

Can't Tell Left from Right: Party Ideology and Gender Equality Policy in Post-Communist Europe

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Abstract

Party competition is only two decades old in post-communist Europe and therefore, still highly unstructured for theorizing. Ideological cleavages have been somewhat blurred by the emerging of a multitude of new parties as well as the reconstruction of the old communist parties. Additionally, the incentive for European Union membership has also added to the ambiguous nature of party stances in Central and Eastern Europe. The unexpected behavior is mirrored by the unusual support of gender equality policy by the central-right parties. The progressive stance of left parties has been co-opted by strangely pro-equality central-right parties that have passed anti-discrimination acts and established equality institutions within cabinets across the region. In this paper, I examine blue print anti-discrimination policies as well as the monitoring equality institutions that have been created across 11 post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe over a period of 11 years in an effort to understand why rightist and leftist parties in this region have switched roles in the area of gender equality policy.

The traditional partisan theory of policy outcomes prescribes that left wing and right wing parties have very different and distinct positions when it comes to issues of social policy and justice. More specifically, leftist governments have been considered more likely to support policies that ameliorate the position of women in the society, while rightist party coalitions are less likely to become promoters of social justice and equality. The empirical evidence mostly gathered and analyzed in Western European democracies confirms the theory (Beckwith 1985, Norris 1987, Esping-Andersen 1993, Caul 1999, Christensen 1999, Waylen 2007). In the context of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) however, where drastic political and economic transformations have taken place in a very short period of time, the partisan theory might not apply. In this article, I argue that in post-Communist Europe central-right political parties are more likely to support gender equality policy than in other areas of the world, whereas central-left parties are not the catalysts or the reliable backbone that we have come to expect in well-established post-industrial democracies.

The ideology variable is a constant in our models exploring the structural effect on public policy. More particularly, rarely do we find an analysis examining gender equality policy where the left/right ideological makeup of the cabinet is not taken into consideration. The consensus has been that left parties are more likely to support social policy and the expansion of welfare state. Furthermore, left parties are also more likely to push for equality before the law and a more egalitarian society. However, the Central Eastern European set of countries defies our expectations and leads us to look at the unusual behavior of central-right parties, which in this case have many times led the way with support for blueprint gender equality laws as well as the establishment of institutional structures to promote and ensure the implementation of the laws.

In this paper, I try to accomplish two main tasks. First, I seek to illuminate a phenomenon that may illustrate a new type of party competition in post-communist Europe, the unexpected

behavior of central-right parties with regards to gender equality policy and anti-discrimination policy more generally. I examine blueprint gender equality policies adopted across eleven Central and Eastern European countries over a period of eleven years (1998-2009). Blueprint policies consist of equality policies that establish general principles for feminist state action at the national and subnational levels and focus on two or more domains (Mazur 2002: 47). I assess the content of the laws in terms of quality of legislation as well as the institutional provisions (blueprint offices) that the policies propose for monitoring and implementation. I argue that it is difficult to recognize left from right, if looking only at the legislative output and institutional structures in CEE, presenting us with a perfect scenario of ‘ideological confusion.’ Second, I aim to explore the factors behind this regional effect and what implications it may have beyond the countries under study. I question the legacy of the former communist regime as well as the role that the European Union has played in transforming party politics in the region. Furthermore, I also examine whether the left and right divide as theorized by the partisan politics theory can find application in the newly established ideological competition in post-communist Europe.

The article is organized as follows. The first section briefly reviews the existing literature and poses the hypotheses for this research project. Next, a systematic analysis of the empirical state of policy and institutions is presented in order to capture the unusual behavior of political parties in the region as well as to point out to any cases that may not fit the common pattern. In the third section various explanatory factors are considered to deduce a model that may help us explain the behavior of political parties toward social policy in the region. The last section discusses the findings of this article and the larger implications that it has for explaining party-competition in Central and Eastern Europe and beyond.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Partisan theory of policy outcomes, linking political parties to governmental policies, has argued that party constituencies are divided by economic class and therefore, left and right parties are defined by the economic issues of their respective party followers (Hibbs 1977, 1987, 1992). Blue collar workers are mostly affiliated with the left wing, while white collar workers are more likely to support the right wing party agenda. Similarly, Esping-Andersen (1985) recognizes the socio-economic cleavage and argues that social-democratic parties (leftist) are usually the ones to promote equality and welfare programs in response to their corresponding constituency. Empirical work has supported the theorized relationship between left wing parties and a comprehensive welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1990; Allan and Scruggs 2004). Therefore, the ‘parties do matter’ view or ‘partisan theory’ of public policy is now commonly accepted (Castles et al. The Oxford Handbook of the Welfare State). Partisan politics matters and left parties are seen as more egalitarian and the more likely to support the marginalized groups and working class (Esping-Andersen 1999; Hueber and Stephens 2001).

Gender and politics literature also theoretically and empirically supports a connection between left parties and progressive feminist policy (Beckwith 1985, O’Conner 1999, Huber and Stephens 2001, Weldon 2002, Outshoorn and Kantola 2007), even though in recent years large comparative policy studies have argued that left-wing governments are not the determining factor that they once were thought to be.¹ Nevertheless, feminist work refers to party ideology (left/right) as an explanatory variable when it comes to feminist policy success in Western industrialized democracies.

H1: Leftist parties in Central and Eastern Europe are more likely to support overarching gender equality laws than rightist parties.

¹ For more on this see the McBride and Mazur (2010).

In addition to the expectation that leftist parties promote more egalitarian goals than rightist parties, there is also the expectation that parties will live up to their commitments in their programs and manifestos. In this study I am interested to identify the source of ideological deviation and therefore, I seek to compare the difference between party manifestos and political party behavior. I utilize data from the Comparative Manifesto Project² to determine where parties in cabinet coalitions stand with regards to social justice and the need for fair treatment of all people.³ The expectation from existing literature is that the party manifestos themselves will present a partisan divide in terms of issues of justice, welfare and redistribution of resources. Many recent studies have demonstrated strong support for partisan differences in a wide variety of policy areas, social policy included (Benoit and Laver 2006). Therefore, we expect that left and right parties would follow their party programs when it comes to acting on gender equality policy. If parties do not live up to their manifestos, it would be a clear deviation from their ideological base.

H2: Left and Right parties act in harmony with their Party Manifestos with regards to gender equality anti-discrimination policy.

Partisan theory of policy outcomes has been informed by considerable empirical evidence in Western post-industrialized democracies however, CEE present a new set of cases where party constituencies are fairly volatile and the legacy of communism still shapes today's party competition. Former communist parties in order to become more appealing to the constituency and lose their pariah status, have become more market oriented (Tavits and Letki 2009). The reformed communist parties felt a need to prove themselves by becoming detached from socialist ideology (Grzymala-Busse 2002). The newly established central-right parties in response have followed more populist economic reforms to avoid losing votes and at the same time have embraced the

² For more information see <https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/>

³ See Variable per503

norms of liberal democracy and EU membership requirements. Several studies of party politics in post-communist Europe argue that rightist parties in the region have tried to minimize the focus on the economy and instead turn to sociocultural issues such as religiosity, minority rights, decommunization and nationalism (Hanley 2004, Kitschelt et al. 1999, Marks et al. 2006, Vachudova 2008). In sum, the unusual behavior of fiscal responsible left parties has forced central right parties to claim issues such as support from state intervention and social provisions as their area of concern. In turn, we should expect a role reversal when it comes to equality policies.

H3: Rightist post-communist parties are more likely than leftist parties to show support for equality policies similar to their behavior toward economic policies.

Starting in the 1970s, the dominance of partisan theory in Western Europe has been challenged by the ‘new politics’ dimension (Flanagan 1987; Flanagan & Lee 2003; Franklin 1992, Inglehart 1977; Kitschelt 1988). In short, this new perspective argues that the economic left/right dimension is no longer sufficient to explain political party behavior and that a more diverse view taking in consideration issues such as the environment, lifestyle, gender and national culture is necessary (Marks et al. 2006; Vachudova and Hooghe 2009). The new dimension includes the following terms: green/alternative/libertarian (Gal) and traditionalism/authority/nationalism (Tan) (Marks et al. 2006: 157). Scholars have observed that unlike Western Europe, Central and Eastern Europe presents an interesting scenario with regards to how the Tan/Gal dimension couples with the Left/Right economic dimension. Out of the 73 parties in the nine countries observed in one research project in 2006, 50 are either Left-Tan or Right-Gal, while in Western Europe there are strong links between Left and Gal and between Right and Tan (Ibid. 158). Communism was a left-tan ideology and the consequences of regime transition and capitalism have created an interesting

combination of economic and traditional values (Kitschelt 1992, Kostelecky 2002; Lane 2002, Meyer 2003).

The “new politics” dimension is specifically important in analyzing gender equality policy in the newly democratized CEE region as all of the blueprint equality legislation adopted has been inspired by the EU requirements for membership. The post-communist transition and the EU pressure for membership has strengthened the left-tan values and the right-gal ideology, encouraging political parties to get out of the left-tan corner most closely associated with communism (Vachudova and Hooghe 2009: 188). However, not all countries in the region responded to the so-called “integration magnet.” Research demonstrates that the manner in which former communist parties have been reformed matters for the ideological structuring and support of EU induced policies. Party competition, at least in the early years of transition, has been constrained by the behavior and choices of former communist parties (Grzymala-Busse 2002). In cases where the communist parties were quickly reformed, we are less likely to see the Left/Tan relationship than in those where reform came late or when it did not come at all (Vachudova and Hooghe 2009). Thus, the communist legacy has shaped party competition in a quite different way than the west (Kitschelt 1992).

H4: In cases where the communist parties were quickly reformed, we are likely to see support for equality policies from both left and right parties; where communist parties were reformed late we are likely to see more support from right parties than left; and when right parties did not reform at all, we are likely to see an overall rejection of equality policies as a result of strong tan tendencies and anti-EU sentiments.

The process of Europeanization has also played a large role in the way political parties behave. Even though direct effects do not seem to influence the domestic political party system,

the indirect effects may prove the more decisive (Mair 2000). The EU decision making from above has played a major role in the “hollowing out” of political competition among political parties at the national level (Mair 2008: 159). The “one size fit all” blueprint policies have limited the policy space that is available to political parties, depoliticizing issues such as gender equality policy and furthermore, diminish the possible cleavage rising from the ideological disagreements. This effect could be much larger and much more concerning in Central and Eastern Europe, where the requirements for membership were much stricter than they had ever been before in accession countries and where the membership benefits greatly outweighed the costs. Thus, we could observe large agreement among political members from both left and right wings when it comes to fulfilling the requirements of EU gender equality Directives signaling a temporary and artificial ‘ideological peace,’ which would then quickly reverse after membership is gained. Under these circumstances we would expect a backlash on the implementation of the laws.

H5: Left and Right Parties in CEE will largely agree on issues of gender equality policy as they enter the process of accession and they will reverse their support for blueprint equality policies once they gain membership in the EU.

In the next section I examine the developments in blueprint equality policy in CEE by assessing the laws as well as the functionality of the blueprint offices that the legislative measures have produced.

Blueprint policies in Central and Eastern Europe

Central and Eastern European countries came out of a symbolically egalitarian gender regime infused with the communist notions of labor equality. However, in the early 1990s it was obvious that not much was left of the formal egalitarian norms that were heavily pronounced for almost five decades. Women occupied very few seats in the Parliament, even fewer seats in

cabinets and it seemed as if the highly educated and politically active CEE women of the 1990s had retreated to the traditional sphere (Einstein 1993, Rueschemeyer 1998, Gal and Kligman 2000). The early transition story did not however define the region, as gender equality as an issue entered the public agenda once again and individual actors and women's organizations joined the policy debates to determine the path toward equality (Einhorn and Sever 2005, Galligan et al. 2007, Waylen 2007, Avdeyeva 2010). The divergent paths of transition created divergent outcomes for equality policies (Waylen 2007). The quality and strength of formal and informal institutions along with the transition to market capitalism had an effect on the quality of gender equality policies put forward and adopted in each CEE country. Furthermore, the desire and opportunity for EU membership started to play an immediate role in the way countries transformed their Constitutions as well as their legislative measures addressing gender equality. Once countries gained candidate status, they were required to transpose the *acquis communautaire*, the body of European laws, into their own national legislation. Therefore, CEE countries in the late 1990s felt the pressure to improve legislative measures in order to please the EU.

In this article I concentrate on blueprint policy to examine overarching governmental efforts toward gender equality, rather than issue specific legislative measures. Blueprint policies are more comprehensive as they target two or more domains, dealing not only with issues of employment but also reconciliation policies, education, health services, housing etc. Blueprint policies then give us a clearer picture of the cabinet's support for gender equality and social justice. It is worth mentioning here, that there is no expectation that blueprint policies will produce feminist outcomes. The CEE countries have had divergent outcomes in terms of implementation of laws but I do not elaborate on the causality of the variation here. Instead, I seek to examine the unusual behavior of rightist parties in establishing these comprehensive policies and offices, which in itself

is no small feat. We know that even in cases when the EU law has been passed in purely symbolic ways, activists have taken advantage of the legislation and pressured the governments for compliance (Haskova and Krizkova 2008, Kakucs and Peto 2008, Regulska and Grabowska 2008).

There are six major instruments of blueprint policies: symbolic constitutional statements, material constitutional provisions, legislation, executive orders, equality plans and reports and governmental agencies (Mazur 1995, 2002: 48). I look for evidence of each of these instruments in order to differentiate for example between symbolic and material constitutional provisions, whether the statement is a mere recognition of equality or if it is a formal inclusion in the constitution of equal rights of women and men. Thus, I consider the blueprint policy to be meaningful when it presents evidence that the law provides some exact prescriptions on how it may later be successfully implemented.

I also look at the functionality of equality institutions. Equality Bodies (State Women's Machineries or Women's Policy Agencies) are "government structures that are formally charged with furthering women's status and rights" (McBride Stetson and Mazur 1995: 1-2). These institutions can provide the necessary support for the successful implementation of adopted laws. The EU has required the establishment of these institutional structures as part of the gender equality Directives. Therefore, in many CEE countries Women's Policy Agencies (WPAs) have been created to fulfill the accession requirements (Jezerka 2002; Galligan and Sloat 2003). I measure the effectiveness of the agencies by looking at their "structure, leadership, powers and administrative resources" (McBride and Mazur 2010: 15). I argue that the adopted policies will be more likely to be successfully implemented when WPAs are located in relative proximity to power, have sufficient administrative resources and are led by qualified and well-trained leaders.

Legislative Change (1998-2012)

Out of the eleven cases examined here, ten of them have adopted blueprint gender equality legislation. Latvia is the only case that does not have a blueprint equality legislative measure. Instead of passing a wide-range anti-discrimination law, it has chosen to integrate provisions into sectoral law. Thus, Latvia is the singular case in this study that only demonstrates evidence of material constitutional statements and has used those to satisfy the EU gender equality requirements.⁴ Only in Hungary and Poland the comprehensive gender equality laws have been passed by a mainstream leftist coalitional government. In both cases, long-lasting and heated debates have preceded the adoption of the laws. In Hungary, a blueprint policy was proposed in 2002 and later in 2003 widely debated, and then adopted by the Parliament (Dombos et al. 2007). The anti-discrimination law, the Act on Equal Treatment and the Promotion of Equal Opportunities, entered into force in January of 2004, just a few months before Hungary became a EU member (Krizsan and Pap 2005). The Act is considered to be a relatively progressive anti-discrimination law both in its definitions and in the forms of discrimination that it covers (Dombos et al. 2007: 6). In this case it is apparent that the political will to deal with gender equality came as a result of the change in government through the elections of 2002 which established a central-left cabinet coalition comprised of Hungarian Socialist Party (MsZP) and Alliance of Free Democrats (SzDSz).

The case of Poland is not as straight forward as the case of Hungary. Poland did not pass a blueprint anti-discrimination law until December of 2010. While a leftist government was in power, led by the Civic Platform (PO), the debate on whether to adopt the Act on the Implementation of Certain Provisions of the European Union in the Field of Equal Treatment (also referred to as the Act on Equal Treatment) was sparked by both left and right political groups. The

⁴ Article 91 of the Latvian Constitution provides for the principle of equality before the law as well as it speaks against any kind of discrimination. (Novikova 2006)

right wing Law and Justice (PiS) supporters argued that Poland already had various sectoral laws that addressed issues of discrimination, while the left-wing members of parliament and NGO representatives argued that the Act was not sufficient to address societal inequality. Nevertheless, the Sejm adopted the law which came into effect in January of 2011. Assessing the content of the Act on Equal Treatment, it is doubtful whether it can even be considered a blueprint policy, as it does not extend equal treatment in health and education but it only applies to two domains, employment and the distribution of goods and services. Thus, what becomes obvious in the case of Poland is the lack of the leftist government political will to establish a much more qualitative anti-discrimination law. We would expect that in Poland, as we saw in Hungary, a leftist government, especially one that for the first time since the fall of communism has won two consecutive terms, to change the tone of the debate and act as the backbone of social issues. That expectation is simply not met in Poland.

An interesting case is that of Bulgaria, where the blueprint gender equality legislation, the Law on Protection against Discrimination (LPD), entered into force in January of 2004 under the leadership of the new party National Movement Simeon II (NDSV) (Stoykova 2007: 9). The former King of Bulgaria, Simeon II had been forced to create a coalition with the Bulgarian Women's Party and the Movement for National Revival after the Sofia City Court refused to register his party because it did not meet all of the requirements (IPU). It was unclear where NDSV stood with regards to ideological divisions since it was a relatively new movement. Looking at the party manifesto however, I qualify the NDSV as a central-left party. This case serves as an illustration of the still fluid ideological spectrum in CEE. New political parties are still rising and competing quite well and therefore, indicating the volatile constituency that parties compete for in the region.

In the cases of Romania and Slovenia both left and right parties have passed blueprint gender equality legislation. The Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in Romania was adopted in 2002 while a leftist government led by the Social Democracy Party of Romania (PDSR) was in power. However, in 2005 the law was further revised to include more detailed definitions of terms and further comply with the EU requirements. It was a central-right coalitional government comprised of Democratic Liberal Party (PD), National Liberal Party (PNL), Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania (UDMR) and the Humanist Party of Romania (PUR) that ushered the new legislative changes.

Similarly, in Slovenia both left and right parties have passed fairly progressive gender equality legislation. In 2002 the Act on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men was adopted under the leadership of a central-left coalition comprised of Liberal Democrats (LDS), People's Party (SLS), the United List of Social Democrats (ZLSD), and the pensioner's party DeSUS. The implementation of an additional blueprint legislative measure in Slovenia, the Equal Treatment Act of 2004, which set legal grounds for the introduction of gender equality measures in all legal documents (Bahovec 2005, Kuhar 2007, Jalusic et al. 2003), took place during a rightist coalition government led this time by the conservative Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), New Slovenia - Christian People's Party (NSi), the Slovenian People's Party (SLS) and the DeSUS. Thus, in these two cases, we observe both left and right parties to act similarly toward gender equality policy, with very little disagreement or public debates taking place.

In all the other six cases gender equality blueprint legislation was passed and revised under the leadership of right-wing governments.⁵ The case of Czech Republic is of specific importance here. Czech Republic, unlike any other new EU member state, had the least amount of legislative

⁵ Latvia is excluded here since it did not adopt blueprint gender equality legislation.

progress with regards to gender equality. It was not until 2009 when a blueprint Anti-Discrimination law was passed, 13 months after President Vaclav Klaus, the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) chairman vetoed the bill (Strafeldova 2009). The Parliament with the majority of support from ODS as well as leftist Social Democratic (CSSD) and Green Party (SZ) members of parliament overrode the veto. There was also opposition from radical left and right parties (Communists and Christian Democrats) but not significant enough to block the bill. It should also be noted that left-wing representatives did express concerns that the law was not sufficient in addressing inequality but nevertheless saw it as a step forward toward improving Czech government's commitment to equality (Ibid.). What is more interesting here is that, the Czech Anti-Discrimination law was passed during a transitional period, when the right-center government lost the Parliament's vote of confidence and a 'caretaker' government was put into place. The ODS, the CSSD and the SZ agreed to form a non-partisan government (IPU). The case of the Czech Republic presents evidence of both phenomena that were depicted above, the inability of the leftist governments to push the gender equality agenda forward when in power, as well as the unusual consensus that both left and right parties reached in 2009 to adopt a blueprint comprehensive equality law.

In all cases, but Latvia, there is evidence of symbolic constitutional statements but the blueprint comprehensive policies adopted have become the pillars of equality legislation in each country. Three main types of blueprint legislation have been adopted in CEE: 1) Gender Equality Acts (Croatia and Estonia) 2) Laws on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (Hungary, Lithuania, Romania and Slovenia) and 3) Anti-Discrimination Laws (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia). Despite the unequal quality of adoption and implementation of these laws across the region, overall the CEE cases analyzed here have made tremendous progress

with regards to adoption of legislative measures introduced by the EU as part of the conditionality requirements. Blueprint gender equality policies have established for the first time in the region a set of criteria, definitions and in many cases clear and set punishments to eliminate gender-based discrimination. What is surprising however, is that these progressive measures have been for the most part passed and ushered by central-right cabinet coalitions. Central-left parties, while at times have been outspoken on the quality of the laws, have been unable to play the central role that we have come to expect in the Western post-industrial democracies, signaling an ideological shift in the region.

Institutional Change (1998-2009)

The adoption of blueprint gender equality policies was important because it also had institutional implications, establishing monitoring equality institutions which would enable the successful implementation and evaluation of the laws. As with legislative developments, despite EU requirements, CEE countries have had a divergent experience with regards to equality institutions. Each country has established these structures at different points in time, under different mandates, with various capacities in terms of human and financial resources and with different degrees of functionality. A starting point for the establishment of the governmental equality bodies was the Beijing 4th World Conference of 1995, even though in some cases, such as Poland and Slovenia, efforts to construct an institution in charge of gender equality were initiated before that. However, for the majority of the post-communist European countries the starting of negotiations with the EU further contributed to the establishment of gender equality offices and other assisting institutions, together usually referred to as ‘gender equality institutional structure.’ More specifically, the adoption of blueprint equal opportunities, anti-discrimination or gender equality laws to comply with the EU membership requirement further stipulated the

establishment of an equality office that would monitor and assist in the implementation of the law among other duties. In this manner, institutions that would otherwise have taken many years to be established were quickly set up in post-communist Europe.

While all cases examined here have made some progress with regards to establishing equality institutions to monitor the implementation of gender equality laws, four of them fulfill the functional criteria I have established. The largest differentiation among these equality bodies is their access to power. Most of the gender equality offices across the CEE region have been established as Units or Departments under the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs/Policy, with limited human and financial resources. Furthermore, their mandates have been limited to advising and educating instead of assisting in implementation and active monitoring of the laws. Only four cases demonstrate somewhat developed institutional structures: Croatia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia. In all four of these countries, there has been overwhelming support for blueprint gender equality policy from the right-wing cabinet coalitions. Slovenia is the only case where a leftist coalition was involved in the adoption of comprehensive gender equality policy but there we depict no change in the degree of commitment to policy adoption moving from left to right.

In Croatia, the adoption of Gender Equality Act (GEA) at the end of July 2003 enabled the creation of several formal institutions charged with monitoring, coordinating and advising on issues of gender equality. In 2003 the gender equality Ombudswoman was appointed by the Parliament to act autonomously and independently, monitor the implementation of GEA and other regulations relating to gender equality and report to the Croatian Parliament at least once a year.⁶ The Ombudsperson is entitled to issue warnings, proposals and recommendations regarding cases of violations of the principle of gender equality, cases of discrimination against individuals or

⁶ Articles 19-25 of Gender Equality Law

groups of individuals committed by government bodies, bodies of the units of local and regional self-government or other bodies vested with public authority, by employees of that body and other legal entities. These drastic institutional changes took place under the leadership of a leftist coalition dominated by the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Liberal Social Party (HSL). However, even when power changed hands in 2003 from left to right, the Croatian Governmental Office for Gender Equality was still established. There were no signs of ideological differences when it came to implementing the institutional prescriptions of the Gender Equality Act. The Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) continued the commitment to gender equality, in line with its mainstream populist message.

Various equality institutions have been established in Lithuania. The Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson was established in 1999 under the leadership of a conservative government, as the main monitoring body that deals with cases of discrimination in all grounds, including gender (Taljunaite 2005). The Office is an independent monitoring mechanism for the Law on Equal Opportunities for women and men but since 2005 the Office of the Ombudsperson also monitors discrimination on grounds such as age, gender, disability, ethnicity etc. The Ombudsperson is accountable to the Parliament and has the capacity to propose legislative changes based on the assessment of the situation in the country (Pilinkaite-Sotirovic 2007). The work of the Ombudsperson has increased over the years. In 1999 when the Office was just established, it received 31 complaints, in 2003 50 complaints and by 2008 it received a total of 219 filed complaints (Davulis 2010: 98). The office of the Ombudsperson was established after a new left coalition government comprised of the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP), the SLP (Social Liberal Party), the Labor Party (DP), and the Union of Farmers' Party and New Democracy Party came into power. Once again, what we observe here is the unusual similar behavior of both

left and right camps with regards to the successful establishment of gender equality monitoring institutions.

In Slovakia, the Department of Equal Opportunities was first established in 1999 when a wide coalition of right wing (SDK and SOP), centrist Hungarian Coalition (SMK) and reformed communist Party of the Democratic Left (SDL) came to power. In 2004, the equality office changed to the Department for Equal Opportunities and Antidiscrimination following the adoption of the Anti-Discrimination Act, and in 2005 as a result of the transformation of the structure of the Ministry of Labor Social Affairs and Family was renamed the Department for Family and Gender Policy, and again in 2006 changed to the Department of Gender Equality and Equality of Opportunities working directly under the Minister (UNECE Report 2010). The main role of the Gender Equality Office has been to initiate legislative change and monitor the implementation of existing laws (Bitusikova 2005; Búturová et al. 1999; Kvapilová and Porubanová 2001). Even though various changes have taken place from 1999 to today, the Department has been the main gender equality body in Slovakia. The institution has been active in initiating legislative changes concerning domestic violence, trafficking in women and labor policy. Despite the changes from a right-centered cabinet coalition led by SDKU to a left coalition led by SMER, little changes occurred with regards to the Department's mandate and access to power. Slovakia, just like Lithuania and Croatia, has established a successful equality institution with bipartisan support.

Under similar circumstances, Slovenia has also established a functional gender equality office. The very first equality body was established relatively early. The Women's Policy Office was established in 1992 as a professional service responsible for the realization of the rights of women guaranteed by the Constitution, legislation and international treaties. Some of its tasks included raising public awareness, participating in drafting of legislation, proposing changes to the

existing laws and preparing and disseminating country reports. The Office was renamed the Office for Equal Opportunities in 2001 but its mandate and operational structure remained the same. The approach towards issues however did gradually change from mainly concentrating on women and discrimination to tackling more broad policy and structural issues related to gender equality (Neubauer 2004). Within the Office for Equal Opportunities the position of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality was established in 2003. The main objectives of the Advocate are to assist the victims of discrimination and to provide guidance and advice to prevent discrimination.

It should not be surprising that the rest of the seven cases in this study have not developed functional equality institutions, considering the region's overall diagnosis of 'weak institutions.' The lack of state commitment to gender equality may not be the sole reason for the symbolic nature of the blueprint equality offices. The legacy of communism still haunting the CEE countries may also contribute to the inability of WPAs to properly operate.

Explaining 'Ideological Confusion' on Gender Equality Policy

Based on the empirical evidence presented above, it is clear that the dynamics of support for gender equality policy in CEE are somewhat different than what we have seen in Western established democracies. As previously mentioned, only in the case of Hungary has an anti-discrimination/gender equality law been passed while a leftist cabinet coalition has been in power. The largest step that central-left cabinets have taken to promote gender equality has been to slightly increase the power of the blueprint equality office within the cabinet, as in the case of Poland. Even this action is a questionable indicator of governmental commitment to equality because as we know from previous research, cabinets usually revert to previous institutional practices and in this case the gender equality office may have been an unintentional beneficiary. Central-right parties on the other hand seem to have sponsored and supported the adoption of legislative and

many times meaningful measures to address societal gender inequality. Thus, we find more support for the third hypotheses developed in this article than for the first, supporting previous existing work that points out to the different behavior of central-right and central-left parties in the region (Tavits and Letki 2009). In this case, we notice that right parties have gained issue ownership of individual rights, and women's rights more specifically, something that left parties couldn't do very easily. Gender equality, at least from a very symbolic stance, was a central part of the communist ideology and thus, the reformed communist parties were eager to detach themselves from issues that further deteriorated their status in political competition.

The support for equality and justice is not necessarily only a behavioral shift from the party programs. When looking at left and right party manifestos in CEE, there are some partisan differences on the issue of social justice and equality but usually the central-right parties/coalitions make more egalitarian claims than central-left parties/coalitions. In all eleven countries that I examined, only in the case of Croatia did the left party make drastically more claims for equality than the right party. This may have something to do with the nature of the Croatian ideological structure, where the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) was transformed from leading an authoritarian government in the early 1990s to becoming the leader of economic and political reform later in the transition. This may have given the Social Democratic Party (SDP) the opportunity to take over issue ownership of individual rights and equal justice, at least in its party manifesto. Despite the scarce of evidence of commitment to equality in the HDZ party program, the party has behaved quite amicably towards gender equality policy, adopting a very progressive gender equality law as well as establishing a functional blueprint office. The phenomenon of rightist parties supporting progressive gender equality laws has been the norm across the region. Thus, what I find is that leftist parties lack strong claims in their party manifestos towards social

justice and equality which in turn explains their weak position on gender equality blueprint policies.

What we observe is not only behavioral deviation of left and right parties but also a more general consensus on issues of equality among party manifestos. In other words, CEE leftist parties lack the strong support for gender equality policy from the inception of their party manifestos which tells us that they are appealing to a constituency that does not value these liberal pro-social justice norms. In turn, rightist parties have an unusual amount of equality claims instilled in their party manifestos which then is translated into even stronger actions in support of public policy. This may have been an acceptable shift for the post-communist constituency that could not trust the left to once again make claims for equality and bring back the communist symbolic jargon, but saw the right as non-threatening and inspired by liberal democratic values to promote individual rights.

When examining the left/right divide and the tan/gal perspectives, countries are divided into three groups⁷: Immediate Reformers, where the communist party reformed itself rapidly after 1989 into a modern European social-democratic party and embraced market economic reforms (Poland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Slovenia), Late Reformers, where the communist parties did not embrace liberal democracy and economic reform right away (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Slovakia) and Never Reformers, where the major communist party remained unreformed and unapologetic (Czech Republic). I hypothesized that based on the timing of the reform the policy outcomes would also differ. Indeed, I find that the case of Czech Republic, where the Communist Party of Bohemia (KSCM) never reformed, is certainly an exception since the EU

⁷ I utilize the divisions of Vachudova and Hooghe (2009) where they define as “upholding liberal democratic standards, supporting comprehensive market-oriented reforms and condemning the party’s crimes and mismanagement during the decades of communist rule.”

gender equality requirements have not been met with enthusiasm. Both left and right parties have been fairly weak in addressing the issue. Unlike in the rest of the region, the leading party of the right wing, the ODS, has demonstrated *tan* characteristics. This can be explained by the fact the ODS ran unopposed to a competing left-wing party in the early 1990s and therefore, it adopted policy positions in an ad hoc manner. The structure of party competition becomes highly unpredictable, when parties no longer vie for constituents, as a result of the absence of a rational political alternative.

I also find overwhelming support for the argument that rightist parties in the late reformer countries are more likely to endorse gender equality policy. When the communist parties took a longer time to reform and abandon the *tan* corner, this was an opening for the right opposition parties to occupy the *gal* corner of the ideological space, appearing more pro-democracy and pro-liberal values and winning over the constituency comprised of the young, the intellectuals, women, minorities and all other groups that refused the communist past. In terms of the quality of equality institutions, I find no evidence that the timing of the communist party reform had an effect in the establishment of functional blueprint offices. Both, some early and late reformers have established functional institutions.

In this analysis, I find mixed evidence in support of the argument that early reformer countries are more likely to receive support for equality policies from both left and right parties. In Poland, anti-discrimination law was not passed until 2010 and in Latvia there is still no comprehensive blueprint policy adopted. It is arguable that in both cases gender equality policy has been adopted, just not in the comprehensive way that we see through blueprint policy. Nevertheless, the case of Poland and the substantial debate that took place in 2010 regarding the anti-discrimination law is evidence that finally, equality policies are now being debated in the

public arena and that political parties may start to shape their own programs and manifestos accordingly. Another possible explanation for the case of Poland may be that the issue of gender equality has produced an ideological debate because unlike in the rest of the new EU member states, the law is being passed after membership, which drastically changes the incentive structures of the political parties to support or oppose the law. This argument may find some ground in the case of Czech Republic as well, where the issue has also attracted more controversy than usual. This leads to the next hypothesis examining the role of EU membership on the way that political parties behave toward gender equality policy.

The hypothesis developed in this research article refers to the effect of Europeanization in the region. Has the EU “hollowed out” the policy space, where political parties have not had a chance to rally around issues that were part of the requirements for membership? In this analysis, I find that in the majority of cases (Czech Republic and Poland) there has been an overwhelming agreement on EU requirements, signaling ‘ideological peace.’ While this has been seen as a positive development for short term goals, the adoption of quality legislation, it is unclear what effects it may have in the long term. If Europeanization has caused parties in post-communist Europe to temporarily agree on issues of gender equality, then we expect that in due time, after gaining membership the political parties would reverse their positions. While, I do not find a backlash effect in this analysis, we are seeing cases like Hungary where the right-wing party Fidesz is transforming the Constitution to undermine quality policies already in place. The case of Hungary may be the beginning of the ‘backlash’ effect and the rise of a more populist and tan right-wing in CEE.

Discussion and Conclusion

What has caused left-wing parties like the Lithuanian Democratic Labor Party (LDLP) to disintegrate the welfare system and ignore the social democratic principles in the policies they have adopted (Krupavicius 2003)? Why did the main left wing party in Slovenia, the Social Democratic Party (SD) adopt “center right or even rightist policies” (Fink-Hafner 1999: 116)? What would cause the social democrat Democratic Party (PD) of Romania to create a coalition with the center-right liberal National Liberal Party (PNL) and then later even switch to a center-right ideology? The questions posed here highlight the unusual behavior of left parties in CEE. Unlike in Western post-industrial democracy, the left wing in post-communist Europe has not been the promoter of social justice and equality that we have expected to see in our models of analysis. Furthermore, in response to the ‘strange’ leftist behavior, the newly established rightist parties have responded and occupied the progressive *gal* ideological space. We observe rightist parties stand up for women’s rights in ways that we don’t even witness the left parties do in the Western world. For example, in 2006 the central-right coalition in Slovakia collapsed as the conservative Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) withdrew its support after the leading party, the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKU), refused to approve a treaty with the Vatican that would have allowed doctors working for hospitals funded by the Catholic Church to refuse to carry out abortions on grounds of conscience (IPU).

In this article, I concentrated in the development of gender equality blueprint policies to illustrate and explain the phenomenon of ‘ideological confusion.’ I find evidence that indeed left and right parties have switched roles in support for equality policies, where right parties promote and usher the changes and the leftist parties are either passive or do very little to promote gender equality laws. I argue that because communism was a left-tan ideology, leftist parties have had

incentives to shed away their pariah status by adopting more traditionally rightist and pro-market reform and ignoring issues such as gender equality. In turn, rightist parties comprised of communist opposition forces have more populist claims and embraced the role of preparing the CEE countries for EU membership.

Furthermore, I find ample evidence that the communist legacy still plays a role in the way political competition is structured in the region. When communist parties were reformed late, rightist parties have gained the leading role for improving legislation and institutional structures for gender equality, while leftist parties have taken a more passive role. The process of Europeanization has also produced a more accepted consensus on issues of gender equality by disabling a true political debate during the accession process and furthermore reinstating the role of right wing parties in promoting individual rights. The long-term outcomes of this process have yet to be felt in CEE as countries move away from the membership incentive structure heavily outweighed by the benefits and into a new structure with new rules and a different set of incentives.

This research study leads us to question the constituencies that left and right wing parties seek to attract in post-communist Europe. The ‘new politics’ debate has questioned the electoral foundations of political parties, which in Central and Eastern Europe have certainly not been similar to those in Western established democracies. The partisan politics literature assumes that the Left still represents the working class and their interests and that its constituency is made up of highly educated, young and highly libertarian voters, many of them women (Esping-Andersen 1999). However, the opposition movement in Central and Eastern Europe, which comprised the majority of the constituencies of the central-right parties was anti-communist and therefore did not fit the usual profile of leftist party constituencies. In this article, I find that leftist political parties are not only behaviorally deviating from the expectations but also programmatically, having

established a less egalitarian platform than what we are used to seeing in the Western post-industrial democracies. This signals that leftist post-communist parties are intentionally eschewing equality politics to revive their constituency with more pro-West and anticommunist members. The rightist political parties which did not have an established constituency to begin with wanted to uphold their commitment to liberal values and Western international organizations such as the EU and therefore, embraced whatever reforms that made them look more populist and progressive.

The results of this study have broad theoretical implications not only for the literature on party positioning but also for gender and politics literature. We must reexamine the ideology variable in our models by questioning the role that left parties play in supporting women's interests in political debates. The expectation that leftist parties are the active promoters of gender equality is found to be the case in this study. A more comprehensive view of ideology should be incorporated, along the lines of gal and tan in addition to left and right, in order to capture the full effects of party politics on equality policies.

Further research needs to be conducted in the region in order to understand whether this is a permanent ideological shift in the commitment of rightist parties to egalitarian policies or if it is a temporary outcome produced by the political and economic transition coupled with the incentives for EU membership. The expansion of the concept of equality, extending rights to Roma women and LGBT in the region is another opportunity for us to assess where left and right parties stand in the equality and social justice debate.

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