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Europeanization through Trans-national Party co-operation

The European People's Party and its (potential) sister parties in

Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic

Abstract:

In 1989 the European People's party (EPP) set the goal to represent Christian Democracy in the whole of Europe. This paper sets out to discuss three questions concerning this. A) What challenges and problems did the EPP have to confront? B) What strategies did they use to face these problems? C) To what degree has the EPP succeeded in reaching the goals? The study is done by following the EPP over time and how it has worked towards the new parties in Central and Eastern Europe with a special focus on Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. The data used for this is party documents, yearbooks and interviews. Both the aims and the strategies of the EPP caused internal disputes. The main question was whether size or ideology should guide the strategic decisions. The conclusions are that EPP was successful much thanks to its pragmatism to organization and ability to reach compromises internally.

Introduction

The purpose with this paper is to contribute to the discussion on how political parties consciously and unconsciously can influence each other and under what circumstances this can take place. Focus is put on the European People's Party (EPP) and its activities in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989. In the new political situation 1989, EPP set the ambitious goal to represent Christian Democracy in the whole Europe and thus become the strongest European political force. By following how the EPP has been working towards likeminded parties in Central and Eastern Europe in the process of integrating them in the European Christian Democratic family, this paper wants to contribute with some insights about the role of international party cooperation in the process of party system nationalization in Central and Eastern Europe.

The following working questions will be the base for the analysis:

1. What problems and challenges did the EPP have to confront in setting out this goal?
2. What was the strategy of the EPP to face these problems? What tools were used to obtain the goals?
3. To what degree has the EPP succeeded in obtaining its aims?

To deal with the working questions, the strategy is to analyze a development over time. In this sense, it is a method of process tracing. By systematic study of party documents and in-depth interviews with key figures within the EPP at the time, the aim is to follow and map out the activities of EPP in East Central Europe. A special focus is given the Polish, Hungarian and the Czech development to get a more detailed picture. There is no ambition to cover the whole development of the three party systems. Rather I want to pick out some interesting situations which have interesting implications for how actors act and react and how they reason in a certain political context. Focus is to a large extent given to party elites and how they interact. The CEE parties may seem like passive objects in this study but this is not the case. They were and are political subjects indeed. But in this paper the focus is put on EPP as apolitical subject. I will focus on a time period starting from the time around Communist regime-collapse and ending at around the time where the national party systems have matured and the parties are fully integrated in the European party family (or have been excluded/chosen to stay out).

The paper is structured as follows: After the introduction follows a short section about earlier research. This is followed by a presentation of the EPP and its activities in Central and Eastern Europe. After that comes the analysis of the development in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. Finally in the

conclusion, the implications of working questions are discussed in the light of the three country experiences.

An underlying theoretical research interest concerns a question which in a way is a byproduct of this empirical study. That is how and to what degree the links to the EPP has influenced the national parties' ideological identity and organizational stability. In the conclusions I will propose some areas from where this where this question can researched in more detail.

Related research fields

I will here briefly address two research fields: The research on Europeanization and research on parties on the one hand and the research on party systems in Central and Eastern Europe on the other.

Political parties and party systems in Central and Eastern Europe

A useful summary on political parties and party systems in CEE and what is making them different from those in Western Europe is made by Peter Mair. He proposes that there are three main factors that have shaped a specific context for party life; the democratization process, the character of the electorate and the context of competition.¹

The democratization (i) in the post-communist countries took place in a historical context where the electorate was already “effectively incorporated, mobilized, activated and politicized”. This meant that the political parties grew out without the need to mobilize outside the parliamentary arena and therefore had a weak linkage to voters and the civil society. The democratization was also special in that it included two other factors; transition to market economy and state/constitutional building.² Both these parallel transitions had real potential of creating clear winners and losers. This created according to Mair strong conditions for an intense competition. The electorate (ii) in CEE is characterized as open with weak loyalties to parties and high volatility.³ Ingrid van Biezen has suggested that these parties have made an ‘evolutionary leap’, meaning that they have ‘leaped over’ the classical West European stages of cadre party and Mass party direct into professional electoral parties.⁴ The pattern of competition (iii) is also characterized by openness rather than closure. The new party elites have weak organizational loyalties which leads to many party splits and mergers. Institutional uncertainty and also uncertainty in coalition alternatives serves as a general difficulty for all actors to predict the future.⁵

¹ Mair (1997) p 175

² Offe (1992) p 14

³ Mair (1997) p 180-185

⁴ Van Biezen (2005) p 155-164

⁵ Mair (1997) p 187-191

So, parties and party systems in CEE can be summarised as more fluid compared to their western counterparts. The party organizations have from the beginning been state-centered and elitist weak ties to voters or civil society in general. If relating to the possibilities for EPP to influence these parties with this environment of openness the prospects should be good. On the other hand the weaker party loyalties would definitely be a hurdle for the EPP. It makes it difficult for all actors including the transnational party to know what party to cooperate with.

Another question that can affect the possibilities for western European transnational parties in their attempts to integrate parties from CEE is cleavages that differ from the traditional western European party system with a dominating socio-economic divide. Even if cleavages are generally weaker in CEE when it comes to core voter bases and party loyalty, they do play a role. Due to its history with weaker industrialization and weak middle-classes, the CEE party systems are not necessarily structured along the economic divide. In Hungary for example, there is a ‘national divide’ within the political elite between those who see themselves as the defenders of the Hungarian nation founded on ethnicity, history, and religion and on the other hand the defenders of individualism, universalism and secularism. The socialists in this context are often criticized from the right for being too market-oriented.⁶ Also in Poland there is a ‘cultural’ cleavage competing with the economic while the Czech Republic is often used as the single country in CEE with a dominating ‘western’ socioeconomic cleavage structuring the parties.⁷

Intuitively one assumes that a party which operates in a society with different cleavages should more difficult to integrate into western-based transnational party organizations. But in the case of EPP, it has a rather toned down ideological profile it might be a smaller problem as long as the party is not extreme right. This issue will be discussed further in the country cases.

Europeanization of political parties

When it comes to research about europeanization of political parties, specific analyses are a recent feature of the academic debate. One analysis from Peter Mair claimed that the impact of Europe on national party systems was minimal: “...of the many areas of domestic politics, which may have experienced an impact from Europe, it is party systems in particular that have perhaps proved to be most impervious to change”⁸. Mair’s conclusion has been questioned. Paul G Lewis for example argued that it is more interesting to look at indirect effects rather than the direct which Mair focuses on.⁹

⁶ Delsoldato (2002) p 281

⁷ Jasiewicz (2006) p 27, Delsoldato (2002) p 283 For a good background of cleavages in CEE, see also Markowski (1997) and Kitschelt et al (1999)

⁸ Mair (2000) p 4

⁹ Lewis (2006) p 5

I would go one step further and argue that we would find different results in CEE. Even if there are some late publications¹⁰ on CEE most research so far has been done on Western Europe.¹¹ As Peter Mair himself has noted in his 1997 book, the parties and party systems in CEE are more open and the parties are more loosely linked to the civil society. This is one argument that parties in CRR could have been more influenced than we think. General studies on Europeanization have also noted certain hierarchical relation when it comes to ‘europenization east’. The background is often short-term demands from EU on an applicant country. In this case a clear power-relation.¹² I want to put forward the question if the same tendencies of asymmetrical east-west power relations can be found in the relations between political parties.

In 2002, Robert Ladrech presented a framework for the analysis of Europeanization of political parties. His point of departure was that European integration influences the operating arenas of national political parties. He proposed five arenas or areas, where a process of Europeanization would be probable: (1) Policy/programmatic content; (2) party organization (3) patterns of party competition (4) party-government relations and (5) relations beyond the national party system.¹³

This study relates especially to the first and the second point and to some degree to the third. In the case of this study the EPP activities towards the potential member parties and the process of integrating these parties may well influence their party programs and organization. What is somewhat surprising is that Ladrech *only* alludes to changes that are directly related to EU-integration. In the policy programmatic arena, he points at how parties mention the EU more frequently in the party programs, and in the organizational theme he focus on the incorporation of EP delegates in the organization. In this study I want to raise the issue of a wider meaning of europeanization of political parties. Claudio Radaelli’s general definition is also closer to this: “...a set of processes through which the EU...dynamics... become part of the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies”¹⁴.

Finally, in an article about transnational party co-operation and party developments in CEE, Geoffrey Pridham sees two different levels of Europeanization. One he calls ‘...a diffuse sense of following European models of party development’ and means that the parties adapt themselves by a ‘sense’ or by intuition to what they think is expected from them. This should be seen against the background of EU

¹⁰ One example is Lewis & Mansfeldova (eds.) (2006) *The European Union and Party Politics in Central and Eastern Europe*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan

¹¹ Enyedi (2007) p 65

¹² Goetz (2003) p 6-7

¹³ Ladrech (2002) p 396

¹⁴ Radaelli (2000) cited from Ladrech (2001) p 392

promise and pressures on political elites, or in these study, why not unspoken promises from EPP? The other is real pressure or influence through inter-elite socialization¹⁵.

The European People's Party: a short background

In this section I will present how the European Christian Democracy took organizational form and developed ambitious goals for its movement which became even more ambitious after 1989.

Development before 1989

In 1989 there existed two parallel bodies in the European-level Christian democracy: The European Union of Christian Democrats (EUCD) and the European People's party (EPP). The EUCD was founded in 1965 as a transformation of the more loose organization 'Nouvelles Equipes Internationales'.¹⁶ The new EUCD was more systematic and dense as an organization than NEI and it also had an outspoken goal:

“To develop a permanent, close cooperation between Christian Democratic Parties in Europe, leading to a common policy of creating a federated Europe.”¹⁷

The EUCD wanted to include all Christian Democratic parties in the democratic countries in Europe. At the same time the aim was to develop a common 'doctrine' which included a vision of a federal Europe. This ambition to become both broad and deep has an in-built duplicity and perhaps even contradiction. As we will see later the strategy of European Christian democracy is often a balance between two groupings who balance against each other; the ideological 'narrowers' and the pragmatic 'broadeners'.

The EPP was founded in 1976 as the first European grouping calling itself a 'political party'. The reasons behind were mostly institutional. The increasing speed of the EC-integration process made the Christian Democratic group in the European Parliament (EP) to articulate a need for coordination and communication among the parties in the different EC-member countries. The decision in 1974 to introduce direct EP-elections increased the need for coordination and quickened the process.¹⁸ The two other European party groups in the EP, the Socialists and the Liberals also developed party federations outside the EP before the EP-elections in 1979.¹⁹

¹⁵ Pridham (2001)

¹⁶ Jansen, Thomas (2006); p 53-58

¹⁷ EUCD statutes 1971, via Jansen (2006) p 73

¹⁸ Kohler and Myrziak (1982) p 196

¹⁹ Hix and Lord (1997) p 168

The purpose and goal with the newly founded EPP was still very ambitious but perhaps somewhat more instrumental than EUCD's:

“The party ensures close permanent cooperation between its member parties and ‘equipés’ in order to realize a European federation through joint policies. In particular...it advances, coordinates, and organizes European actions by its members.”²⁰

But the founding process exposed a divide between a ‘broad camp’ and a ‘narrow camp’. The underlying issue was whether the conservative parties in UK and Denmark should be invited or not. The ‘broad camp’ (mainly the German parties), argued that the conservatives should be invited. Their argument was that the success of the CDU and the CSU in Germany was their ability to include both liberal and conservative forces. Therefore it was important for them to avoid “Christian Democratic” in the party name and to invite the conservatives. The ‘narrow group’ (mainly Italian, Dutch and Belgian parties) argued that the name was a symbol of the party’s ideology and position. They argued that the party name should reflect the ideal and that the conservative parties should be invited to join *after* the foundation of the party.²¹

The result was a compromise. The broader name of “European Peoples Party” was accepted but the conservative parties would not be invited while it would threaten the coherence and effectiveness of the new party in this critical early stage. The plan was to invite the conservative parties at a later stage but they (as the Germans had feared) formed their own organization European Democrat Union (EDU).²² It should be mentioned that a German dominance within EUCD and EPP has been confirmed by several authors.²³

So the creation of the EPP made the divide between the ‘narrowers’ and the ‘broadeners’ visible. The narrow group won but to the price of creation of the EDU. This included mainly the conservative parties which were excluded when EPP was founded. It also created a problem for the EUCD whose status was outweighed by the EPP. It had become a de facto waiting-room for parties coming from countries waiting to join the EU. The diminishing role of the EUCD initiated plans in the 1980’s to merge the EUCD with EPP. It was a weakened European Christian Democracy that entered the 1980’s.²⁴

The new situation 1989

The new political situation in Central and Eastern Europe was a challenge for all political forces in Western Europe. How should they handle the situation, what strategies and goals should be set out?

²⁰ EPP Constitution 1976, Article 3

²¹ Hahn and Lucker (1987) p 145

²² Jansen (2006) p 76-77

²³ See for example Kohler-Myrzik (1982)

²⁴ Jansen (2006) p 71-75

Compared to the others, the European Christian Democrats had both clear aims and strategy from the beginning. It was decided that the merging of EUCD into EPP should wait. They realized that it was now an advantage to have two complementing organizations. The EUCD had gotten a new role and could now focus on one thing only: To work actively for the transformation from a west European organization to one which embraced the whole continent.²⁵ In hindsight, one can say that despite the time- and energy consuming experiment with EPP and EUCD as parallel organizations and the drawn-out hostilities within the organization this created, it was worth it. The parallel organizations now became an advantage, while the EUCD could gather Christian Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe under one umbrella and at the same time serve as a 'buffer-zone' to the EPP. As Hanley puts it:

“The EPP’s role of co-ordination is enhanced by its position within the wider EUCD, into which it fits like the proverbial Russian doll. This flexible structure enables a wider grouping of parties to be kept in the CD fold, with the prospect of graduating eventually to the inner sanctum of the EPP”²⁶

The aim for the EPP and mainly the EUCD’s coming activities in Central and Eastern Europe was outspoken and clear. That was both to support the Christian democratic parties and parties close to them in Central and Eastern Europe.

“...systematic expansion of contacts with the parties of Central and Eastern Europe as a first priority. Bilateral relations must contribute to this. Giving support to developing an infrastructure of Christian Democratic parties, and Christian Democratic thought, is a priority.”²⁷

This resolution if any shows the explicit intention of EPP to “giving support to developing an infrastructure of Christian Democratic parties, and Christian Democratic thought” in these countries. The last formulation shows that there was also a somewhat less altruistic reason for this priority. The EPP saw its chance to become the dominant European political force after the fall of the communist regimes. They knew that socialism was discredited and that liberalism had never had a strong representation in the region. A strong position in Central and Eastern Europe would pay-off after an EU-enlargement with a dominant parliamentary grouping.²⁸

But the ambitious goals immediately met a more complicated reality. One of the main problems in the early stage for EUCD was to identify the proper parties with which to initiate links. This was indeed a problem also for the European Liberals and Socialists because there was a time-pressure. The first free elections were called only a few months after the fall of the communist regimes and it was of course

²⁵ Jansen (2006) p 169

²⁶ Hanley (1994) p 195

²⁷ Resolution of the EPP Congress, Dublin 1990

²⁸ This view of the situation is further confirmed in Jansen (2006) p 169

strategic to be present. But this difficulty seemed to be most present on the centre-Right of the political spectrum. Even if identifying the de facto Christian democratic parties could be difficult, a more sensitive issue was to draw a line to exclude those parties with hard Right views. Some of the Christian parties in the region had national-populist or even anti-Semitic tendencies.²⁹ Facing the complicated reality forced a compromise between the balancing aims of strength and ideological purity. That compromise entailed a broad spectrum of potential parties on the one hand and an ambition to help or encourage these centre-Right parties to find their home in Christian democracy.³⁰

The strategies of EPP and EUCD for Central and Eastern Europe.

In this section I will present European People's Party's (EPP) activities in Central and Eastern Europe and the gradual inclusion of new member-parties. The focus is set on the strategies of EPP and how these were gradually adapted to the special problems that appeared. After this section I will look closer at the development in Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic for a closer evaluation of the strategies and tools used by the EPP.

The first years

In 1989, many Christian democratic parties and foundations from Western Europe were in the process of travelling around to get to know the new parties and initiate personal contacts. The problem was that they were unaware of each other and there was no coordination centre. Faced with this situation, the "EUCD and EPP working group for Central and Eastern Europe" was created in October 1989. It took a coordinating role in this process and it had the following tasks:

1. Inventory of the parties; party name and description of the party's profile and experiences from the party
2. Exchange of experiences; the West European parties report to the working group their contacts and experiences of parties and personalities.
3. Planning activities; gather information about the different projects from the western Christian democratic parties
4. Coordinate the support; material support (copy-machines for example), arrange courses and seminars and continuous visits of western delegations.
5. Information centre; not only to the western Christian democratic parties but also to the Christian democratic international.³¹

²⁹ Pridham (2001) p 186

³⁰ Jansen (2006) p 175

³¹ The tasks of this working group is summarised in Europa im Blickfeld no 11, 30 October 1989, p 23-24

So, what kind of support could EUCD provide? All the new parties sought help before the 1990 elections to be able to mobilize the party, do campaigning etc. The actors that contributed were individual parties and foundations.³² The main responsibility lay on the individual parties to establish bilateral relations. The first year it was many visits and meetings. As one observer noticed in the Hungarian elections 1990 “...there were all these foreign politicians from whichever party involved in the campaign.”³³ The EPP and the EUCD could only play this role to some degree. They had no material resources but could give advice in organizational and programmatic issues.

“Well of course they needed money, that’s quite obvious. But there was not great readiness let’s say to get the money. “...” But they were anyway quite happy with the ideal help they got to form their cadre of young people and so on. “...” So that was the main help we could give them, to organize the formation of the militants or the responsible people.”³⁴

In October 1991 the EUCD founded the “Academy for Central and Eastern Europe” based in Budapest. This was done with the help of different foundations which were connected to the European Christian democracy. In this institute, systematic training seminars could be held directed to actual but also future party activists in Christian democratic or those politically allied to them. The main purpose with the seminars was to provide democratic, political and parliamentary know-how to the new parties.³⁵ This setup, I would say, is a strong indicator for influence on party identity. It provided a possibility for the new parties to send one or two persons for a week or two. The participants had the chance to get to know and learn from experienced party activists from Western Europe but also meet and exchange experiences with Christian democrats from other Central and Eastern European countries. For the new parties, who, compared with the former communist parties lacked the knowledge and infrastructure, this democratic and political “know-how” was of course also welcome.

An occasion which may serve as an endpoint for the ‘first stage’ of contact building was the EUCD congress in Warsaw in June 1992. When 14 parties from Central and Eastern Europe took part as observers, the atmosphere was both solemn and joyful.³⁶ For the first time representatives from post-communist countries were also elected to the presidency.

In the next years a number of meetings and seminars were arranged either by western EUCD member parties or the different foundations and institutes tied to the Christian democratic movement.. Above all there were numerous visits by individual national parties. Except to show solidarity with the new partners the aim of all these travels was to consolidate contacts and keep updated on the party

³² For a good overview of the general support given, see Delsoldato, Giorgia (2002) p 276

³³ Pridham (2001) A response from one of his interviews p 191

³⁴ Interview with Thomas Jansen (Secretary General of the EPP and EUCD 1983-1994) 14th of June 2007 EPP-headquarters, Brussels

³⁵ Jansen (2006) p 172

³⁶ DPA 23rd June 1992, Bayernkurier 11 July 1992

landscape, which was still not stable. The bilateral party contacts are interesting when it comes to party influence. In the early phase they could give rise to adaptation or even imitation from the newly formed parties who searched role models. According to Pridham the basis for the contacts was often geographical. For example the Austrian parties focused on neighboring countries in Central Europe, The Scandinavian parties focused on the Baltic countries while the Germans spread their contacts more broadly.³⁷ The EPP put much focus into these down-to-earth bilateral relations. The European Liberals tried another less successive strategy in the first years:

“One mistake that we did after the fall of Communism was the belief the we could do the same thing, recommend the same recipe for every country...the Americans and many in Europe had worked out plans for how the countries could change from a planned to a market economy and so on. But we learned to respect every unique culture...that shaped every country’s situation.”³⁸

Every country had its own unique problems. So was it also with each party system and the specific context from which it grew out. EPP had chosen the wise strategy from the beginning.

Evaluating the membership applicants

The goal for EUCD to enlarge to the whole of Europe was unproblematic in theory. But the reality on the ground showed that many of the new centre-Right parties that were potential member parties were populist, nationalist or sometimes anti-Semitic. The special working group for Central and Eastern Europe had therefore a difficult task in evaluating membership applications. Except the problem of evaluating the parties, there were also pressures from different Western parties that certain applicant parties should be admitted sooner than others. Their arguments could, be strategic, historical-sentimental, personal, or tactical. Whatever reason, they could seldom serve any general agreement and therefore the working group to define criteria for membership which were included in the new EUCD constitution. This new framework of rules was established as a direct adaptation of the EUCD to the new situation.³⁹

The EUCD was open for all European parties with a Christian democratic leaning and which could fulfill three conditions:

- that they operate in countries which have a system based on liberty, democracy and the rule of law
- that they have taken part in free elections and are represented in parliament

³⁷ Pridham (2001) p 185

³⁸ Interview with Lex Corijn, (East-West Coordinator for ELDR 1990-) August 21st 2007 in LI headquarters, London

³⁹ Jansen (2006) p 173-174

- that they accept the ‘Manifesto of European Christian Democrats’, the ‘Political Manifesto of the World Union of Christian Democrats’ and this constitution⁴⁰

The second and third criteria are interesting here. The third is a straightforward demand to accept the general Christian democratic ideological framework. Even if these international manifestos are often very wide in their ideological stance, this could have had some psychological effect on the party identity. It could also serve as safe barrier against obscure Christian or nationalist parties. The second criterion can be seen as an attempt from the EUCD to sort out all those small newly started groupings without any real political importance.

There was also another possibility in the constitutional framework that the EUCD could use. If there were applications from several competing parties, the EUCD council could make *membership conditional on the formation of a national Equipe*.⁴¹ This meant that the applicants had to develop a cooperation and consultation structure to ensure that they would have common representatives in the EUCD. This possibility was really a potential for “forcing” stabilization of the Christian democratic space and, as a consequence, the party system in the applicant country.

In the evaluation processes of the applications the old division between ‘broadeners’ and ‘narrowers’ appeared again. The Germans wanted to give priority to the strong parties with aspirations on government positions. The matter of the proper ideological belonging was something that they “..could perhaps develop later on.”⁴² The other grouping was mainly interested in getting aboard the parties with a Christian democratic tradition, often smaller parties.⁴³

The phasing-out of EUCD, and EDU

The EUCD played an important role as being a broader and more informal organization compared to the EPP. But it became increasingly evident that it was too expensive and too time-consuming to have these two parallel organizations. The signals towards an eastern enlargement of the EU also contributed to a change while the parties in Central and Eastern Europe would then become de facto EPP-members. So an integration of EUCD into the EPP was something all agreed was natural. But there were some divisions within EPP in how long the process should take to integrate the parties from Central and Eastern Europe into the EPP. Some thought 2-3 years while others who were more skeptical to the stability of the new parties proposed 5-6 years.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ EUCD Constitution, article 3c,

⁴¹ EUCD Constitution, article 3d

⁴² Interview with Thomas Jansen (Secretary General of the EPP and EUCD 1983-1994) 14th of June 2007 EPP-headquarters, Brussels

⁴³ Interview with Thomas Jansen (Secretary General of the EPP and EUCD 1983-1994) 14th of June 2007 EPP-headquarters, Brussels

⁴⁴ EVP News Nr. 57 June 1996; Union in Deutschland 6th June 1996

The person who became the architect of this process of integrating the new parties into the EPP was the new Secretary General of EPP and EUCD, Klaus Welle. He had a difficult task of balancing between the two opposing groups. The result was as so often a compromise. In May 1995 he presented a plan for the EPP political bureau. This plan included a change in the statutes to have three-phase process for membership.⁴⁵

1. Parties from non-EU countries can apply and get the status as observers
2. Parties from countries which are negotiating on EU-membership can apply for and get the status as associate members
3. When the home-country of the party has become EU-member, they can apply for and get the status as full members

What he proposed was to implant some more control stations than before through these three steps. One year later, at the EUCD summit in Luxemburg in July 1996, a time-table was agreed. The aim was to finally integrate EUCD into the EPP in the end of 1998. After the proposal of Klaus Welle and Wim van Velzen⁴⁶, it was also decided that the applicants for EPP-membership had to fulfill seven criteria⁴⁷:

1. The party must have had at least 10 % of the last parliamentary elections and at least 5 % in the two last elections with representation in Parliament.
2. In the last two years there must have been no party split.
3. There must be no unpaid member fees.
4. The party's representatives in the Council of Europe, WEU, Committee of the Regions etc. must be members of the EPP groups there.
5. The party must endorse European integration through the federal model
6. The party program must be based on a personalistic human ideal (the human within the freedom-responsibility spectrum)
7. The party must acknowledge and support the principle of subsidiarity.

Criteria 3-4 are not very controversial but criteria 1-2 and 5-7 are interesting. The first two are clearly a signal that the EPP only wants established parties with a stable electoral base and continuity in the party organization. This could literally force parties towards stability. The fifth, sixth and seventh criteria are in their nature programmatically enforcing. Even if these programmatically demands might be what the parties in general can agree with, they can definitely have some psychological impact on party identity and sense of group-belonging. On the question on whether these demands, especially those about party size and stability, were perhaps too tough, Klaus Welle says:

⁴⁵ EPP/EUCD Yearbook 1995

⁴⁶ Van Velzen was the head of the EUCD working group for Central and Eastern Europe . He became the president of EUCD in its two last years

⁴⁷ EVP News Nr. 67 August 1996

“The thing with the criteria was that they looked tough but weren’t though. For the existing member parties, it was an insurance because they looked tough. But when I went through my member parties I saw that it wasn’t a problem for them. “...” The criteria about not having a split became important because the (Central and Eastern European*) parties really got fed up with all these splitting up. “...” It gave some basic guarantee, but those guarantees were not excessive and therefore could be accepted by the parties in Central and Eastern Europe.”⁴⁸ (*author’s adding)

In hindsight, it is interesting that the purpose with these criteria was not only to prevent future instability within EPP but also to satisfy *both* the “worried group” within the EPP and the applying parties. The demands were, as Welle noted, *apparently tough* but were already in balance with what the potential member parties could fulfill.

The inclusion into EPP also awaited the parties connected to the EDU. The rapprochement of EDU and EPP started in 1992, when they formed a common group in the European Parliament.⁴⁹ During the years many centre-Right parties in Central and Eastern Europe kept contact both with EDU and EUCD. These two different groups were to some degree competitors but when it became clear that EDU would merge with the EPP, it became an advantage. Together they had established links with and included almost the whole centre-Right spectrum in Central and Eastern Europe.⁵⁰

Only one year after the seven tough criteria for EPP-membership was presented they were removed. The reason for these swift changes was a need to speed up the process of integrating the new parties into the EPP structures. On the EPP congress 1997, it was decided to lower the hurdles for integrating the parties into EPP. If the home-country had applied for EU-membership, it was possible for a party to become an associate member if had established itself as a national force. Thus, once accepted as full EUCD or EDU member, a party would become a de facto EPP associated-member when its country applied for EU-membership.⁵¹

The EPP and the parties in Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic

A case study is now presented with the purpose of going more into depth in the development in Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic (Czechoslovakia until 1992). By looking at the particular context in each country and pick out some interesting situations something can hopefully be said about

⁴⁸ Interview with Klaus Welle, Brussels 27th of August 2007

⁴⁹ After the formation of the common group in the EP it became increasingly clear that the EDU parties were to be moved into the EPP. The de facto inclusion of the EDU into the EPP was in 2001 when the EDU secretariat in Vienna was closed and the staff moved to the EPP headquarters in Brussels.

⁵⁰ Jansen (2006) p 190-194

⁵¹ Jansen (2006) p

the importance of the transnational party links compared to the countries' specific historical heritage and the natural process of institutionalization of the party system.

Poland: the difficult case

The early party landscape

The early contacts with Poland were complicated for the EPP and EUCD delegates. The background for this is partly Poland's complicated transition and partly the later disintegration of Solidarity. The arrangement of the first multiparty elections in June 1989 was a compromise with the Communist regime and only allowed 161 of the 460 seats free for contest (See Table 1.). So although Solidarity, won all the contestable seats but one, they still had a minority position in the Sejm.

Table 1. Polish elections to the Sejm: Results 1989

Parties	Seats	Seats (%)
PZPR: Polish United Workers' Party (communist party)	173	37,6 %
ZSL: United Peasants' Party (satellite party)	76	16,5 %
SD: Democratic Party (satellite party)	27	5,9 %
Pax (catholic satellite party)	10	2,2 %
UChS: (catholic satellite party)	8	1,7 %
PZKS: Union of Catholic Laymen (catholic satellite party)	5	1,1 %
OKP: Solidarity movement	161	35 %

Source: Database at University of Essex home page: Project on Political Transformation and the Electoral Process in Post-Communist Europe. www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/database/database.asp; **Note:** Comments in brackets are the authors

The tough budget reforms in 1989 divided the new Solidarity government and revealed the many ideological groupings within it. It led finally to the disintegration of Solidarity and this had profound effects on the emerging Polish party system and above all for the EPP and EUCD to get an overview. The instability was also strengthened by the fact that party splits and merging depended at least as much on personal rifts as on ideology.⁵²

The elections to the Sejm in October 1991 (See Table 2.) display the total disintegration of Solidarity and almost total chaos in the new legislature. Solidarity's disintegration in small pieces combined with the fact that they used much of their energy to fight each other made them scattered and weak as a political force.⁵³ Also after the elections, the splits continued and changes of group-belongings were frequently exercised. The different right-wing government coalitions were weak and unstable and most of the political debate concerned who did what during the Communist regime.

⁵² Ágh (1998) 39-42; Markowski (2006) p 20

⁵³ Millard (2003) p 28-29

Table 2. Polish elections to the Sejm: Results 1991

Parties	Votes (%)	Seats	Seats (%)
<u>UD</u> : Democratic Union	12,3 %	62	13,2 %
<u>SLD</u> : Democratic Left Alliance	12,0 %	60	13,0 %
<u>WAK</u> : Catholic Electoral Action	8,7 %	49	10,6 %
<u>PSL</u> : Polish Peasants Party	8,7 %	48	10,4 %
<u>KPN</u> : Confederation of Independent Poland	8,7 %	46	10,2 %
<u>POC</u> : Citizen's Centre Agreement	7,5 %	44	9,7 %
<u>KLD</u> : Liberal Democratic Congress	7,5 %	37	8,2 %
<u>PL</u> : Peasants Agreement	5,5 %	28	6,2 %
<u>NSZZ</u> : Solidarity Trade Union	5,1 %	27	6,0 %
<u>PPPP</u> : Polish Party of Beer Lovers	3,3 %	16	3,5 %
<u>NN</u> : German Minority	1,2 %	7	1,5 %
<u>ChD</u> : Christian Democrats	2,4	5	1,1 %

Source: Database at University of Essex home page: Project on Political Transformation and the Electoral Process in Post-Communist Europe. www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/database/database.asp, **Note:** Parties with less than 5 seats not included. These include six parties and independents

Identifying the parties

So which parties were potential partners for EPP and EUCD? From the 1989-1991 Sejm there were three catholic parties which at least before had been allied to the Communist Party (see Table 1). Then there was of course also the Solidarity movement which included the whole spectrum of ideologies. The disintegration of Solidarity “into a swarm of parties” created a complicated picture of Polish Conservative/Christian democratic field. Krzysztof Jasiewicz provides a serviceable summary of the conservative groupings in the early 1990's⁵⁴:

- Solidarity Trade Union (NSZZ): AWS is seen as the heir
- Centre Alliance (PC): Won seats in the 1991 Sejm as ‘POC’
- Christian-National Union (ZChN): WAK in the 1991 elections.
- Agrarian Alliance (PL)
- Christian Democracy (ChD)
- Party of Christian Democrats (PChD)

The situation was almost impossible for the EUCD delegations when they wanted to map the Polish political landscape for potential member parties. The list above, it must be said, is even this a simplification while most of the mentioned groupings split and merged with other groupings over time. Moreover the liberal and the agrarian parties are not included despite that their heirs today are EPP-members.

⁵⁴ Jasiewicz (2006) p 34-36

So the early period was difficult for the EPP and the EUCD when it comes to identifying stable partners. It is not difficult to understand a certain amount of frustration within the EUCD in this task. The EPP/EUCD Secretary General at the time had the following comment on this:

“It was a very exciting moment and very interesting talks we had there. But the difficulty with the so-called Christian democrats or those who had interest to join the union, Christian group, was that they were not able to come together. I mean we always told them: ‘Listen, we cannot have 16 or 6 or 12 parties. You are all nice people with good ideas and you are very much engagé, but we must find a way to come together’”⁵⁵

There was actually one attempt within the Polish parties to bring the forces together after encouragements from the EUCD. Jan Olszewski, Prime Minister 1991-1992 and leader of the Centre Alliance wrestled with problem of coordinating six Christian parties. In the EPP and EUCD there was widespread pessimism over the possibility to unite the Polish Christian democrats but also over the nationalist/populist tendencies within some of the parties.⁵⁶

But in June 1992, when the EUCD held its congress in Warsaw, something happened which was encouraging for the EUCD. The Polish Christian democratic parties had formed a joint grouping ‘Christian Democratic Congress’ just before this occasion. Now they could apply for EUCD membership according to EUCD condition to have a ‘national equipe’. But there were not really many who believed that this would hold for long and it fell apart only some weeks after the conference.⁵⁷

If there was any hope in the EUCD that the condition of having a ‘national equipe’ would make the centre-Right parties come together, it did not work in Poland. As mentioned before, the Polish political Right was so divided because of cross-cutting cleavages and personal rivalries that such broad coalitions were not possible. This rivalry can be exemplified by the behavior of one of the central figures within the Christian democratic Polish movement, Jarosław Kaczinski⁵⁸. He continuously tried to monopolize the contacts with EPP and EUCD. The phrase was “Us or no one” in the talks with EUCD and in this trying to isolate all other potential parties.⁵⁹ This created a very difficult position for the EUCD who came out with no partner party at all.

A more open strategy

Their main problem for the EUCD delegates, namely the chaotic Polish party landscape, was partly solved after the 1993 elections (see Table 3.) These elections were a turning point in Polish politics.

⁵⁵ Interview with Thomas Jansen in the EPP head-quarters in Brussels 14th of June 2007.

⁵⁶ Christ und Welt, Rheinischer Merkur 13th of March 1992

⁵⁷ Interview with Thomas Jansen in the EPP head-quarters in Brussels 14th of June 2007.

⁵⁸ He was party leader for the Center Alliance before Olszewski and later the leader of PiS and Prime Minister 2006-2007.

⁵⁹ Interview with Thomas Jansen, Brussels 14th of June 2007

Not only because the reformed communist SLD became the biggest grouping but because new electoral laws stabilized the party system.⁶⁰ The Sejm now became dominated by three groupings; a modernized social democratic left (SLD) which pressed for market economy and pro-Europe policies, a ‘modern’ right (UD) and thirdly some more traditional right-wing parties. The party landscape was now dominated by an increasingly modern and western-like social democratic left which pressed for market economy and pro-Europe policies, and a political right still divided between a pragmatic right and a traditional nationalist right-wing grouping.⁶¹

Table 3. Polish elections to the Sejm: Results 1993

Parties	Votes (%)	Seats	Seats (%)
<u>SLD</u> : Democratic Left Alliance	20,4 %	171	37,1 %
<u>PSL</u> : Polish Peasant Party	15,4 %	132	28,6 %
<u>UD</u> : Democratic Union	10,6 %	74	16,0 %
<u>UP</u> : Labour Union	7,3 %	41	8,9 %
<u>KPN</u> : Confederation of Independent Poland	5,8 %	22	4,7 %
<u>BBWR</u> : non-party block-Support of Reform	5,4 %	16	3,4 %

Source: Database at University of Essex home page: Project on Political Transformation and the Electoral Process in Post-Communist Europe. www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/database/database.asp, **Note:** German Minority Party not included

Since the moderate right party UD had established links with the EDU, the parties or alliances that could be of interest for EUCD after were the three smaller conservative groupings. These on the other hand had sometimes nationalist or authoritarian tendencies so a membership could be problematic. The strategy from EPP and EUCD had to change. The demand for a national equip was left behind while it was anyway impossible in the Polish scattered Right. The problem was the many party splits and mergers. To handle this the EUCD started instead to focus on the broader groupings. As Klaus Welle describes it:

“...contacts needed to be organized but they couldn’t be formalized. So what we did was that instead of being fixed upon one party, we were looking at the political space. And we were saying: ‘This is our political space, and the organizations which are in this political space for us are fine.’ We knew that they might not continue for a very long time but the people which were in there and the programs which were in there would continue under a different brand name.”⁶²

⁶⁰ A news electoral law with 5 % threshold for parties, 8 % threshold for party coalitions and 7 % threshold for national lists was introduced.

⁶¹ Ágh (1998) p 59

⁶² Interview with Klaus Welle 27th of August 2007, European Parliament in Brussels

Even with this broader strategy it was difficult to integrate parties into the EUCD. There had been a small “freezing” of the Polish party system after the 1993 elections but the party landscape changed again markedly between 1995 and election year 1997.

But the new EUCD strategy of keeping broad contacts could make for some reward and some smaller parties kept the contacts. This was above all Conservative People’s Party (SKL) and the Solidarity heir AWS. The liberal-conservative party UD which later became UW joined the more open and flexible EDU-network. When the EDU was starting to merge with the EPP in 1997, UW was accepted as associate EPP-member. In 1999 it was followed by: Conservative People’s Party (SKL) and the Solidarity heir AWS.⁶³

Short summary: Poland

Even if some major parties were later integrated into the EPP network, it could be described as an extremely difficult case for the EUCD to handle. The strategy of more broad contacts later on from EUCD was somewhat more successful, but Poland is still seen as a “disaster”⁶⁴ compared to the other countries. The reasons for the complicated party situation in Poland can partly be explained by cross-cutting dimensions of conflict which makes party names and party policies somewhat overlapping. This could have made it more difficult for the EUCD to identify the parties.⁶⁵ The problem indeed the fragmentation of the centre-Right parties and also the strong catholic or too conservative/nationalistic tendencies within some.

But the difficulty for the European Christian democrats to find stable partners in Poland is to some degree puzzling. When looking at the strong tradition of the Church and many Christian parties, there should have been a good strategic arena for the EUCD. A rather frustrated statement from a European Liberal, who was the east-west coordinator at the time, confirms this: *“There was and is no liberal party in Poland. There are only catholic or nationalistic/catholic parties to be honest.”*⁶⁶ The problem was not the Christian Democratic tradition but the ‘context of competition’⁶⁷ as Mair would have put it. Weak organizational loyalties made parties and party coalitions very fragile.

⁶³ EPP/EUCD Yearbooks 1997-1999, EPP headquarters Brussels

⁶⁴ Interview with Thomas Jansen 14th of June 2007

⁶⁵ Jasiewicz (2006) p 26-27

⁶⁶ Interview with Lex Corijn in the IL headquarters in London, 21st of August 2007

⁶⁷ Mair (1997) p 187

Hungary

The early party system

Compared with Poland it was much easier for EPP and EUCD delegates to overview the situation in Hungary. When EUCD delegates went to Hungary in the early stage already 1988, they met people not only within the opposition but also from the regime. The soft Hungarian Communist regime was obviously ready to support and cooperate to enhance a democratic transition. The early visits were often accompanied by Hungarians who had left the country as children 1956 and now was political active in different western Christian Democratic parties.⁶⁸

One of the reasons for the relative easiness of the early Hungarian party system is that the transition started early and went on for many years. The road to multiparty democracy started already in the early 1980's when 10 per cent of the Parliament seats were open for contest. Therefore, the Hungarian first parties started to grow out already in 1987-1988. The parties which were to dominate the scene emerged in 1987-1988. In 1987, *Hungarian Democratic Forum*, MDF, was formed as a loose movement at a great meeting in the Hungarian country-side. The aim was to unite all moderate democratic opposition forces and it followed the model of Solidarity in that it had a moderate national-populist but also left-leaning "third-way" ideology. In 1988, two liberal parties were founded. *Alliance of Free Democrats*, SZDSZ, grew out from the former democratic opposition representing European-oriented urban intellectuals. The *Alliance of Young Democrats*, Fidesz, was rather like the Free Democrats in its ideological stance but was a party exclusively for young people (under 35). In 1988 the *Hungarian Socialist Party*, MSzP, grew out as an outbreak of the moderate grouping from the Communist Party.

These were the first four parties to be founded in the emerging multi-party setting. Because they were organized first, they also attracted the most talented people as leaders and they were based on a particular social movement. The second generation of parties was the so-called historical parties with roots from the middle-war period. They emerged somewhat later and lacked connections with any social movement and had programs that were a bit outdated compared to the new parties. Two became more prominent than the others: The agrarian *Independent Smallholders Party* (FKGP) and the *Christian Democratic Peoples' Party* (KDNP).

So the political landscape was rather easy to overview even before the first parliamentary elections for the EPP/EUCD. The main potential partner parties⁶⁹ were:

- MDF (Hungarian Democratic Forum): Moderate national-conservative

⁶⁸ Interview with Thomas Jansen 14th of June 2007 in Brussels

⁶⁹ The party descriptions are based on Körösenyi (1998) p 35-45

- FKGP (Independent Smallholders' Party): Agrarian, populist
- KDNP (Christian Democratic People's Party): Christian Social

The early situation could almost be described as an 'ideal case' from an EUCD perspective. The chairman of MDF, Jozsef Antal, was a strong and respected authority with a Catholic background. After the 1990 elections (see Table 4.) he united the conservative political family by building a coalition government with the Smallholders and the Christian Democrats.⁷⁰

Table 4. Hungarian parliamentary elections: Results 1990

Parties	Votes (%)	Seats	Seats (%)
<u>MDF</u> : Hungarian Democratic Forum	24,7 %	165	42,7 %
<u>SZDSZ</u> : Alliance of Free Democrats	21,4 %	94	24,3 %
<u>FKGP</u> : Independent Smallholders' Party	11,7 %	44	11,4 %
<u>MSZP</u> : Hungarian Socialist Party	10,9 %	33	8,5 %
<u>Fidesz</u> : Alliance of Young Democrats	9,0 %	22	5,7 %
<u>KDNP</u> : Christian Democratic Peoples' Party	6,5 %	21	5,4 %

Source: Database at University of Essex home page: Project on Political Transformation and the Electoral Process in Post-Communist Europe. www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/database/database.asp,

Problems within the Hungarian centre-Right

Even if the early situation looked good from the EUCD-perspective, the coming years were problematic. This was initiated by the strong disputes within the centre-Right government. One issue was about the new constitution. Without informing its coalition partners, MDF made a pact with the second largest party, the liberal SZDSZ which were in opposition. This pact gave the new MDF Prime Minister Jozsef Antall a position, which was much stronger than in for example Poland or Czech Republic. Another issue that divided the coalition was the issue of privatization of the assets that had been expropriated by the Communists. Here the Smallholders argued for a return of the assets to the pre-communist era owners, while MDF held a more moderate position.⁷¹

Because of these conflicts there were strong tensions between the coalition parties. In 1992, the Smallholders left the government and formed a right-wing opposition. The constitutional pact with the liberals, which was supposed to have been made-up in secret talks, created strong tensions also within the MDF. This conflict was between a nationalist-radical wing and the ruling moderate conservative wing. In 1993 the national-radical wing left, or were expelled from the MDF and formed the new party

⁷⁰ Körösenyi, (1998) p 35-39

⁷¹ Tamas (1999) p 31-33

Hungarian party for life and justice (MIEP). This was led by the charismatic Istvan Csurka who held strong nationalist and anti-Semitic views.⁷²

Table 5. Hungarian parliamentary elections: Results 1994

Parties	Seats	Seats (%)
MSZP: Hungarian Socialist Party	209	54,2 %
SZDSZ: Alliance of Free Democrats	69	17,9 %
MDF: Hungarian Democratic Forum	38	9,8 %
FKGP: Independent Smallholders' Party	26	6,7 %
KDNP: Christian Democratic Peoples' Party	22	5,7 %
Fidesz: Alliance of Young Democrats	20	5,2 %

Source: Database at University of Essex home page: Project on Political Transformation and the Electoral Process in Post-Communist Europe. www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/database/database.asp,

The results of the 1994 elections indicated some new paths in Hungarian politics. The Socialist/Social Democratic MSZP was the clear winner and formed a government together with the Free democrats, SZDSZ. The Centre-Right parties was weakened and divided. After Antall died in late 1993 from cancer, the MDF's disintegration continued. After the elections 1994 the centre-Right parties were therefore weaker, more divided and also internally less stable then in 1989.

For the EUCD, this created some problems which forced them to act. The unproblematic nature of the Hungarian centre-Right had made the EUCD to accept the three parties as members at an early stage. The problems started after the Smallholders elected the new party leader Jozsef Torgyan in 1991. He refused to compromise with MDF over the land-restitution and as mentioned his party left the government in protest. This split the party while a group of the party's deputies continued to support the government. At a later stage the EUCD decided to expel the FKGP from the organization. It was Torgyan's nationalist-populist style combined with the instability he created that was behind the final decision in 1992. The Secretary General of the EPP and EUCD remember the situation as follows:

“...it was quite clear from a certain moment that the leader of the (smallholders’) party, Mr Torgyan was a very strong figure but he was a also a populist and a nationalist. “...” So their position was not any more in agreement or in the same track as the thinking and policy of the EPP. “...” But also as a result of his character, he was a very strong, even dictatorial figure “...” and at a certain moment he lost all his deputies. “...” There were all the times these problems and all this together mad that it was decided to expel them from the organization.”⁷³

⁷² Pittaway (2003) p 65-66

⁷³ Interview with Thomas Jansen 14th of June 2007 in Brussels

So now the same problem as the EUCD had had in Poland from the start with national populist parties started to become a problem in Hungary. Shortly after, the problem appeared with the KDNP. After the 1994 elections, the party had recurrent internal crises and some groupings flirted with the extreme-right MIEP. In March 1997, EUCD delegates made a visit was to Hungary with the purpose to sort out the situation. After negotiations with the KDNP leadership, a certain agreement was made. KDNP promised not to contact or cooperate any more with MIEP and to initiate talks with MDF and Fidesz for an electoral coalition. After only one month, KDNP broke both of these agreements. Therefore, the EUCD council “*recognized the fact that KDNP had, by its actions and inactions, expelled itself from membership in the EUCD*”.⁷⁴

The entry of Fidesz into the Centre-Right

The centre-Right parties which had been in government in 1990-1994 were all three weakened and divided after the 1994. The new dominant centre-Right party became Fidesz who realigned itself from a radical liberal party exclusively for younger people (35-years age-limit) to a traditional liberal conservative party with no age limit. It kept its young and fresh profile and also changed its formal name to Fidesz-MPP (MPP: Hungarian civic party) to appeal to the liberal voters and at the same time changed its profile towards a traditional 19th century Hungarian national liberalism rather than mainstream European liberalism.⁷⁵ Fidesz won the 1998 elections and formed a government in coalition with MDF and the Smallholders’ party.

The main challenge after the elections 1998 for EPP and EUCD was to find a way to link the Fidesz to the organization. The situation was a bit strange, as Fidesz since was an associated member of the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party. On the other hand it was quite obvious that it had moved into the centre-Right field and become more conservative. Especially its policies in state control over the media and its family policies when in government pointed to a cultural conservative party profile. Therefore the EPP approached Fidesz to demonstrate that it was welcome to join:

“...Already during the time when they were still associated with the liberals, I proposed to (EPP president) Wilfried Martens to invite (Fidesz party leader) Orbán to the summit of the EPP, even though he was still a member of the liberal party and“...” and had a function in the liberals. Viktor Orbán accepted and this contributed very much to Fidesz realizing that they were not a liberal party but a broad centre-Right people’s party.”⁷⁶

In 2000, Fidesz became an associate member of the EPP. The change was probably on its way but the active demonstration from the EPP that Fidesz was welcome had probably an impact. In the same year the FKGP was accepted again and became an associate member of the EPP. Fidesz’ increasingly

⁷⁴ EPP-EUCD Yearbook 1997, EPP-headquarters in Brussels

⁷⁵ Lanczi, Tamás (2005) p 32

⁷⁶ Interview with Klaus Welle 27th of August 2007, European Parliament in Brussels

nationalist rhetoric later on has led to some critique against the EPP. In 2006 for example during the Hungarian demonstrations against the government, the EPP president spoke in Budapest before a big crowd. This was heavily criticized late in an open letter from the president of the Party of European Socialists for being naïve and used by Fidesz.⁷⁷

Short summary: Hungary

Hungary was an easy case for EPP and EUCD in the early years. Therefore both the FKGP and the KDNP were brought into the EUCD rather early. The expulsion of both showed that EUCD took the rules serious and could also be a signal to other parties with populist leanings. But the contacts were never broken and eventually FKGP could return. When it comes to Fidesz entry into the EPP from the European Liberals it is partly a consequence of the historical cleavages in the Hungarian party system. The dominance of a cultural cleavage in the Hungarian party landscape since the early 1990's was actually an advantage for EPP. In this ideological spectrum it is natural that the dominating centre-Right party is conservative rather than liberal.

Czechoslovakia/Czech Republic

The early stage

The initial contacts with the Czech (Czechoslovak) potential partner parties were established a bit later than in Poland and Hungary. The simple reason behind this was that Czechoslovakia's communist regime was more rigid. The change did not come until late November 1989 when the regime surprisingly quickly surrendered facing the international events and mass-demonstrations. After the smooth "velvet revolution", the federation between the Czech and Slovak states remained intact. but between 1990 and 1992 the political agenda was to a large degree dominated by the future of the Czechoslovak federation. But even if the issue of separation was dominating in the early stage, two party systems began to emerge in the country relatively independent from each other.⁷⁸

The early political agenda-setting was also strongly dominated by the Czech and Slovak umbrella organizations Civic Forum (OF) in the Czech case. In the 1990 elections (Table 6.) to the Czech National Council only four parties or alliances got representation. Like in Hungary, the 5% threshold created a rather stable structure in the first parliamentary period. Except for the winner *Civic Forum*, the unreformed Communist party got a surprisingly second place, which indicated continuity with the past. The other two parties were the *Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party*

⁷⁷ Open letter to Wilfried Martens 24 October 2006:
http://www.pes.org/downloads/Open_Letter_to_EPP_WMartens.pdf

⁷⁸ Linek, Lukáš and Zdenka Mansfeldová (2006) p 20-21

(KDU-CSL) and the regionalist *Society for Moravia and Silesia-Movement for Self-Governing Democracy*.⁷⁹

Table 6. Czech elections to the National Council: Results 1990

Parties	Votes (%)	Seats	Seats (%)
<u>OF</u> : Civic Forum	49,5 %	127	63,5 %
<u>KSCM</u> : Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia	13,2 %	32	16,0 %
<u>HSD-SMS</u> : Society for Moravia and Silesia- Movement for Self-governing Democracy	10,0 %	22	11,0 %
<u>KDU</u> : Christian Democratic Union	8,4 %	19	9,5 %

Source: Database at University of Essex home page: Project on Political Transformation and the Electoral Process in Post-Communist Europe. www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/database/database.asp,

After the 1990 elections, the Civic Forum started to disintegrate and just like in Poland and Hungary one of the main issues was the speed of reforms in the economy. The Czech economic situation was in a somewhat better shape than the Polish one, but drastic measures were still to come. The new Minister for finance Václav Klaus advocated a radical transition to a market economy and the newly elected president Václav Havel argued for a slower reform-speed taking more social consideration. Finally Klaus prevailed in this conflict and in 1991 a program of liberalization and privatizations was introduced. In February 1991 the Civic Forum split when the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) was formed with finance minister Klaus as leader and the Civic Movement (OH) was formed led by foreign minister Jiří Dienstbier.

Table 7. Czech elections to the National Council: Results 1992

Parties	Votes	Seats	Seats (%)
<u>ODS-KDS</u> : Civic Democratic Party – Christian Democratic Party	29,7 %	76	38,0 %
<u>Left Block</u> : KSCM+DL	14,0 %	35	17,5 %
<u>CSSD</u> : Czech Party of Social Democracy	6,5 %	16	8,0 %
<u>LSU</u> : Liberal Social Union	6,5 %	16	8,0 %
<u>KDU-CSL</u> : Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party	6,3 %	15	7,5 %
<u>SPR-RSČ</u> : Association for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia	6,0 %	14	7,0 %
<u>ODA</u> : Civic Democratic Alliance	5,9 %	14	7,0 %
<u>HSD-SMS</u> : Society for Moravia and Silesia- Movement for Self-governing Democracy	5,9 %	14	7,0 %

⁷⁹ Ágh (1998) p 118-119

Source: Database at University of Essex home page: Project on Political Transformation and the Electoral Process in Post-Communist Europe. www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/database/database.asp, **Note:** Left Block was an electoral coalition between the Communist Party (KSCM) and the Democratic Left (DL)

The party landscape after the 1992 elections (see Table 7) was a bit more complicated but also mirrored the new political map. The clear winner was an electoral alliance between ODS and the small Christian Democratic Party (KDS). ODS and KDS formed a coalition government with centre-Right KDU-CSL and the market-liberal ODA. The left was still represented by a surprisingly stable Communist party KSCM, here in alliance with the smaller Democratic Left (DL). The Social Democratic CSSD and the Liberal Social Union (LSU) represented the political Centre. The Civic Movement under Dienstbier did not even get seats in the Council.

So what options were there for the EUCD and EPP delegates in the early Czech party landscape? It was in a way difficult to identify potential partner parties in the earliest period. First of all, the question of whether Czechoslovakia would divide or not, created a general uncertainty of how the future party system would look like⁸⁰. Secondly the rapid transition had made the Civic Forum stronger as an umbrella organization than its Polish and Hungarian counterparts.⁸¹ The “wait and see” strategy⁸² of the European party organizations was therefore a bit longer in the Czech case.

But if the general political situation created uncertainty, it became soon clear that the splinters from Civic Forum either leaned towards social liberalism as in OH or market liberalism as in ODS and ODA. Therefore there were only two obvious potential partners. This was KDU-CSL and KDS. The stronger of the two was KDU-CSL which proved to have a stable voter base in the 1990 and 1992 elections. It was the historical catholic or Christian Democratic Party with roots in the inter-war period. KDS, which sprang out from dissident groupings, was part of the Christian Democratic Federal Coalition in 1990 and had to ally with the ODS in the 1992 elections to get into the Parliament. KDS never succeeded in becoming a political force. In 1996 it merged with the ODS.

So the most stable reliable partner party seemed to be KDU-CSL but it was a former satellite party to the Communists so their credibility was questioned by many. The KDS did not want to cooperate with them and another even smaller Christian party did the same. Despite this, the EUCD delegates chose to work with this party:

“...what made it possible to work with them and to invite them to the club was that they relatively early said *‘Ok, this is the past. We don’t want to deny our responsibility for it but on the other hand our people have never been involved in a way that they committed criminal acts’*...and they changed. The obliged to some of the personalities which were most important during the

⁸⁰ On the federal level, there was for example the ‘Christian Democratic Federal Coalition’. See Novák (2003) p 37

⁸¹ Ágh (1998) p 117

⁸² Pridham (2001) p 189

communist regime...to withdraw themselves from the political life and other new younger people came and took responsibility for the party.’⁸³

The EUCD also kept good contacts with the two smaller Christian Democratic parties but as mentioned they were never able to play a role in Czech politics. When it comes to KDU-CSL, its original party name in 1989 was CSL but shortly after the revolution in 1989 they added the name KDU. This could be an example of what Pridham labels ‘diffuse europeanization’ where the party tries to follow its intuition and take after the ‘European model’. Their party name is rather analogous with the biggest Christian Democratic Party in Europe: the German CDU. It might also be that the established link with EUCD provided some degree of recognition for a party which credibility was questioned.

The problem with a narrow party

During the term of 1992-1996 the party landscape continued to be rather shaky at times. It was mostly within the political left that splits and outbreaks could be seen. ODS emerged as the most stable and well-organized party and formed a coalition government together with ODA and KDU-CSL. On the left, the new Czech Party of Social Democracy Social Democratic Party – CSSD, grew out as the dominant force. Therefore the Czech party system shortly before the 1996 elections was rather easy to define. The ODS emerged as only strong and well-organized Centre-Right party⁸⁴ and it made a strong right-wing alternative with its coalition partners. On the left the Social Democratic Party became a dominant force.

Table 9. Czech parliamentary elections 1996

Parties	Votes (%)	Seats	Seats (%)
<u>ODS</u> : Civic Democratic Party	29,6 %	68	34,0 %
<u>CSSD</u> : Czech Party of Social Democracy	26,4 %	61	30,5 %
<u>KCSM</u> : Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia	10,3 %	22	11,0 %
<u>KDU-CSL</u> : Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak Peoples Party	8,1 %	18	9,0 %
<u>SPR-RSČ</u> : Association for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia	8,0 %	18	9,0 %
<u>ODA</u> : Civic Democratic Alliance	6,4 %	13	6,5 %

Source: Database at University of Essex home page: Project on Political Transformation and the Electoral Process in Post-Communist Europe. www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/database/database.asp,

The 1996 elections indicated a consolidation of a Czech “six-party system”. This contained four moderate parties with a clear left-right dimension and two extreme parties on both left and right. In the

⁸³ Interview with Thomas Jansen, Secretary General in EPP-EUCD 1983-1994, EPP-headquarters in Brussels 14th of June 2007

⁸⁴ Ágh (1998) p 141-142

new elections in 1998 the new smaller market-liberal US party got seats. It was affiliated with EDU and was therefore to be an associate EPP member later on.⁸⁵

From the EPP and EUCD perspective its partner KDU-CSL was a stable party which had a permanent voter base and experience from government from 1992 until 1997. It was accepted as EUCD-member in 1995 and it was quite unproblematic to deal with compared to for example the Hungarian KDNP or FKGP which both had extreme and populist elements. The problem with KDU-CSL was their narrowness in representation. Through the years, its core voters have been concentrated in southern Moravia, where also the share of Catholics is the highest in the country.⁸⁶ This has caused some concern in the EPP:

“In the Czech Republic a special problem was and still is that KDU-CSL was a Christian democratic party but with a part the old regime and limited to Catholics in Moravia. So, it is both a regional party and a confessional party, but with no real representation in Bohemia and among protestants or non-believers. It is a party for Moravia’s Catholics. So can they really be the representation of the country?”⁸⁷

There was from the beginning an awareness within the EPP and EUCD that the conditions for Christian democracy were not the same in the Czech Republic as in for example catholic Slovakia or Hungary. Its history of the severe counter-reformation in the 17th century by German speaking Catholic Habsburgs is still today engraved in the Czech political culture. Therefore the inclusion of the liberal-conservative US into the EPP-family, when in year 2000 the EDU was dismantled, was welcome. It complemented KDU-CSL with its broader voter base both geographically and structurally.

The ODS was a problematic case. It had been affiliated to the EDU since its creation in 1991 and from the beginning it resembled more British market-oriented conservatism than continental Christian democracy. Therefore it was not surprising that it was the British conservative party and the ODS that did not join the EPP in 2000 when the EDU was dismantled. Except the ideological difference that set these two parties aside from the EPP, they have had a markedly EU-sceptic

One problem the EPP had with ODS, was the strong euro-skepticism in the party-leadership. There was a worry within the EPP-leadership but since they knew that the key voters of ODS were the most pro-European compared to the other parties, they continued to have contacts with ODS.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Williams (2003) 48-49

⁸⁶ Kostelecký (2003) p 94-95

⁸⁷ Interview with Klaus Welle (Secretary General of EPP and EUCD 1994-1999), European Parliament in Brussels 27th of August 2007

⁸⁸ Interview with Klaus Welle (Secretary General of EPP and EUCD 1994-1999), European Parliament in Brussels 27th of August 2007

Summary Czech Republic

The historical cleavages of the Czech lands did not provide the same opportunities for big Christian democratic people's parties like in Hungary or Poland. But on the other hand, it was easy to choose partner. The dilemma whether or not to cooperate with a former satellite party was not so difficult for EUCD to overcome. This shows the pragmatist character of EUCD. KDU-CSL in turn had everything to win with being linked to European Christian Democracy to become more accepted. The ODS never joined the EPP much because of its Euro-skepticism.

Concluding Remarks

The goal that was set out 1989 to become a party represented in all Europe is more or less achieved. The EPP is today the biggest grouping in the European Parliament. To some degree the reason lies in its ability to find compromises and its organizational culture. A rather tolerant attitude towards organizational pluralism combined with close personal relations allowed the Christian democratic European family to be broad and flexible and therefore also big. The co-existence of EPP and EUCD made it possible to act much more actively than for example the European Liberals. The reunion with EDU was also a result of keeping the contacts alive and building personal trust.

The country cases show some interesting differences. Poland was indeed the most difficult case for the EPP and EUCD. Despite a historical tradition of Christianity in Poland, EUCD could not include any one party the first years. The reason was above all the difficulty for the Polish Christian democratic parties to come together. Tough criteria did not work in the Polish case; instead EPP tried a more open strategy which gave some results later on. Hungary was probably the easiest case for the EPP and EUCD. The transition started earlier which led to rather stable parties before the first elections. The increasing domination of a cultural rather than economic divide strengthened the EPP's representation there. The back-drop with this cultural divide was that it opened for populism which led to the expulsion of two parties from EUCD. Interesting is also how Fidesz was invited by EPP which eventually led to a strong representation in Hungary. Fidesz increasing nationalist rhetoric on the other hand has led to criticism of the EPP. The Czech case had its special historical conditions which made it difficult from the beginning for EPP and EUCD delegations. But the Czech member party KDU-CSL has been a surprisingly stable party but its clerical and regional narrowness has been a worrying factor. Much due to the strong economic divide in Czech politics, the main right-wing party the ODS is closer to British EU-skeptics conservatism and did not join the EPP when EDU vanished. Despite this, the EPP perceives them as a partner.

Finally I will present some tentative comments on the possible influence or Europeanization of the national parties in CEE as a consequence of the links to EPP and EUCD. One observation that unites the three countries is that there were mainly small parties that joined or wanted to join the EUCD at an early stage. The possible exception is Hungarian MDF but this party was weakened during its first term. Three countries is perhaps too small a sample and it needs more comparison but small parties should have more to win with joining a transnational organization. In the early phase the link to a transnational party could provide some basic recognition and also access to networks and to information. This may raise the question of whether it is more likely that it was and is smaller parties pressured by close threshold, that is more apt for external influence and to change.

When it comes to party programs there were probably many parties who made adjustments according to the EUCD and later EPP membership criteria. Whether these possible adjustments made a difference for any party is something that would need more research. When it comes to stability and continuity of party organizations there were some explicit criteria which on the other hand seldom were used.⁸⁹ On the other hand these criteria and the above all the signals they sent out can have had a stabilizing effect on some parties. Also here more research is needed to come closer to this. Finally there was intense travelling of different individual western European Christian democratic parties. All these meetings at least on elite-level created informal personal networks. Lojze Peterle, Party leader for Slovene SKD had the following comment about EPP and EUCD.

“What I like best is that the EPP seems to be very, well, personal. People really know each other and can talk informally. Difficulties seem to get sorted out before they become problems, I suppose in conversations like this. That has been the advantage to us being in the EUCD these past few years. We have had friends, and been able to help each other.”⁹⁰

These many meetings, lunches, seminars, workshops, congresses etc. often brought the same groups of people together. It is in these groupings that socialization and learning can take place. Whether and how they have influenced political behavior on national level will hopefully be researched.

⁸⁹ The seven criteria for EPP membership 1996 were removed already after a year.

⁹⁰ Conversation with Wim van Velzen September 12 1996 in Brussels. Reproduced in EPP/EUCD Yearbook 1996

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