



Party Law in Modern Europe

The Legal Regulation of Political Parties in Post-War Europe

The Impact of Party Regulation on Membership Rates in Post-Communist Europe

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Introduction

Party members are ambivalently perceived. On the one hand, they are seen as advantage seekers and tiresome demanders who negatively influence the democratic process (Seyd and Whiteley 1992). Their party affiliation is considered as driving towards benefits not available for the rest of the citizens. The nominations in public office based on political criteria are illustrative examples in this respect (Peters and Pierre 2004; O'Dwyer 2006; Grzymala-Busse 2007). On the other hand, party members ensure long standing contributions to the political life, provide campaign (including funding) and electoral support to parties, and constitute appreciative audience for party elites (Kopecky 1995; 2006; Scarrow 2000; Szczerbiak 2001; Webb and White 2007; Tavits 2012). They provide financial support and volunteer work on a continuous basis, not solely around elections. The difference between them and regular citizens resides in their political participation pushed beyond the occasional voting turnout. Apart from the constant fees, party members are a valuable pool of resources for recruiting and socializing political leaders (Kopecky 1995). At the same time, the membership organizations act as training grounds where actively involved individuals acquire and develop skills for future political careers. For example, Kopecky (2006, 133) shows how in the 1998 local elections parties with minimal membership in the Czech Republic faced difficulties in fielding candidates outside the main cities. An extended social web and a high roster of party members sends the electorate a message of popular legitimacy and sets the bases for a party speech of strong ties to ordinary citizens (Dickson and Rublee 2000; Scarrow 2000). Duverger (1954) explains how in the Western European countries parties constructed national-wide networked membership associations that cultivate political identities and mobilize newly enfranchised populations.

These advantages contrast with the low levels of citizen involvement in the party politics of post-communist countries. Previous research emphasizes large discrepancies between the levels of party membership in Western and Eastern Europe (Lewis 1996; Bielasiak 1997; Mair and van Biezen 2001; van Biezen 2003; Millard 2004; Spirova 2007; van Biezen et al. 2012). Recent empirical evidence shows that most East European parties have very small membership organizations; the average for almost two decades is often below 1% of the electorate (Gherghina 2012). In spite of these low membership rates, there are large cross-party and cross-country variations. So far, existing research explained these variations through political, contextual or, structural factors (e.g. party types, elite behavior, and citizens' lack of confidence in parties). Less attention was given to the potential effect of (intra)party regulations on membership figures. To fill this void in the literature, this paper has a two folded goal. First, it investigates to what extent the conceptualization of membership is similar across political parties in Eastern Europe. Second, it tests whether the number of provisions on membership (i.e. requirements, duties, or rights) stipulated in the party statutes or

constitutions diminish voters' willingness to become party members. The key theoretical argument is that citizens find supplementary reasons to sign up for those political parties that show a higher degree of concern for their members. The analysis includes 28 parliamentary political parties from Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia between 2005 and 2009. It relies on the qualitative content analysis of party statutes/constitutions and correlations.

The paper proceeds as follows. The first section reviews the explanations provided in the literature with respect to the variations in party membership among the East European parties. The second section provides the central argument of this paper, formulates the working hypothesis, and briefly summarizes the research design for this analysis. The following section seeks to identify to what extent the party membership has a similar meaning for across political parties. Section four tests the existence of an empirical relationship between the formal provisions and membership rates at party level in Eastern Europe. The paper ends with concluding remarks and suggests avenues for further research.

Previous Explanations

There is a consensus in the literature that East European parties focused on voters instead of developing their membership organizations (Wyman et al. 1995; van Biezen 2003; Millard 2004; Enyedi 2006; Szczerbiak 2006; Webb and White 2007). The empirical evidence illustrated that this was the result of institutional and behavioral causes to be observed both in supply (political parties) and demand (voters). A similar approach (i.e. a focus on supply, demand, and combination of factors) best summarizes the attempts to explain the variations in the membership size across parties. The broad categories of empirical determinants are related to the political context, institutional legacies, and the organizational and ideological instability.

Political Context and Institutional Heritage

The four major phases of party formation in Eastern Europe capture best the political explanations for the different degrees of membership rates across the parties in the region. Such an approach allows the mapping of the differences between political competitors starting as intellectual clubs, like-minded circles of friends, passionate units of anti-communist fighters, and the revived parties on the one hand and the organized (mostly the successor) parties on the other hand.

The first phase marked the creation of discussion partners for the communists in the Round Table Talks (Walsh 1994; Ester et al. 1998). This meant the legalization of parties operating as dissident/intellectual clubs, groups and circles in a clandestine manner during communism (Szczerbiak 2001) and the creation of anti-communist umbrella organizations gathering the

opposition forces. The registration of these formations did not imply their conversion into articulated organizations. Mainly driven by ideas and need for representation, none of these political parties/coalitions could rely either on membership or on extensive territorial organization for the first elections. The lack of membership and organizational structures is due to their embryonic form, loose organization and ideological diffuseness. The umbrella organizations claimed to represent the interests of diverse groups and/or of the society as a whole. Examples can be found in many countries: the Bulgarian United Democratic Front gathered the diverse forces of political opposition, in Czechoslovakia the Civic Forum and the Public Against Violence dominated the political space, the Hungarian Democratic Forum, and in Poland the traditions of the Solidarity movement were moved into politics (Berglund and Dellenbrant 1994). In addition, strong anti-party attitudes limited the development of membership organization. The avoidance of the party label, of issues resembling party discipline, structured bureaucracy, and office-seeking behavior were symptomatic of many umbrella organizations in the first phase. For example, the Czech Civic Forum adopted "Parties for party members – Civic Forum for everybody" as one of main slogans for the first free elections in Czechoslovakia (Toka 1997, 5). An exception to this rule was the National Salvation Front in Romania that also took the shape of an umbrella organization, but instead of anti-communist forces it brought together the successors (Ishiyama 1999; Bozoki and Ishiyama 2002; Pop-Eleches 2008).

The second phase began as soon as the Round Table Talks decisions were made public and elections were scheduled. This involved the crystallization of successor parties and the revival of historical parties, coinciding with the occurrence of sharp discrepancies in terms of organization and membership. On the one hand, the cosmetization of the communist elites and organizational structures into successor parties took place through a process of adaptation and change in the face of new political circumstances. In an environment filled with anti-regime feelings, their successful return to the political scene was based on developed structural and membership organizations inherited from their predecessors. Kitschelt (1995) argues that repressive and closed previous communist systems generates electoral success for the successor parties as they would be more successful in adapting to new competitive conditions given its heritage and opponents initial weakness and disorganization. On the other hand, the revived parties failed to establish the organizational continuity with their previous existence and they could rely solely on the political memory as basis for mobilization (Waller and Karasimeonov 1996). In this respect, there was no difference between (most of) the umbrella entities and the revived parties in terms of societal anchorage and lack of organized structures.

The third phase is visible in the aftermath of these free elections and involved mainly the disintegration of the socio-political movements and attempts to recast their constituent elements in

a new organizational form. Once their initial goal is achieved (i.e. the removal of communists from power) there was little motivation to continue. Given the diffuse nature of these conglomerates, various political identities emerged and new formations were created. This led to extreme degrees of fragmentation as happened with the 1991 Polish Parliament that included 29 parties or with the 1990 Romanian legislature that had 17 different political formations, in addition to the nine belonging to the national minorities. The Bulgarian and Romanian successor parties/fronts suffered similar transformations, mainly derived from the elite disputes and internal struggles for power. Following an intense conflict between factions backing the first two men in the party (president Iliescu and prime-minister Roman) the National Salvation Front went through a split. Both political parties emerging after the split kept the traits of successors (i.e. elite, structures, membership). The Bulgarian case tells a similar story. Splits occurred within the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) (the direct successor of the Communist Party) and the Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union (the successor of the satellite party) as the result of concentrating skilled and experienced elites within the same framework (Waller and Karasimeonov 1996). The defining feature of this phase is the quest for institutional articulation, ideological separation, and political mobilization. In essence, this is the time for the emergence and development of properly constituted political parties in the region. Only Hungary witnessed the articulation and differentiation of parties even in what described as the first phase. The Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) and the Alliance of Young Democrats (FIDESZ) early in the days of the Round Table Talks represented alternatives to the MDF.

A fourth phase included the nuanced strategies of parties facing the prospects of failure to enter Parliament, the solidification of institutional features, and the formation of target electorate. The time line for these events was before the second round of post-communist elections. The fragmentation from the third phase was complemented by the creation of electoral coalitions and alliances meant to maximize the share of votes and to allow government coalitions. The parliamentary group received an increased role in the life of the parties as their activities on the grounds were still underdeveloped (van Biezen 2003). This final phase of formation set the bases for the development of national and local structures, the vertical and horizontal links necessary for fulfilling the functions of the party and the development of membership organizations.

In addition to these developments, the organizational heritage of the successor parties made a difference when compared to the other political competitors. The successors benefitted from an organizational heritage and were better represented at the local level than the rest of competitors that had no time to develop an extensive web of branches (Ishiyama 1999). For example, in the Czech Republic the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) covered the territory of their country extensively compared to the newer social democrats (CSSD) or Civic Democratic Party (ODS)

(van Biezen 2003; Kopecky 2007). Similarly, the two Romanian successor parties had twice as many local organizations as the liberals (PNL) (a revived party) or the radical right Greater Romania Party (PRM) (a newly emerged political actor). Based on the organizational legacy, the successors enhanced their membership organizations. For example, the KSCM managed to create and secure strong linkages with its members and thus created a relatively stable mass membership on which it relied for many years (Ishiyama 1999; Grzymala-Busse 2002). Similarly, the BSP in Bulgaria and the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL) in Slovakia started with the largest membership roll due to heavy organizational legacies. The discrepancy between the successors and the rest of the parties had a supplementary attitudinal cause. Due to the extensive inclusion pursued by the communist parties, the newly emerged political actors considered party membership as a legacy of the past and took distance from it.

Organizational and Ideological Instability

One prominent feature of the East European political parties is their low degree of stability in terms of electoral performance, organization, and ideology. This had an effect on membership organizations. The volatile electoral performances of political parties (Gherghina 2012) did not allow them to present themselves as stable alternatives on the political scene. As a result, voters willing to engage in the workings of political parties had no medium-term prospects. Along similar lines, the large number of splits and mergers (Ibenskas 2012) between political parties contributed to a feeling of member instability. Political parties lost members through splits or individual defections by their leaders or elite politicians. The large umbrella organizations from the first years of post-communism disintegrated into smaller parties after one or two elections. The medium-sized political parties often decided to join forces to increase their electoral gains. The small political parties lost their identity when merging by absorption with larger parties; such decisions were usually determined by the failure to gain access to the legislature. In any of these instances, citizens became over night the members of a new party than the one in which they enrolled. For example, the 1991-1993 Polish Parliament had 16 parliamentary groups, but all their composition and names completely changed from the beginning to the end of the term in office (Millard 2004). Recent empirical evidence shows indicates the parties with relatively large membership organizations were formed at the beginning of the post-communist period and underwent few organizational changes (Gherghina 2012). Whereas the organizational heritage has helped the successors to reach higher levels of membership, this alone was not a sufficient condition (e.g. SDL in Slovakia).

The ideological instability complements this picture. The general absence of cleavages in Eastern Europe (Rivera 1996; van Biezen 2003) lead to ideological fuzziness at two interconnected

levels: parties could hardly create their own historically derived identities (Waller 1996) and the lack of social stratification diminished the possibility of ideological niches (Mair 1997). Consequently, political parties hardly possessed features that distinguish them from the rest (Enyedi 2006). With the exception of a handful of parties - radical right wing parties, ethnic and liberal parties with strong ideology as in Hungary – the rest of the political actors represented an amorphous mass for the voters as they did not present messages to differentiate themselves from competitors. Many parties did not offer a set of highly specific programmatic choices preferring to approach catch-all strategies (Innes 2002) to maximize their electoral performance. In many cases, such strategies added supplementary confusion to the already blurry picture voters had about parties. There were cases in which even those actors successful in presenting themselves as unique actors in front of the voters destabilized this initial image through an extensive change of beliefs (Pop-Eleches 2010).

The Role of Formal Provisions and Research Design

Some of these factors have limited explanatory power in contemporary times. For example, after two decades, the organizational heritage of the successor parties is visible in less than half of the cases. Some successors like the one in Slovakia even disappeared from the political scene. Others, as in Poland, ceased to play a major political role in the last recent decade. Other factors such as those related to the organizational instability do a good job in explaining the diachronic variations. Accordingly, the membership organizations can vary as a function of the changes recorded with respect to organizational dynamic or party positions. However, they fail to account for synchronic comparisons. This is where the potential linkage between formal provisions about membership fits into the picture.

The logical mechanism behind this linkage relates to the perceived responsiveness of the party to citizens' needs and can be summarized as follows. The amount of provisions about membership is an indicator of the importance given to this issue. A large amount shows attention for details and willingness to better articulate the interaction with the citizens, and to help the latter to integrate in the life of the party organization. All these means bring parties closer to the citizens. By showing a high degree of interest for the fate of their members, parties demonstrate their willingness to incorporate more voices in their decision-making processes and to respond to problems raised by citizens. Indirectly, they send a message of better representation and can increase the appeal for intra-party involvement. With a complete set of provisions regarding their activity within the party, the future members may feel that their activity is relevant. In a nutshell, the formal provisions can create more intense communication with the future members. These formal statements also convey a clear message that long-term attachment to the party is accompanied by

political rewards. Consequently, I expect political parties with a higher number of provisions in their state to have more members than the rest.

Data and Method

One aim of this study is to identify differences in the conceptualization of party members across countries and parties. Accordingly, a two-step case selection was used. First, based on similarities in terms of former political regime, non-belonging to the Soviet Union, and paths towards democratization, the six former Warsaw Pact countries were selected to be part of this study: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. Second, within these countries I considered only the political parties gaining access to at least half of the legislatures elected between 1990 and 2008 and such results were achieved running mainly on an individual basis (i.e. not running only in electoral coalitions or alliances). The choice of parliamentary parties is related to the existence of established membership organizations. The parties that were only episodic actors on the political scene or that enjoyed a limited electoral support could hardly build a membership organization. Accordingly, I have selected a number of 28 political parties (for a full list, see Appendix 1) that will be used both to identify conceptual equivalents of membership and to empirically test the hypothesis formulated above.

The data regarding the requirements for party membership were taken from the party statutes/constitutions available around election times between 2005 and 2008¹ (one statute for each party). The membership figures used in the analysis come from the same period; they were reported by the parties' headquarters to the official party registry, in media interviews, or personal interviews with the author. Whenever possible, I used triangulation with secondary sources (academic works) to ensure data validity. All membership figures are available in Appendix 1.

The Meaning of Membership

This section investigates to what extent political parties have a similar conceptualization of membership. To this end, it includes a qualitative content analysis of party statutes. An assessment of the form indicates that membership appears is a priority component of the party organization. The section on membership is positioned at the beginning of the statute and includes extensive provisions on rights and duties. It usually comes right after the general aims, goals, and principles of the party and it is situated before the structure of the party. Quite often, these parties dedicate

¹ For the SDL in Slovakia the statute and membership figures are from 2002 as the party ceased to exist in 2004 after a merger with Smer. A new party registered in 2005 under the same name but with loose elements of continuity with the original organization.

exclusively four to six pages (i.e. on the average one fifth of the statute) to the regulations on membership.

Common Provisions

The concept of membership is built on a few general features shared by the political parties across Eastern Europe. The first common element is represented by the existence of a few conditions for eligibility to become a member. They usually refer to the citizenship (nationals are accepted as members irrespective of their residence within or outside the country), minimum age (for most of the parties is 18, some Hungarian parties have 16 as a limit), existence of civil and political rights (e.g. the applicant should not be legally deprived by the right to vote or any other rights) and adherence to the statute, principles, and values of the political party. All these requirements are specified in the first paragraph of the section dedicated to membership. Two further common features are procedural and refer to the application and acceptance mechanisms. All these political parties mention the necessity of a written enrollment form. This has to be filled by the applicant and its complexity differs across parties and countries, but it is usually short and concise. The simplest version is less than 10 lines and the most sophisticated – used by more than half of the scrutinized parties – is one page long. The membership application is made at the local level, in the geographical proximity of applicants' place of residence. Most membership applications are for determined periods that most of the times amount to two or three years. The procedures following the completion of such a form are similar across parties: the membership request is examined by the local or regional organization (if there is no local organization where the application can be filled in) and a decision is reached within a time frame varying from one week to one month. The longer period of time includes the possibility of contestation from other members.

The general rights and duties are key components of the membership organizations and they are mentioned in every statute. With small variations, the general rights refer to the possibility of the member to participate in all party activities, the right to elect and get elected in institutions of the party, the freedom to express their opinions, the right to promote initiatives, and the possibility to use party resources during and between elections. The general duties incorporate compliance with the rules and regulations of the party, work to implement party decisions and to strengthen party democracy, the promotion of good conduct and social values (e.g. against racism), the assistance of the party and candidates, the carrying out of the party programme and the defense of its goals (in various ways), and the payment of a monthly fee. All these requirements are very broad and involve a lot of discretion from both sides: the members decide the content of their actions to comply with these tasks and the party officials have extensive freedom in deciding whether the actions of party

members meet the expectations. The failure to fulfill some of these obligations leads to the end of membership. The latter is approached in detail by the statutes that specify not only the conditions in which membership is terminated, but also the specific mechanisms of decision triggered by such instances. The membership is over if the individual member does not pay the fee for a certain time period (it varies from three months to one year), joins another party, resigns, is dismissed by the party, or dies. The dismissal is the final layer of warning and is applied either for severe damages to the image of the party or for repeated breaks of the statute.² Most parties employ the verbal and written warnings or temporary suspension prior to the exclusion. The latter includes series of decisions coming from various committees in the party and usually takes between one and three months to solve a request (also due to the appeal periods).

With the exception of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) that has no explicit reference in its statute about the end of membership, these features are common to all the East European political parties. One further characteristic shared by almost all parties refers to the exclusiveness of membership. The statutes all explicitly require members to belong to a single political party. This is the reason for which most parties consider end of membership the enrollment of a member into another political party. In reality, as political parties do not share their membership databases, this provision rarely gets into effect and heavily depends on the members' willingness to declare their belonging to another political formation. This leads to certain overlaps in counting members that cannot be estimated. Most enrollment forms ask the applicants to specify their previous belonging and it is up to the party receiving these forms to check whether the applicants were removed from the records of the previous party. Returning to the exclusive membership, only four parties do not explicitly ask their members to fulfill this criterion: the SDS in Bulgaria, the SZDSZ in Hungary, the UDMR in Romania, and the HZDS in Slovakia.

Different Provisions

Table 1 provides a general picture of the formal requirements mentioned in the party statutes regarding membership. Apart from the above mentioned commonalities, many parties specify that members should belong to a single party organization and include the conditions to regain membership in case of exclusion. All the Czech and Romanian parties include in their statute the provision according to which members are affiliated to one local organization, also mentioning the possibility of member transfers. This is encountered to various extents in three other countries: in Bulgaria the BSP and the DPS, in Hungary the MSZP and the KDNP, and in Slovakia the KDH, the SDKU

² The extension of these provisions varies across countries. The Hungarian parties have a strong emphasis on sanctions and procedures to terminate membership, whereas the parties in the Czech Republic have the softest approach towards such issues.

and the SMK. At the other extreme, none of the Polish parties specify such a requirement in their statutes.

Table 1: Membership Provisions in Eastern Europe

| Party | Conditions | Exclusivity | Enrollment form | Recommendation | Single organization | Merger | Rewards | General rights | Specific rights | General duties | Specific duties | End of membership | Regain membership |
|---------|------------|-------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------------|--------|---------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| BSP | x | x | x | | x | | | x | x | x | | x | x |
| DPS | x | x | x | | x | | | x | | x | | x | x |
| SDS | x | | x | | | | | x | x | x | | x | x |
| CSSD | x | x | x | | x | | | x | x | x | | x | |
| KDU-CSL | x | x | x | | x | | x | x | x | x | | x | x |
| KSCM | x | x | x | | x | | | x | x | x | x | x | |
| ODS | x | x | x | | x | | | x | x | x | | x | |
| MSZP | x | x | x | | x | | | x | x | x | x | x | |
| Fidesz | x | x | x | x | | | | x | | x | | x | |
| SZDSZ | x | | x | | | | | x | | x | | x | |
| MDF | x | x | x | x | | | | x | | x | | x | |
| KDNP | x | x | x | | x | | | x | x | x | | x | |
| PIS | x | x | x | x | | | | x | x | x | x | x | |
| PO | x | x | x | | | | | x | x | x | | x | x |
| PSL | x | x | x | x | | | | x | x | x | | x | x |
| PD | x | x | x | x | | | | x | | x | | x | x |
| SLD | x | x | x | x | | | | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| PDL | x | x | x | | x | x | | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| PNL | x | x | x | | x | x | x | x | | x | x | x | x |
| PRM | x | x | x | | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| PSD | x | x | x | | x | | | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| UDMR | x | | x | | x | | | x | | x | | | |
| HZDS | x | | x | | | | | x | x | x | | x | x |
| KDH | x | x | x | | x | | | x | x | x | | x | x |
| SDKU | x | x | x | | x | | | x | x | x | | x | |
| SMK | x | x | x | | x | | | x | x | x | | x | x |
| SNS | x | x | x | | | | | x | x | x | x | x | |
| SDL | x | x | x | | | | | x | | x | | x | |

The possibility to reapply for membership is included to a similar extent in the statutes. This period varies from one to four years, the longest period being specified by the HZDS. In Bulgaria all the parties have this provision and to a similar extent the same happens in Poland (with the exception of the PIS) and Romania (without the UDMR). In Slovakia the HZDS, the KDH, and the SMK have included this specification, whereas in the Czech Republic only the KDU-CSL has it. Hungary is the only country where parties do not mention this possibility.

The specific rights of members appear to be quite popular among political parties. They refer to the possibility of members to have political initiatives, to the right to be informed about specific activities of their organization, to the right to participate at the meetings where decisions are taken about important initiatives or the activity of organization in general, the opportunity to receive political training, education, and to become candidates on party lists, or the chance to appeal to superior organizations if their proposals are rejected at local level. Such detailed rights are crucial in the forming of membership organizations as they entitle members to more active roles in the intra-party decision-making process. The openness of the East European parties towards the involvement of their members is extensive in formal terms as only one quarter of the parties does not incorporate such provisions in their statutes.

The situation is completely different when analyzing the specific duties of members from the statutes. Although many parties allow members to participate in the meetings, very few consider this participation to be a task of membership. There are some legitimate reasons for which the active involvement of members is not enhanced through such provisions. For example, the membership implies a voluntary activity. Accordingly, individuals who join a political party may expect to decide entirely on the type of activity to undertake within the party. In that respect, the minimal provision of rights is necessary to allow participation and sufficient to avoid the overburden of those involved. At the same time, this approach of making participation optional is beneficial for political parties. They cannot be blamed for elite driven arrangements and the speed of decisions is usually higher when members do not get involved. However, from an analytical perspective, there is an asymmetry between the presence of specific rights and the lack of specific duties that only less than a quarter of the East European parties avoids. All Romanian parties but the UDMR require active involvement of their members – an observation consistent with the findings in chapter 3 – and the same happens with the PIS and the SLD in Poland, the KSCM in the Czech Republic, the MSZP in Hungary, and the SNS in Slovakia.

The provisions of the statutes regarding membership reveal three other categories that are almost country specific. Four out of the five examined Polish parties (the PO is the exception) plus the FIDESZ and the MDF in Hungary require recommendations from other members to support a

membership application. Only three Romanian parties (the PDL, the PNL, and the PRM) specify what happens with the members after a merger. If for the PDL and the PNL such a provision originates in their rich experience of splits, mergers, or electoral alliances and coalitions, the PRM is a peculiar case as its organization is the least static of all investigated political parties in Romania. Finally, the issue of rewards appears quite rarely in the statutes: the PNL, the PRM, and the KDU-CSL are willing to provide distinctions to the members with good results and outstanding services brought to the party and country.

In light of these details, there are some differences across countries in regulating membership. There is a visible tendency of the Romanian parties to include numerous details and of the Bulgarian and Czech parties to keep things at a more general level. The cross-party variation within countries appears to be similar to the one between countries. Thus, no institutional mimetism in which parties copy the models of more successful competitors within the same party system can be empirically observed. Nevertheless, one cross-party difference is relevant. Some parties are more specific than others when approaching the membership. The PNL includes the most details in its statute, having also supplementary provisions from the categories displayed in Table 1. For example, a member is not entitled to two functions in the party. The UDMR has the most relaxed attitude towards members having no explicit regulations about common elements such as exclusivity of membership or termination conditions. The character of this party – officially labeled as cultural union with numerous organizations as component parts – can justify the loose provisions. The SDS in Bulgaria or the SZDSZ in Hungary have also general guidelines towards membership rather than very specific regulations.

At the same time, according to the statutes, the East European political parties share a broad general understanding of the concept of membership. Citizens willing to become involved into party politics should register, comply with general requirements, belong to a single party, benefit of rights and are asked to fulfill general tasks. Most parties do not explicitly enhance the participatory feature of members, but they provide them the right to do so. Less than a quarter of the analyzed political parties explicitly demand their members to take part in the creation and development of intra-party democracy. There are several other differences at party level that reflect the preoccupation for the admission of quality members (e.g. recommendation based enrollment) or the position of members within the party (e.g. rewards). Based on these observations, the following section tests the existence of a relationship between these provisions and the membership roll at party level.

When More (Regulations) Means More (Members)

Prior to the analysis, a few general remarks on the levels of membership provisions are necessary to indicate the absence of distribution patterns. Thus, the likelihood of a spurious relationship is diminished. In spite of their membership legacy, not many of the successor parties display extensive requirements and regulations for their members. The content analysis reveals that most of them are situated slightly above the average for the entire pool of parties (8.39 provisions). Such a situation makes them only in half of the countries the champions of membership provisions. If the BSP, the MSZP, and the PSL follow this rule, the SDL in Slovakia occupies the last position with only six provisions. While there is a weak tendency of the successors to have more provisions about membership, they can hardly be clustered into one category. Similar conclusions can be drawn when it comes to the other two types of parties. A close look at the origins of the investigated parties show no clear pattern about the number of membership provisions among the revived or newly emerged parties. The rankings vary from country to country and the general situation provides a blurry picture.

These general observations have one further implication, highly relevant for this study. One could argue that the relationship between the membership organization and formal regulation can go in a different direction than presented in the theoretical section. Large parties created complex organizational structures and they adopted provisions to maintain them. They could thus select or filter out undesirable members. This possibility is plausible but with limited empirical applicability to the investigated parties. The organizational complexity of the successors matches only to a small extent that of the number of membership provisions.

For the empirical tests I aggregate the 13 provisions (equal weights) outlined in Table 1 in a common index. Each party received a score between a minimum of 5 (the SZDSZ and the UDMR) and a maximum of 12 (the PRM); none of the analyzed parties made references to all the specified provisions. Such a measurement on an eight-point Likert scale requires the use of the Spearman correlation coefficient for nonparametric measures. The association between the amount of membership regulations and the size of membership organizations is reflected in Table 2. For membership organizations I use both the raw number of members and the percentage of members in the electorate. The reason to focus on both measurements is that in the East European context, where the membership organizations are so small, the raw numbers can be as telling as the percentages. These relationships are first discussed at pooled level including all the scrutinized parties, and at country level. The latter allows for insights into the situation of different parties from the same political system and for comparisons between the countries.

The correlation between the formal regulations and the total number of members is positive and quite strong (0.46, statistically significant at 0.05). The correlation with the percentage of

members has also a positive sign, but it is weaker and lacks statistical significance. Such empirical evidence supports the initial expectations that more provisions regarding membership correspond to higher roster of members in Eastern Europe.

Table 2: Correlation Coefficients between Formal Provisions and Membership Size

| Correlation between statute regulations and... | Number of members | Percentage of members | N |
|--|-------------------|-----------------------|----|
| General | 0.46* | 0.22 | 28 |
| Bulgaria | 0.99 | 0.99 | 3 |
| Czech Republic | 0.43 | 0.43 | 4 |
| Hungary | 0.33 | 0.33 | 5 |
| Poland | 0.46 | 0.47 | 5 |
| Romania | 0.23 | 0.23 | 5 |
| Slovakia | -0.53 | -0.40 | 6 |

Statistical significance at * 0.05, ** 0.01.

At country level the difference between the correlation with the number or percentage of members vanishes, but the evidence is mixed. In Bulgaria there is a perfect association between the number of provisions and the membership rates. Given the small number of units of analysis, the observations can hardly be generalized. The party with most provisions (BSP) also has the largest share of members, whereas the party with more relaxed requirements and conditions for membership (SDS) is the least successful with respect to its membership organization. Similar trends are visible in the Czech Republic and Poland where the correlations are high or medium. In Hungary and Romania the relationship is a bit weaker but still in the hypothesized direction. Such a result has two different drivers. In Hungary, the party with the lowest number of provisions (SZDSZ) has more members than parties with more provisions (e.g. KDNP or MDF). A quick look at its history indicates that the SZDSZ is characterized by continuous oscillations in terms of membership. Until the 1994 elections it doubled its number of members, but got to the initial level four years later. The SZDSZ is one of the few East European parties that losses members when it governs. In Romania, the PRM has the highest number of provisions, but its appeal to members is exceeded by almost every other Romanian party.

Slovakia is the only country in which the relationship is negative: the parties with fewer provisions have more members. It was already mentioned that the SDL had loose provisions and quite significant amount of members. Similarly, the HZDS was since its beginnings quite successful in attracting members, having the second organization in the country. Until 2006 this grew and made a champion of membership. This did not coincide with an increase in the membership regulations.

Conclusions

This paper assessed the concept of party member through the eyes of the East European political parties. The empirical evidence resulted from the qualitative content analysis of the party statutes revealed that the conception of membership is based on a few key characteristics shared by all parties in the region: conditionality for membership, enrollment form, and the existence of general rights and duties. At the same time, several features are country (e.g. legacy of mergers) or party specific (e.g. recommendation as prerequisite for membership, rewards, or specific duties). Once an answer has been provided to this question, I have argued and tested the extent to which the number of formal provisions on membership is related to the actual membership size. The results of the analysis suggest the existence of empirical evidence to support such a claim. In general the relationship is moderate when it comes to the percentage of members and quite strong when we refer to the raw numbers. In spite of mixed evidence at country level, whenever the relationship goes in the hypothesized direction it is quite strong.

This analysis is preliminary in its conclusions. Its exploratory goals were primarily meant to clarify a conceptual problem and to draw attention to a possible explanation for the variation of party membership in new democracies. Its primary implications are theoretical and can shift the approach towards membership. So far, earlier research focused on factors with longitudinal changes. The results give sufficient reason to include the formal components of party organization in future analyses on membership. On empirical grounds, this study has brought evidence to account for synchronic differences between membership organizations. In that respect, it tested only the existence of an association and was limited to the parliamentary parties with established organizations. Further research might investigate more closely the causal relationships and identify particular clusters or individual provisions leading to higher membership rates. Future efforts can also include a broader range of political parties, countries, or elections. Another avenue for research lies in the investigation of the degree to which these formal provisions are implemented. This analysis relied on a logical mechanism based on citizens' perceptions. This argument can be strengthened as soon as the correspondence between formal texts and informal practices is established.

Appendix 1: List of Parties used in the Analysis

| Country | Acronym | Name | Number of members | Members as % of the electorate |
|------------|---------|---|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Bulgaria | BSP | Bulgarian Socialist Party | 191,000 | 2.84 |
| | DPS | Movement for Rights and Freedoms | 95,621 | 1.42 |
| | SDS | Union of Democratic Forces | 29,000 | 0.43 |
| Czech Rep. | ČSSD | Czech Social Democratic Party | 17,569 | 0.21 |
| | KDU-ČSL | Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People’s Party | 38,312 | 0.46 |
| | KSČM | Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia | 77,115 | 0.93 |
| | ODS | Civic Democratic Party | 29,429 | 0.35 |
| Hungary | FIDESZ | Alliance of Young Democrats | 39,932 | 0.49 |
| | KDNP | Christian Democratic People's Party | 17,000 | 0.21 |
| | MDF | Hungarian Democratic Forum | 11,000 | 0.14 |
| | MSZP | Hungarian Socialist Party | 36,000 | 0.45 |
| | SZDSZ | Alliance of Free Democrats | 20,000 | 0.25 |
| Poland | PD | Democratic Party | 1,800 | 0.01 |
| | PIS | Law and Justice | 22,000 | 0.07 |
| | PO | Civic Platform | 32,000 | 0.10 |
| | PSL | Polish People’s Party | 160,000 | 0.52 |
| | SLD | Alliance of the Democratic Left | 72,000 | 0.24 |
| Romania | PDL | Democratic-Liberal Party | 153,333 | 0.83 |
| | PNL | National Liberal Party | 116,134 | 0.63 |
| | PRM | Greater Romania Party | 106,797 | 0.58 |
| | PSD | Social Democratic Party | 290,116 | 1.57 |
| | UDMR | Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania | 85,000 | 0.46 |
| Slovakia | HZDS | Movement for a Democratic Slovakia | 35,370 | 0.83 |
| | KDH | Christian Democratic Movement | 15,297 | 0.37 |
| | SDKU | Slovak Democratic and Christian Union | 8,569 | 0.20 |
| | SMK | Party of the Hungarian Coalition | 10,500 | 0.25 |
| | SNS | Slovak National Party | 1,370 | 0.03 |
| | SDL | Party of the Democratic Left | 21,233 | 0.38 |

Note: The percentage of members from the electorate was calculated from the total of registered voters.

Sources: Gherghina (2012); IDEA.

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