

Responsible Party Government? Explaining Party Stances on European Integration in Post-Communist Eastern Europe

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Abstract

The preponderance of scholarly literature suggests that East European parties fail as yet to function as sources of “responsible party government”. If true, such failure would be of concern for post-Communist democratic consolidation and, given the considerable evidence of growing skepticism about economic and political integration in these states, for the enlarged European Union itself. We therefore investigate the relationship between party stances on integration issues and various criteria for assessing “responsible party government” using data from an expert survey of party stances conducted by the authors in ten post-Communist states. A range of possible explanations for growing party Euro-skepticism are tested, including the nature of political cleavages, party families, competitive status, and contextual factors that give parties incentives to mobilise against the costs of integration. Our results indicate that the bases of Euro-skepticism are actually compatible with three criteria of “responsible party government”: parties provide viable alternatives; they supply coherent policy packages; and the national context predictably and similarly influences the behaviour of all parties within given countries. Despite this positive picture, however, we also find grounds for concern about democratic consolidation because of the on-going connection between system-level political cleavages, cost-mobilization, and parties’ integration stances.

1. Introduction

This paper addresses two connected questions. What accounts for the stances taken by political parties in post-Communist Eastern Europe towards economic and political integration with the European Union? And what implications have these stances for the emergence in post-Communist states of what Schattschneider terms ‘responsible party government’? To answer these questions, we examine information from an expert survey about the stances of 70 parties in ten post-Communist countries.

As we show, there exists a considerable degree of skepticism about EU integration among parties in accession states, a pattern that parallels the growing skepticism of mass publics about integration more generally (Cichowski 2000; Jasiewicz, 2003; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2004). To explain these patterns at the party level is politically and theoretically important for the following reasons.

Politically, we anticipate that EU governance, as well as its further expansion, may become considerably more contested and problematic at the party level in the post-accession period than during the pre-accession years. Moreover, the political effects of greater contestation will be exacerbated if the character of Euro-skepticism in post-Communist states differs significantly from established member states, such that ‘old’ and ‘new’ EU members do not share a ‘common political space’ (Marks and Steenbergen, 2002).

Furthermore, growing skepticism is politically problematic because the two processes of integration and democratization are intertwined in the post-Communist world. A number of scholars have pointed to the fact that political elites in post-Communist states saw economic integration with the West, including NATO and the EU, as a means of safeguarding against any return to Communist or authoritarian rule (Tucker, Pacek and Berinsky, 2002; Zielonka and Pravda, 2001). In so far as integration issues may remain attached to democratic consolidation, more controversies over integration with the EU may have an unintended, reverse effect – rather

than being a means to democratic consolidation, problems with integration may make consolidation more problematic.

Theoretically, the questions raised at the outset are important because the integration issue provides a good opportunity to examine whether political parties in new democracies reflect the onset of “responsible party government”. It is widely accepted in the literature about democratic representation in mature democracies that political parties are the central intermediary between mass preferences and government policies (see e.g., Schattschneider 1942; Klingemann et al. 1994; Dalton 2002). However, party systems in Eastern Europe often lack several characteristics that provided the basis for stable party governments in established democracies: voters are more volatile (Miller et K. 2000), party organizations weaker (Kreuzer and Pettai 2003), and party-voter attachments relatively tenuous (Toka 2004). These traits raise the question whether parties can fulfil their central role as mediators between citizens and policies. Accordingly, after we develop several criteria of a “responsible party system”, we analyze whether parties in new democracies frame debates over European integration in ways that are consistent with these criteria.

A central reason why prior research on European integration does not address these issues is the lack of systematic, comparative information about party positions in Eastern Europe. The existing literature typically focuses on a single country, or a few nations at most (Bielasiak 2002; Kopecky and Mudde 2002). In addition, they typically rely on subjective classifications of party stances. Even the most comprehensive study to date contributes to empirical and conceptual ambiguities in party stances about European integration (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004).¹

¹ The following problem illustrates the problematic character of this literature. While Taggart and Szczerbiak distinguish between “hard” and “easy” integration issues, where easy issues are those that invoke little opposition and hard ones those issues that spark controversies, the distinction becomes nearly tautological: hard issues are those that, according to the authors, are controversial; easy ones those where controversies are presumably absent (Kopecky and Mudde 2002).

These studies also tend to rely on models used to describe West European party systems, such as a cleavage approach (Marks et al., 2002; Dalton 2002). Given the conditions under which integration occurs in Eastern Europe, however, one cannot take for granted that the same model explains party stances towards integration in the West and the East.

This paper, then, seeks to contribute to the party system and integration literatures by (1) developing three criteria of responsible party government; (2) describing the degree of Euro-skepticism; (3) assessing the sources of party stances on integration. The data are obtained from an expert survey conducted by the authors in late 2003-early 2004 that contains indicators about where parties stand on various integration dimensions and about the nature of domestic conflict structures more generally. This provides a unique database to systematically assess where parties stands on integration - which is supplemented in the analysis with nation-level indicators - and allows us to assess the factors influencing party stances on this question.

2. Responsible Party Government: Three Essential Criteria

The role of political parties as mediators between citizens and governmental policies is widely recognized in Western democracies (Budge, Klingemann, et al. 1987; Dalton 2002; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). Perhaps nothing signals the import of parties in democratic institutions more than the fact that parties quickly became the main competitors in elections in Eastern Europe and Latin America soon after elections became the mainspring of legitimate political power. Viewed superficially, one might conclude that the pillars of a party government travel easily from the context of mature democracies to newly established ones.

However, the conditions under which parties in new democracies compete have raised a great deal of skepticism about whether parties can perform their intended role as mediators. Analysts typically point to the lack of a stable reservoir of voters derived from societal segments that habitually support a party (e.g., Lawson, Rommele, and Karasimeonov 1999), and the high

degree of voter volatility (Kreuzer and Pettai 2003) even by the standards of a dealigned western electorate (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000).² Furthermore, post-Communist political parties are distrusted just as much as in the West (Mishler and Rose 2001). At the party-level, party organizations change frequently (Lewis 2001), so that voters frequently do not get to choose from the same set of countries over time. No single study concludes that the concept of responsible party government is inapplicable to new democracies. But the preponderance of this evidence implies the distinct possibility of party failure as effective mediators of the public interest, and suggests the inapplicability of the responsible party government concept in new democracies.

We agree that parties in new democracies face conditions that make it difficult to perform effectively as responsible agents of a party government. But we also think that it would be premature to conclude on this basis *alone* that party systems are ineffective. Indeed, there is some evidence, again from the level of mass publics, that the social and ideological bases of voters' choice are fairly consistent over time and rooted in fairly stable socio-economic characteristics (Whitefield 2002; Colton and McFaul 2003; Jasiewicz 2003). These studies imply that parties and voters are able to coordinate programs and interests, notwithstanding the fluidity and volatility of formal party organizations and nominal voter choice.

What we are left, then, with is inconclusive evidence from analyses of mass publics about whether or not responsible party behavior is possible in new democracies. We think a central reason for this is that prior research does not consider systematically how parties *themselves* frame an important issue - and what criteria to use in evaluating their democratic role.

Policy, Coherence, and Context

² The literature on dealignment in western democracies bemoans the growing volatility in advanced industrial democracies (Dalton et al., 1984; Dalton and Wattenberg 2002). Note that volatility rates in post-Communist societies are considerably higher than in the dealigning electorates of Germany, Great Britain, and Italy (Miller et al 2000).

What does responsible party government mean at the level of party systems? The literature on party government has developed several key criteria (for a succinct summary, see Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). While we cannot consider all of them in this paper, the left most column in table 1 outlines three criteria that party systems must meet at the policy level before one would conclude that parties in the region behave responsibly—or, conversely, that they lack the capacity to do so: (1) parties offer viable policies; (2) these policy stances are linked to parties' other programmatic goals; (3) national factors that *should* influence parties within a nation similarly indeed affect them in predictable ways.

--Table 1 about here--

Policy Alternatives. Most analysts of political parties agree that if (nearly) all major parties do not adopt a policy on an issue deemed important by citizens, then parties fail to live up to one key requirement of responsible party government (Budget, et al. 1987; Klingemann et al. 1994). For if citizens are divided over an important issue dimension, then some parties should be in favour of integration (to stay with our example) and others oppose it if they act responsibly. In order for this criterion to be meaningful, however, it must also be the case that the policy alternatives are not just provided by minor, insignificant parties--some, if not all, major parties must line up at different ends of the programmatic spectrum. This premise, for instance, underlies directional models of party behaviour (e.g., McDonald, Listhaug, and Rabinowitz 1991), proximity models (e.g., Westholm 1997) and the salience approach underlying the party manifesto group (Budge et al. 1987; Klingemann et al. 1994). Thus, a first criterion for effective party government is as follows:

Criterion 1: all else being equal, if mass publics are divided over an issue dimension, major parties must offer viable alternatives on that issue dimension in order to act responsibly.

Programmatic Coherence. A second standard is a party system's programmatic coherence. This criterion is derived from cleavage-based accounts of party stances in Western Europe that stress the importance of pre-existing ("frozen") divisions in constraining how parties position themselves on new political issues (Lipset and Rokkan 1967: p. 50). According to the classic account of the formation of cleavages, parties that favour one issue position on an important line of conflict also tend to be for (or against) another issue dimension. From the perspective of a responsible party government, the connections between issue positions across policy domains increases the governability of nations (Klingemann et al. 1994): policy disputes occur primarily between parties and their constituencies, not within--a process which aggregates the multitude of possible issue combinations to a manageable few. In short, programmatic coherence facilitates the concise formulation of policy packages at the level of party systems, which in turn enables parties to communicate with voters over policy alternatives. Thus our second standard:

Criterion 2: all else being equal, parties must display programmatic coherence in order to be able to act responsibly.

National Conditions. The third criterion stipulates that if all parties are affected similarly by national conditions (e.g., a pressing issue emerges), then cross-national variation of party positions should be systematically related to these varying differences in country conditions. This is the least developed principle of the party government concept in the literature. Most alignment and party organization studies do not link national conditions to properties of party systems even though this logic is clearly explicated in Lipset and Rokkan's study about the evolution of party systems (1967). For example, the early differences among West European party systems are accounted for by "the conditions and sequences of nation-building and in the structure of the economy ..." (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967, p.35) What Lipset and Rokkan's analyses explicitly suggest is that cleavage structures and, subsequently, party stances on issues vary in predictable ways with cross-national differences in national conditions. Naturally, the art is to identify the conditions that matter concerning a specific issue dimension. What we note here is our third

criterion for responsible party government in general, and below identify those national conditions we deem important for the integration issue:

Criterion 3: all else being equal, varying country-level conditions pertaining to an issue dimension systematically and predictably influence the stances taken by parties on integration issues.

Summary. Taken together, these three yardsticks define the minimal conditions for responsible party behaviour. If all three conditions are absent we would surely conclude that responsible party government is unlikely to exist: parties do not provide viable policy alternatives on a conflict deemed important and divisive by publics, or only minor parties do so; main cleavage structures are weakly connected to an important policy dimension; and country-level conditions have little predictable influence on how parties frame an issue dimension. If, on the other hand, party systems meet all three conditions, we would consider this as evidence of responsible party behaviour--major parties provide alternatives on an important issue dimension, link it to other programs, and behave predictably when viewed from the perspective of the conditions prevalent in nation-states.

3. Responsible Party Government and European Integration in Post-Communist Europe

European integration is an excellent issue to examine whether parties behave responsibly in the new democracies. It is a relevant issue in all post-Communist societies that joined the EU on May 1, 2004 and in countries that hope to become members in 2007 (Bulgaria and Romania). Given the enormous adjustments that all applicant-states must meet before they are admitted to the EU (e.g. Moravcsik 1999), no analyst questions the political importance of European integration to new and prospective member-states of the EU.

European integration has also become a contentious issue in most post-Communist countries, certainly in those nations that joined the EU on May 1, 2004. While a consensus

prevailed among post-Communist elites and publics to become integrated into the West shortly after the fall of the iron curtain in 1989 (Hughes et al. 2002; Zielonka and Pravda, 2001), this consensus began to crumble, both at the level of mass publics and political parties. Opposition to the EU became more pronounced at the level of mass publics especially in first-wave accession countries throughout the mid-1990s, including the three Baltic states (Ehin 2001), Czech Republic (Kucia 1999; Pickel 2003), Hungary (Kopecky and Mudde 2002), Poland (Bielasiak 2002), and Slovenia (Adam et al. 2002).

Figure 1 illustrates three characteristics of citizens' views about the EU. First, when publics evaluate the EU in principle, substantial proportions of publics have a fairly positive image of the EU.³ However, we also note that there are warning signs for the EU even at this general level. In some cases, notably Estonia, but also Hungary and Poland, fewer than fifty percent evaluate the EU positively at this general level. Second, publics in the two candidate countries (Bulgaria and Romania) are more positive than first wave countries at this general level: support levels exceed 70 percent which is reminiscent of the strong support the EU enjoyed during the early 1990s in the new EU member-states. Third, evaluations of the EU are substantially lower when citizens consider the positive or negative contributions of the EU to their country in specific policy sectors, such as unemployment, immigration, and crime.⁴ While non-positive responses to this question do not necessarily mean that individuals reject the EU entirely, such figures portray a substantial uneasiness about European integration in all ten nations, including Bulgaria and Romania.⁵

³ The question wording in the fall 2003 candidate barometer is: "And, in general, do you have a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative, or very negative image of the European Union?" Response categories range from 5 (very positive) to 1 (very negative), with a "neutral" middle category (3).

⁴ "And for each of the following issues in (OUR COUNTRY), do you think that the European Union plays a positive role, a negative role, or neither positive nor negative role?"

⁵ Nearly identical patterns emerge when we examined the EU contribution to crime and immigration.

In sum, European integration is an important and divisive issue among citizens in all post-Communist countries. It thus provides a good opportunity to study responsible party behaviour within the same issue contexts across a range of countries.

Criterion 1: Do Parties provide Policy Alternatives on European Integration?

As mentioned above, previous analyses rely on single country studies or a few cases at best, which by definition hinders a broad-based assessment of how parties address an important issue. A first goal of the current paper, therefore, is to systematically describe party positions about the desirability of a country's integration with the West, and their position about economic and political integration. Given the importance of integration for the region, and the growing opposition to the EU, we would expect that the following hypothesis receive support if criterion 1 of a responsible party governments is met:

Hypothesis 1: Party Systems cover the range of publicly relevant policy alternatives, from strong support for integration to strong opposition to it.

In addition to offering policy alternatives, however, criterion 1 is only meaningful if the range of alternatives is covered not just by a small number (or a handful) of insignificant parties. That is to say, if all major parties support integration (as they did early in the 1990s), then we may conclude that party systems do not offer viable alternatives on integration even if a very minor party voices opposition to the EU. It is thus important to know exactly *what kind* of parties support integration.

As Budge, Robertson and Hearl (1987) have argued, parties compete on issues they perceive as most likely to maximise their electoral advantages, and choices about where to stand on European integration, therefore, may hinge on calculations about the effects of staking clear and distinct claims on the issue or minimising its importance. Some analysts, therefore, argue that

party size and incumbency status shape party stances on integration (Hix and Lord 1997; Taggart 1998; Kopecky and Mudde, 2002, Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2004). Parties that are less central to the system – in size and status– may be more likely to take clear and distinct positions that draw attention to themselves. Given the elite consensus in favour of European integration, this ‘directional’ strategy in post-Communist systems is much more likely to be favoured by Euro-sceptic parties. By contrast, ‘winners’ in the existing party system – large or governing parties– will take median positions in order to defuse issues, while peripheral parties will take extreme positions to shake it up.

These studies thus stress the competitive status of parties: those who hope to benefit from a Euro-skeptic stance will espouse it; most others will support integration. In this scenario, party systems do not act responsibly because parties’ existing competitive status rather than the publicly relevant policy alternatives is the primary determinant of stances on integration. Thus, if the viable policy criterion is met, we would expect that the following hypothesis is *not* supported:

Hypothesis 2: Larger parties and government parties are more supportive of integration than smaller, opposition parties.

Criterion 2: Do Parties provide Coherent Policy Programs?

Students of European integration who approach parties’ integration stances from a cleavage-based account would conclude that the second criterion is met. This conclusion, however, holds only if the lessons from Western Europe can be applied to post-Communist societies. Clearly, in Western Europe, there is evidence that parties’ stances on integration are closely connected to their position on other policy domains (Marks et al 2002). But to determine if this criterion is met in Eastern Europe, we must consider the near simultaneous introduction of market economies and liberal democracies, along with their recent Communist past.

The dual transition made it likely that there would be considerable similarity across countries at least about the main political cleavages. At the moment of transition, integration with the West was already ideologically packaged together with systemic market and democratic change⁶. Though the precise character of political divisions in post-Communist Eastern Europe may vary (Whitefield, 2002), systemic transformation – building democracy and the market - is one of the major lines of conflict in the party systems of these states. Therefore, the cleavage approach would predict that parties (and citizens) connect these issues to existing divisions over these differences. In short, if the coherence criterion is met, we expect the following hypotheses to be confirmed:

Hypothesis 3: Parties that are pro-market and that prioritise the development of national democracies support integration more strongly than parties opposing these goals.

A related argument in the West European literature emerges in the research on party families. This is unsurprising, since party families essentially stand for positions on the cleavages identified in the West European literature (cf. Mair and Mudde 1998). Thus, the left-right cleavage is made up by parties ranging from communist to conservative; the church-state cleavage is accounted for by Protestant, Christian-Democrat and liberal parties, etc. In accounts of the party stances in Western Europe, therefore, there are typically substantial relationships of integration to the relevant party family. Marks, Wilson and Ray (2002), for instance, point to the negative stance taken by parties of the extreme right and left and to the greater levels of support that may be found among social-democratic, liberal and conservative mainstream groups. Party family, therefore, provides an additional and complementary source of programmatic structure.

However, although the assumption of comparability and utility of the concept of party families has been made by some scholars of post-Communist parties (Lane and Ersson 1996;

⁶ See Zielonka and Pravda (2001) and Whitehead (1996) for a discussion of the importance of international integration to ambitions for democratic consolidation.

Kopecny and Mudde 2002), it is resisted by those who find only limited empirical applicability in Eastern Europe (Waller 1996). Communist rule collapsed rapidly, on the basis of a broad programme of transition that encompassed many potentially distinct party families in initial overarching coalitions. In this context, party families of the form found in the West – which are used to label parties in Eastern Europe - may not be linked to the basic lines of conflict in post-Communist societies or provide programmatic structure to integration issues.

Thus, the research literature provides conflicting views about the role of party family in supporting responsible party government in Eastern Europe. However, if the coherence criterion is met, we expect that the following two hypotheses about the impact of party family may be supported. First, party families should be related to EU stances in bivariate analyses (because party families reflect party stances on main conflict dimensions); and, second, because party family reflect political cleavages, these relationships should disappear once we control for the policy stances of parties on basic conflict lines:

Hypothesis 4a: Party families at the programmatic centre are more supportive of integration than party families at the programmatic extreme in bivariate analyses.

Hypothesis 4b: These bivariate relationships vanish once party stances on domestic conflict lines are considered simultaneously.

Criterion 3: Do National Conditions lead to predictable Party Stances?

While the least amount of attention in the party government literature has been devoted to national contextual factors, some students of West European party systems have noted that party stances toward international integration are significantly affected by the national context in which they are operating. This ‘international relations’ approach emphasises the differential national effects of integration on citizens’ economic interests, and indeed tends to see integration as primarily an extension of efforts to defend or enhance sectoral or state interests in a transnational context (Waltz 1979; Moravcsik 1998). National context, in short, matters.

But what are the mechanisms through which parties are prompted to channel such factors into domestic policies? One hypothesis follows from the premise that party stances towards integration are more likely to cover the range of policy alternatives when integration becomes a relevant issue for a given country. In that case, parties should begin to balance the pros of EU membership against the potential downside. While EU membership holds out the prospects for substantial benefits, the short-term costs of membership in the EU are immediate, tangible, and undeniable (e.g., unemployment rates increase). And if parties act responsibly, they should begin to debate these disadvantages in addition to the benefits of EU membership. We termed this a cost mobilization approach in an analysis of why publics in first wave nations are especially likely to view integration skeptically (identifying reference), as they do in the fall of 2003 (see figure 1). In these nations, which joined the EU in May 2004, parties which oppose integration may see opportunities to mobilise mass sentiments against the general ideals of a single market; or they may mobilise against what they present as a loss of political sovereignty; or the ‘diktat’ of the EU on minority rights.

The third criterion, then, leads to a hypothesis that stresses the influence of economic reforms on parties’ integration stances:

Hypothesis 5: Parties in countries with more reformed economies are more likely to oppose integration than parties in countries with less reformed economies.

Summary. The three criteria for responsible party behaviour lead to six testable hypotheses about how party systems frame European integration in domestic political debates. To test them requires information about party stances, and to link them to other party characteristics. The purpose of the following sections is to introduce the expert survey, measures, and results.

4. The 2003-2004 Expert Survey on European Integration

In order to measure party stances, we use data from an expert survey conducted by the authors in late 2003 and early 2004, supplemented by publicly available information on other characteristics of political parties, citizen support for parties, and country-level reforms. (Details on the precise question wording from the expert survey and sources for the additional measures are found in Appendix A.)

Thirteen East European states were included in the study, comprising the post-Communist states scheduled for accession in 2004 (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia), later accession (Bulgaria, Romania), as well as states that are not scheduled for entry at all (Moldova, Russia and Ukraine). The analysis that follows is based on the ten ‘first’ and ‘second’ wave accession states because market and political integration are relevant for them.

For each country, we assembled a master list of experts containing 264 names. We included experts on our list if (1) they had published in English on either party systems or European integration; (2) were recommended to us by known experts in the field; (3) were known to us from our own contacts. The survey achieved 111 respondents (42 percent)⁷, giving us, therefore, an average number of respondents per country of more than 8.5 – with no country having less than six. Inglehart and Huber (1995) suggest that one should target a minimum of five experts per country. While any minimum N is somewhat arbitrary conceptually, their strategy is validated by Gabel and Huber (2000) who find that the Inglehart/Huber left-right indicator is closely related to data from other sources, including public opinion and party manifesto data.

An important question is whether the results of our expert survey produce valid results. A way to do this is correlate indicators from our survey with those of others. Fortunately, about 9

⁷ We consider this a conservative estimate of the response rate because it considers all experts, including those with multiple email addresses who never replied to our email (we used the last email known to us). If these respondents are excluded from the denominator, then the response rate exceeds seventy percent).

months before we went into the field a group at (identifying reference) conducted an expert survey on party stances about European integration in East-Central Europe. The two surveys overlap with 57 of the same parties (in 9 countries). In order to validate the quality of the two expert surveys, the two teams combined dataset and analysed the relationship between the most similar and relevant measures (identifying reference). This analysis shows that (i) regarding political integration, both surveys place parties at nearly identical points--the correlation coefficient (pearson's r) is $r=.956$; likewise, the two surveys produce closely related estimates of party stances on market integration ($r= .868$); and on the general left-right ideological stance of parties ($r=. 865$). This evidence strongly suggests that the two surveys produce high-quality information about party stances in post-communist countries.

5. Party Stances about Integration

Following many claims in the literature about the complexity and multi-faceted character of the integration process (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2004, Kopecky and Mudde, 2002), we asked experts to evaluate party stances on three separate measures of integration. Each of these dependent variables is analysed separately, which gives us more leverage in testing the responsible party government thesis:

- West integration in general—whether a party favours closer ties to the West;
- Political integration—whether a party favours the development of a Europe-wide government without specifying a specific form of polity;
- Market integration—whether parties favour the creation of a Europe-wide market.

These indicators tap party policies about integration at a fairly high level of abstraction. It would be easy for parties to adopt a party position that proclaimed a pro-integration stance in principle, while criticizing detailed aspects of integration. Our measures therefore may actually

underestimate the extent of programmatic coherence by diminishing the levels of actual policy differentiation offered by parties.

--figure 1 about here--

Do parties offer programmatic alternatives?

Figure 1 presents the position of all parties in 10 countries (the first and second wave nations). The horizontal axis describes a party's position on general WEST integration, where "1" represents complete opposition to it and a "7" represents unqualified support for it. On the vertical axis, we plot party stances on Europe's political and market integration. The pooled figure (bottom of the graph) indicates that parties supporting WEST integration also support Europe's political integration ($r=.94$) and the integrated market ($r=.82$). And those who favour political integration also frame market integration favourably ($r=.90$).

As even a quick glance across the country plots suggests, however, there is considerable variation in the degree to which these positions cluster. Some country plots, notably those for Hungary and Poland, display as near-perfect a match with the party government criteria as one is likely to find in the empirical world.

Many nations, however, defy this clear pattern. In Bulgaria, for instance, parties cluster in the upper right quadrant, which indicates that parties are in the pro-integration camp on all 3 dimensions; none of the parties falls below the mid-point of "4" on any of the dimensions. Even in this party system, however, we see some signs of skepticism. The Bulgarian Socialists (BSP) and the DPS (Movement for Rights and Freedom) are quite ambivalent on the market dimension, though they do not express outright opposition to integration (as they do not fall below the mid-point). Romania follows this general pattern, except for the xenophobic PRM, which clearly rejects greater integration along all three dimensions. Here we find the pattern typical of pre-accession posturing among parties--they do not formulate the pros *and* cons of EU accession.

Other nations display yet another pattern: a linear relationship within the upper-right quadrant (e.g., Lithuania), which suggests that parties differ in their degree of enthusiasm for

integration--but they broadly agree on accession. Another example of this pattern is found in the Czech Republic where parties are clustered in the “support quadrant”, except for the Czech Communist party (KPCM), which opposes integration, and the Civic Democratic party (ODS), which mainly opposes political integration but supports economic and broader west integration.

A third, and final, pattern indicates that while the relative position of parties on all three dimensions follows a similar pattern—support on one dimension is related to support to another—levels of support vary across each integration dimension. For instance, note that the conservative SLS in Slovenia is quite skeptical of market integration whereas it supports political and general West integration.

When viewed from the region as a whole, then, there is quite a bit of support for hypothesis 1. In contrast to much of the integration literature, which for post-Communist countries assumes that “easy” integration approaches the status of a valence issue, we find considerable variation over how supportive the main parties are of European integration. The summary scores support this conclusion: while the majority of parties supports integration, over one third is skeptical about general West integration (the party score falls below 5); 40 percent are skeptical about the EU’s political integration; and 42 percent are ambiguous or oppose further market integration. This is a remarkable degree of opposition to these integration dimensions, which, again, exist at a fairly high level of abstraction such that it would have been fairly easy to agree with a new regime. Parties therefore appear to fulfil at least part of criterion 1 of the responsible party government model, by offering a broad range of publicly relevant policy alternatives.

An additional yardstick relevant to regarding the policy criterion, however, is that opposition to integration is not limited to fringe parties. To gauge the status of parties within a given party system, we use two measures. First, we added the percentage of the popular vote that

a party received in the last election prior to our survey.⁸ Second, we added a dummy variable measuring whether a party is part of the government at the time of the survey.

Table 2 suggests that there is indeed a statistically significant and fairly substantial bivariate relationship between parties' competitive status and their integration stance (table 2 about here). This suggests that larger parties are more likely to support West, political, and market integration. Furthermore, governing parties are also more likely to support various integration stances. However, visual inspection of the bivariate scatterplot also indicates that this effect is mostly due to those nine parties (13 percent) that received 25 percent and more of the popular vote in the last election. When these are excluded, the bivariate evidence for the bulk of parties (N=61; 87 percent of parties) is reduced to statistical insignificance.⁹ On balance, though, we view this as initial evidence as supporting the competitive status model.

--Table 2 about here--

Do parties display programmatic coherence?

As the discussion above suggested, this question relates both to the relationship of integration issues to the cleavage structures and to party families. We deal with each of these in turn.

Cleavage structures: We asked experts an open-ended question on the importance of several conflict dimensions in each party system.¹⁰ It turns out that the degree of government involvement in the economy is the front-runner nearly everywhere;¹¹ the average score for all ten countries for conflicts over the desired role of governments in the economy equals mean=1.9. A closely related second economic dimension--whether parties prefer a non-market economy over a market regime--is a second domestic line of conflict (mean= 3.5 for item B in Table A1). Another systemic dimension—how important is democratic consolidation to a party platform—also

⁸ In case of newly founded parties, we entered zero percent.

⁹ The relationship between WEST, political, and market integration with party size, respectively, are: $r=.21$; $r=.11$, and $r=.17$ (N=61).

¹⁰ We asked experts to rank those conflict dimensions that constitute the 4 most important cleavages in a country's party system. Experts were offered the ten conflict dimensions listed in the appendix. If a cleavage was not mentioned by an expert, it received a score of 5.

¹¹ Only in Poland are distributional issues trumped by religious issues.

emerges among the top 3 conflicts (mean=3.6). Far from being resolved, then, the market and democracy dimensions remain the central structuring force of domestic conflict lines in post-Communist party systems.¹²

After experts identified the four most important lines of domestic conflict, they then indicated parties' position on these four dimensions.¹³ Because party stances on the two economic dimensions correlate strongly ($r=.91$), we formed one additive indicator and refer to it as parties' distributional stance in the following analyses.

The bivariate relationship between parties' distributional and integration stances are quite strong indeed (table 2). They range from $r=.62$ (with political integration stance) to $r=.77$ (for market integration). Similarly strong linkages emerge between the democracy dimension and the three integration dimensions. Compared to the competitive status dimensions, the coefficients are more than twice as large, providing the strongest bivariate support for the cleavage model.

Party Family: Another aspect of the coherence criterion focuses on the influence of party families on integration stances. After an initial classification of parties into ten detailed categories, we finalized the party family indicator to include: Communist, Socialist, Liberal, Christian Democrats, Conservative, Nationalist, and a residual category containing other parties.

The bivariate relationships are again quite substantial. Extremist parties at both polar ends of the programmatic spectrum are less likely to support any of the three integration dimensions. This initial evidence thus also supports the argument that extremist parties are less likely to view integration positively.

Do parties respond systematically and predictably to country-level conditions?

The cost mobilization model hypothesizes that parties in the most successful reform countries are more likely to oppose integration than parties in the less successful reform countries. We

¹² There is, of course, considerably variation across party systems but the analyses of country-specific patterns of cleavage structures goes beyond the scope of this research and will be examined in a separate study.

¹³ Experts used a seven-point indicator where 7 represents the pro market and democracy position; and 1 the opposite position.

measured the reform success of country economies with the scores developed by the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). A positive sign would conflict with the prediction of the party government model; a negative sign would support it. Evidence once again supports this hypothesis. The coefficients are statistically significant--and, equally important, they are negative, as is predicted by the model. In order to assure that the EBRD scores do not just pick up the effect of a country's affluence, we also include United Nation's measure for of national wealth ¹⁴ (HDI) which also correlate negatively, though more weakly, with the integration dimensions.

Overall, then, the initial evidence provides *prima facie* (i.e., bivariate) support both for and against the case for responsible party government. On the one hand, there is evidence to suggest that parties' integration stances diverge, align with underlying cleavages and with party family, and vary with national conditions. On the other hand, however, there is also evidence, that competitive status and party size matter. What is needed, therefore, is a multivariate analysis in order to sort out which of these relationships survives its more stringent demands.

Multivariate Analyses

We estimate the model using HLM that was developed to account for the complex error structure in data from more than one level, such as our party and country level data (Steenbergen and Jones 2002; Bryk and Raudenbush 1992). Given our interest in modelling the influence of party and country-level factors on parties' integration stances, a hierarchical linear model requires the formulation of two equations. The first equation models the influence of party-level factors on integration stances:

$$\text{Integration Stance} = \beta_0j + \beta_1 \text{ Election} + \beta_2 \text{ Incumbency} + \beta_3 \text{ Economy} + \beta_4 \text{ Democracy} + \beta_5 \text{ Left Extremism} + \beta_6 \text{ Right Extremism} + e_{ij} \quad (1)$$

¹⁴ Socio-economic affluence correlates with EBRD reform score at $r=.87$.

The party-level model contains measures of parties' competitive status (the first two variables), domestic conflict dimensions (the third and fourth indicator), and party family (left and right extremism).

The second equation captures the influence of contextual variables on cross-national variation in party stances on integration. This is captured in HLM through the influence of macro variables on the intercept from equation 1 where the "j" subscript indicates that the intercept varies cross-nationally:

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}EBRD + \gamma_{02}HDI + \delta_{0j} \quad (2)$$

The country-level model captures the argument that economic reforms create economic problems in the short run which in turn should prompt all parties within a nation to pay greater attention to the downside of European integration. Note that equation (2) contains an error term as well: unlike in OLS, a hierarchical linear model does not assume that the intercept is entirely determined by the country-level factors.

We first estimated the impact of market reforms on each integration dimension without the inclusion of the national affluence indicator because of the limited degrees of freedom at the country level (N=10). However, because the results do not differ when the HDI measure is excluded, we only present the final model in table 3.

We note, first, that government status is now only weakly related to a party stance on integration. One coefficient is significant but two are not. However, greater support emerges for the party size argument: two of the coefficients are highly significant, and when we remove the incumbency variable from the equation, it passes the p=.05 threshold for political integration as well. Evidently parties that are large are more likely to adopt a favorable stance on integration than smaller parties. The bivariate analyses already suggested, however, that this influence is limited to the nine largest parties. If these parties are excluded, the effect disappears, just as in the bivariate analysis.

--Table 3 about here--

We do note, however, that the inclusion of the largest parties does produce evidence that is inconsistent with the viable policy criterion. For the analyses suggest that the largest parties are more likely to favour integration than smaller ones. Note that this finding tends to conflict with the argument that *only* smaller parties are more likely to use the integration issue to improve their electoral fortunes (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004).

Turning to the evidence regarding the coherence criterion, we note that it receives again substantial support. The two cleavage indicators are significantly and strongly related to party stances in all six cases. Some of the unstandardized coefficients are in fact unusually large. For instance, when parties are moved two points on the pro-market dimension, they are moved about half a point on the integration dimensions. Politically, the pattern is consistent with the argument that political elites in the region view integration as a vehicle to consolidate the national, democratic regime transition. We find similarly strong relationship for the distributional indicator; parties that are pro-market are substantially more likely to support European integration. In short, the basic lines of domestic conflicts are closely linked to party stances on European integration.

Further evidence for the coherence criterion follows from the insignificance of the party family predictors. After the inclusion of the conflict indicators, the communist indicator is now insignificant; and the nationalist party indicator remains significant only in one instance. Overall, this is evidence in support of H4b: the party family predictor by and large reproduces the main fault lines of domestic conflicts. In this sense, our analysis suggests that party family is relevant to post-Communist party systems and, as in Western Europe, that party families tend to be connected in predictable ways to the cleavage structure.

Turning to the evidence regarding the third criterion--the cost mobilization process--we again find support for it. In countries where markets work well (they receive a higher EBRD score), parties are *less* likely to support WEST integration. Importantly, the same result emerges

for parties' position towards the EU's political integration, which is opposed by parties in the more reform-oriented nations; and it applies to Europe's market integration as well. The consistently strong, direct, and negative effect of economic reforms on parties' willingness to support integration indicates that the costs of economic reforms are being debated by political parties *especially* in the first wave accession countries.

5. Conclusions

Is responsible party behaviour possible under the conditions of fluid electorates and weak party organizations in new democracies? We answer in the affirmative. Our study supports the conclusion that parties approximate three essential criteria of a responsible party government. Despite the fact that parties face volatile electorates, or are weak organizationally, they offer meaningful policy alternatives on an important subject; they consistently link it to salient lines of domestic conflicts, and they especially provide meaningful alternatives where they have a reason to do so, namely in nations which joined the EU in May 2004.

Normatively, these results are pleasing and point to the fact that parties in post-Communist societies, on the whole, communicate with voters in ways that are consistent with the idea of party government. Moreover, they concur with other findings that indicate that citizens' *actual sense* of the democratic process in post-Communist states depends significantly on the performance of representative institutions including parties, rather than on economic or policy factors (Evans and Whitefield 1995). This study focused on three minimal though essential criteria for party government. Having shown that they are approximated reasonably well in new democracies is no reason for jubilation precisely because these are minimal criteria. But our study suggests that parties are more capable to communicate to voters coherent and concise policy alternatives than one would think given the implications derived from analyses of vote and organizational volatility alone. In our view, this calls for more studies that should directly analyze the capacity of parties to meet their democratic role as intermediaries between citizens and the

state. But it also indicates that the performance of parties may be viewed more positively than the predominant stance in the literature currently suggests.

This paper also sustains a number of important conclusions of relevance to the emerging literature on the political and economic integration of post-Communist Eastern Europe. We find strong support for the applicability of cleavage accounts in understanding party stances about integration. This clearly supports the conclusions by Marks, Steenbergen, et al. who favour this model in Western Europe. What differs across the former East-West divide, however, is which lines of conflict form the basis for integration stances. In the West, it is primarily socio-economic division, along with a material-postmaterial dimension. In the post-Communist region, it is socio-economic divisions, along with the consolidation of democracies. The ideological package of system transformation, including integration with the West, that structured the initial transitions in Eastern Europe, therefore, appears to remain central to how parties place themselves on Europe today.

We also find evidence that parties respond ‘rationally’ but not so much in the manner suggested by ‘competitive status’ accounts. While larger parties are more likely to support integration, contextual effects that give incentives to parties to be Euro-skeptic explain a *larger* part of the difference between parties. In particular, in more advanced market economies where integration is of greater relevance, parties are more likely to take negative stances towards it. Our evidence, therefore, diverges from the earlier conclusions of Taggart and Szczerbiak (2004). What we see is not that Euro-skeptic parties operate on a different cleavage dimension from more successful mainstream parties – as the competitive status approach might predict – but that parties *across the political spectrum* on the central lines of conflict are independently moved towards greater Euro-skepticism by proximity to integration.

We see a final theoretical implication--this time for students of integration and party behavior in mature democracies. Few studies examine the interplay between national conditions and party stances on important issues, such as European integration. Even fewer analyses

examine the degree to which the relationship between parties and voters is conditioned by national context. A lesson from East-Central Europe is, clearly, that national conditions need to be considered in examining lower-level relationships.

Politically, our findings have at least two important implications for the European integration process. First, in so far as post-Communist party systems deal with integration on the basis of system-level transformation cleavages, they differ from Western Europe. If, as Marks and Steenbergen (2002) argue, European politics would be complicated by parties occupying different ‘political spaces’, the accession of post-Communist states looks likely to be complicating. Parties – in common with citizens in Eastern Europe – are likely to consider integration based on much broader system considerations and less so on instrumental grounds—an important difference to the West European party space.

Second, when Europe was popular, its connection to democracy and market building was probably very positive for system transformation. Indeed, given the marked weakness of democracy in several non-accession countries, this assumption was probably warranted (Freedom House 2004). However, as awareness of the costs of integration and concomitant Euro-skepticism mounts – as is especially evident in the most advanced post-Communist economies – so too may declining popularity of Europe negatively affect stances towards democracy and market building. Only once integration and Europe become disconnected with system-level transformation will this possibility be safely discounted. But, this seems infeasible given the inherently entrenched character of political cleavages. Growing dissatisfaction with the EU, therefore, is a process that is only likely to intensify at the party level as accession makes the elite consensus on Europe increasingly outmoded.

Appendix A: Measurement of Variables

Dependent variables: (taken from expert survey) – seven point scales:

“Next we would like to ask about the positions parties take on issues of international integration, such as their stance towards the European Union, NATO, or the West in general. As before, please use a seven-point scale, but in this case with 7 standing for strong support and 1 for strong opposition. A 4 would indicate that a party mentions pros and cons but does not adopt a clear position. A 99 indicates that a party does not deal with the issue at all. Again, please note that we are interested in the official stance of a party as it is reflected in the official position taken by the main party leaders.

(i) What about the parties' positions on integration with the West in general?

(ii) How about the EU? Regardless of the specific form that integration may take, where do parties stand on creating a politically unified Europe?

(iii) Where do the parties in [country] stand on creating a Europe-wide, integrated market for the European Union?

Independent variables:

(iv) Cleavages: (taken from the expert survey) – seven point scales.

We would like to begin by asking about the party system as a whole. Some countries may have multiple issue dimensions structuring party competition, others only one, and some of course may have none at all. Could you please indicate how important each issue dimension is in the party system of [country]? We would like to begin by asking about the party system as a whole. Some countries may have multiple issue dimensions structuring party competition, others only one, and some of course may have none at all. Could you please indicate how important each issue dimension is in the party system of Bulgaria? We would like to ask you next about the main parties' positions on the issues you just identified.

A. Economy: redistributive issues (for example, tax levels, welfare state spending)

B. Economy: State-run versus market economy

C. Democracy: strengthening democratic institutions

- D. Ethnic rights (for example, minorities)
- E. Nationalism and Internationalism (for example, views about the EU).
- F. Religiosity (role of church)
- G. Social rights (for example, lifestyle)
- H. Views of the Communist past and its legacies
- I. Regional divisions
- K. Urban-rural divisions

(v) Party family: Parties were initially divided into ten party families – communist, social-democrat, nationalist, conservative, Christian-democrat, liberal, ethnic, populist, sectional, and Greens. Because ethnic, populist, sectional, and green parties did not differ much on integration stances, they were merged into one “other” category. Information on party families was drawn mainly from the database of <http://www.electionworld.org> and was supplemented in the case of new or ambiguously labelled parties in consultation with country experts.

(vi) Strategic: Parties were coded for size by share of vote in the last general election, and by incumbency status at the time of the survey.

(vii) Cost mobilisation:

Economic reform scores are taken from the *EBRD Transition Report, 2002*.

Democratic development scores are taken from Freedom House, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/>.

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Figure 1: Public Opinion about the EU in Ten East European countries

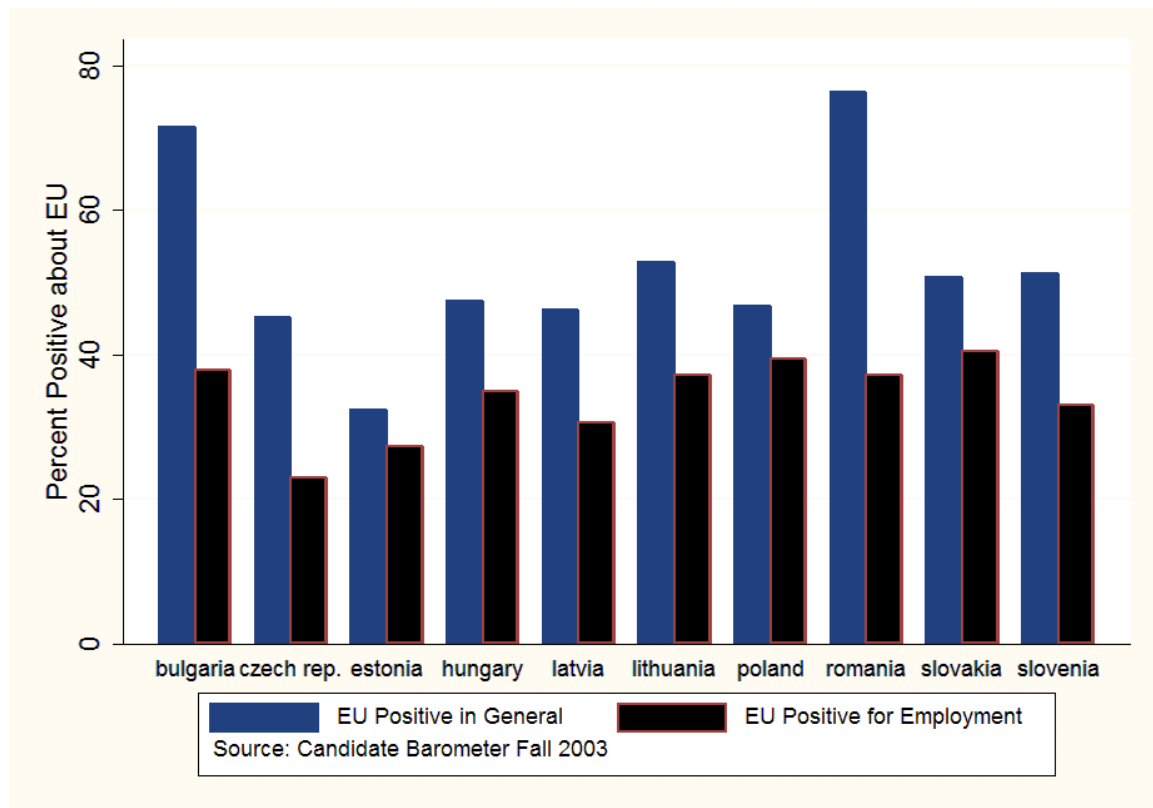


Figure 2: Party Policies on 3 Integration Dimensions

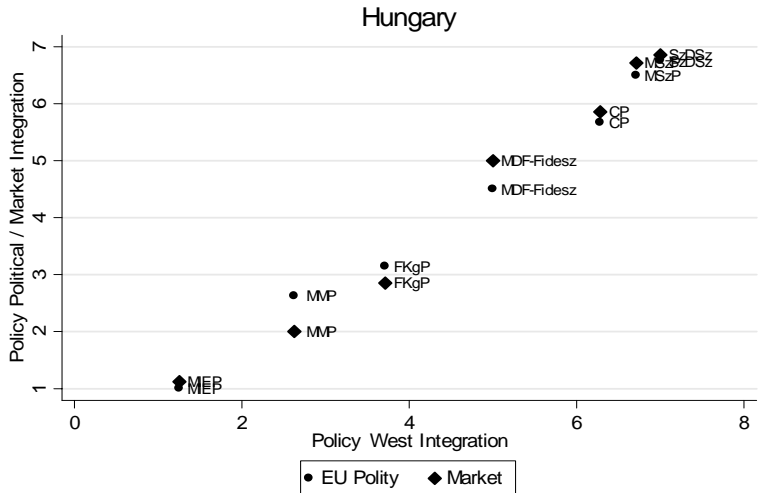
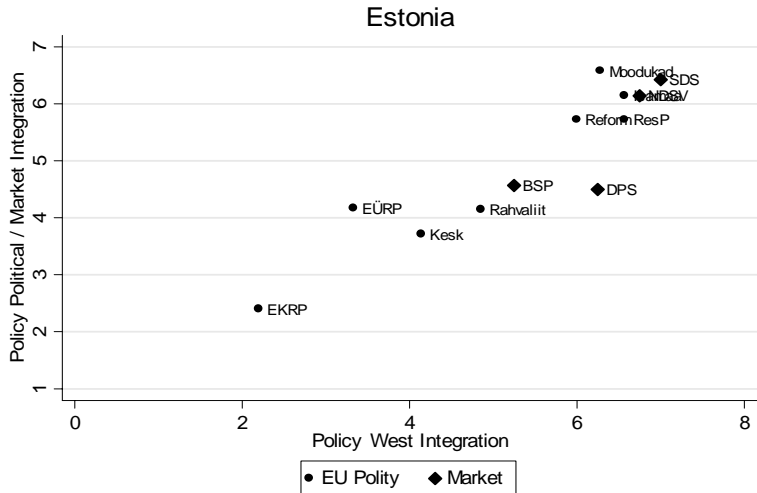
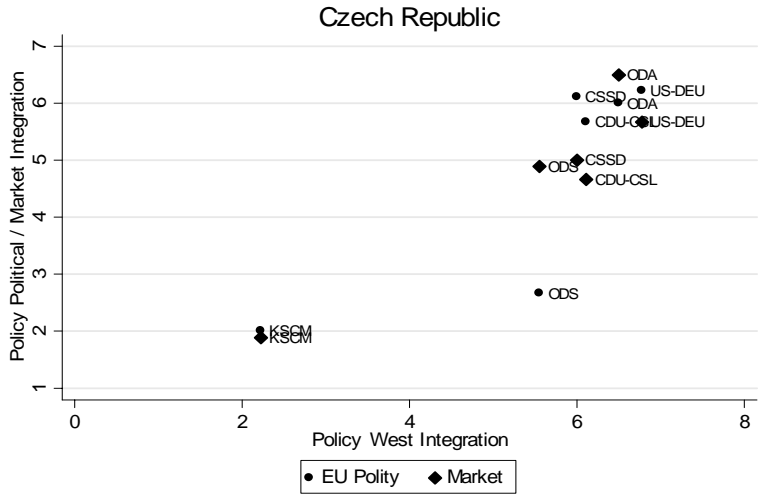
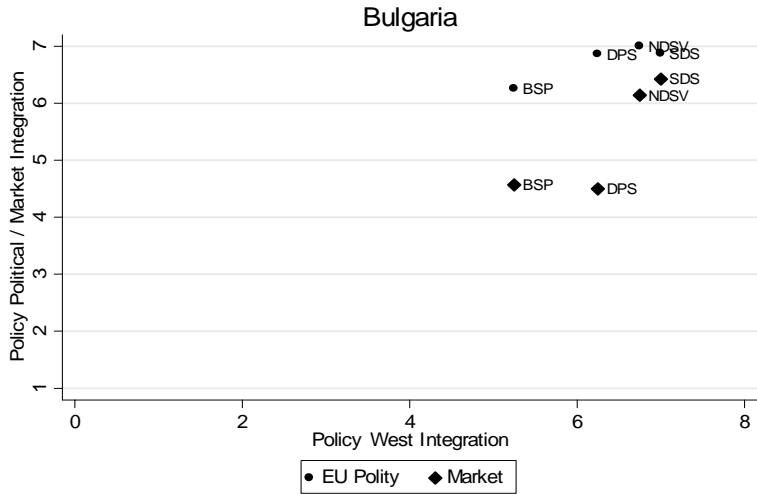


Table 1

Responsible Party Government and European Integration

| | | Party Government | |
|---------------------------------|--|---|--|
| | | Present | Absent |
| Responsible Party Government | Party Systems provide meaningful alternatives on integration | Competitive Status irrelevant | Competitive Status relevant |
| | Integration Stances linked to broader policy program | Cleavages matter Party Family irrelevant | Cleavages irrelevant Party Family matters |
| | National Context Matters | Cost Mobilization | No Cost Mobilization |

Table 2: Bivariate Relationships between Integration Stances and Predictors

| | West Integration | Political Integration | EU Market Integration |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Viable Policies | | | |
| Incumbent Party | .39 | .38 | .30 |
| | | | |
| Large Party | .39 | .36 | .29 |
| Coherence | | | |
| Pro-market | .73 | .62 | .77 |
| | | | |
| Pro Democracy | .72 | .69 | .72 |
| Party Family: | | | |
| Communist | -.36 | -.34 | -.40 |
| | | | |
| Nationalist | -.41 | -.39 | -.39 |
| | | | |
| Context | | | |
| Economic Reform | -.26 | -.30 | -.17 |
| | | | |
| Socio-Economic Affluence | -.10 [^] | -.13 [^] | -.16 [^] |

Note: entries are pearson's correlation coefficients. All coefficients are significant at the p=.05 level, except those noted with a "[^]".

Table 3: Predicting Party Positions on EU Integration (1st and 2nd wave countries)

| | West Integration | Political Integration | EU Market Integration |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Viable Policies | | | |
| Incumbent Party | .40 (.11) | .43 (.13) | .01 (.01) |
| Large Party | .02* (.12) | .02 (.08) | .03** (.19) |
| Coherence | | | |
| Pro-market | .24** (.39) | .12** (.20) | .24** (.41) |
| Pro Democracy | .32** (.37) | .49** (.49) | .48** (.41) |
| Party Family: | | | |
| Communist | -.67 (-.07) | -.38 (-.04) | .71 (-.08) |
| Nationalist | -.91* (-.14) | -.70 (-.13) | -.67 (-.11) |
| Context | | | |
| Economic Reform | -2.1** (-.30) | -2.3** (-.35) | -.94+ (-.16) |
| Socio-Economic Affluence | .38 (-.01) | 1.0 (-.03) | 4.1 (-.11) |
| Variance Component | | | |
| Constant | 5.4 | 5.1 | 5.0 |
| -2xLogLikelihood | 174.678 | 186.843078 | 157.379204 |

Note: Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients; standardized coefficients appear in parentheses.

+ p<.05 (one-tailed); * p<.05 (two-tailed); ** p<.01 (two-tailed). N=70 at party-level; N=10 at country-level.