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Centralization of Political Parties in the Western Balkans

Abstract

Centralization is one of the characteristics of a political party organization. This organizational characteristic is not equally shared among the political parties. Different parties, operating under similar contexts and similar conditions, have different levels of centralization. The paper looks at these differences, in the context of the political parties in the Western Balkan countries, and tries to answer the question why are some political parties more centralized than others? In other words, what determines the centralization of political parties? The literature on political party organization points to three types of factors that influence the political parties organizational characteristics. Firstly, the legacies of the party or the regime in which they operate may influence the development of the party's organization. Secondly, the processes within the political party aimed at securing the interests and needs of the members may shape the organizational hierarchy of the party. And thirdly, the institutional constraints that the party faces may influence the organizational characteristics. However in the context of the Western Balkan countries parties with similar legacies, coming from the same regime and facing the same institutional constraints have different levels of centralization of the political party organization. Therefore in this context none of the three approaches fully explains the differences of centralization between the political parties. In the paper I argue that centralization as an organizational characteristic of a political party is shaped by ideational factors. The process of creation and appropriation of values, which every political party undergoes, influences the extent to which the political party is centralized. The parties in the Western Balkan countries that are more centralized have embedded values from the recent violent past that they went through, which in turn forces on them a more rigid hierarchical organization.