first chapter Tim Haugton offers a framework for measuring the EU impact by using benchmarks (the role of European Policy specialists within party decision-making, the impact on the

distribution of power within parties, the use of the European issue in inter-party competition, prominence of European issues in party programmes and impact of links with European party federations or EP groupings), on several occasions authors of other chapters stress methodological problems in actually measuring the top-down impact of European integration processes (especially Agnes Batory). Nevertheless, Allan Sikk points at the bottom-up stream of the impact as well as the possible 'boomerang' effect of MEP's affecting domestic political competition. In studying this possible two-way stream of impacts Sikk stresses additional methodological problems caused by the reality of small EU member states where EU specialists in small countries tend to be small in number and (also due to this fact) may remain side-lined. The last chapter is based on the methodology developed in older democracies and confirms the theoretical expectations that formal EU membership does not make a difference in real-life politics, which had been involved in EU integration processes in many previous years and which cannot change overnight. All in all, the authors are not convinced that the 'EU factor' can be isolated. Rather, they tend to assess the EU impact as one among many factors influencing domestic party politics.

Third, although the volume seems to be more or less stressing similarities among the investigated countries, the chapters did bring interesting insights into dissimilarities, which have been under-researched. As other research projects which have looked at the Europeanization processes in various fields (including both older and more recent EU member states) and have revealed that some similarities and dissimilarities among countries are not simply determined by a country being an old or new EU member state (old or young democracy), also the findings of the reviewed volume call for further, more broadly conceptualized research.

It can be concluded that the book is a valuable contribution to the field of studying the Europeanization of national party politics as well as a source of encouragement to carry out more systematic research of both - top-down and bottom-up Europeanization processes - which could significantly contribute to the development of a still missing theory of European party politics.