

Assessing success and failure of post-communist unionism: trade unions' self-positioning during system change

Tibor T. Meszmann

Pphmet01@phd.ceu.hu

Work in progress, please do not quote, comments welcome

Introduction

The thesis that post-communism is over in Eastern Europe (Ost 2007) opens an important ground for the evaluation of labor politics. Looking back, there were different expectations in terms of the fate of workers after the fall of Eastern European communism. Some scholars in the 1980s saw in labor movements in the East (especially in the case of Solidarity) potential ‘vanguards’ whose experience might be important to labor movements in the West (e.g. Ost 1990, Denitch 1990, Djilas 1989, Ost & Crowley 2001). These expectations ran into bitter disappointment. Today, organized labor in most ‘post-communist’ Eastern European countries is marginalized (Crowley 2004, Kubicek 2004). On the other end of the spectrum, in the early transition years trade unions were given low chances that they will manage to survive the transition. Namely, with the very introduction of the institutions of the market and political democracy, some intellectuals and decision makers expected trade unions to disappear entirely from the scene in Eastern Europe as relicts of a discredited past. Yet, most ‘old’ and some ‘new’ trade unions in all countries of Eastern Europe coped with the challenges and at least survived, while many other smaller labor organizations emerged. From this point of view, the presence of unions on the political scenes in most Eastern European polities represents a modest achievement. Lamentation over labor weakness in post-communist countries can be thus balanced with the claim that these organizations actually and quite successfully transformed their organizations and at least survived the legitimacy crisis of post-communism. Moreover, in some cases unions remained or became arguably the most important social organizations, capable of mobilizing members, representing a force for political parties to reckon with, and sometimes exert critical influence on decision

making in labor related issues. Scholarly accounts on reasons of unions' survival, and sporadic success in Eastern Europe is nevertheless very thin.

Literature on East European post-communist organized labor emphasizes first and foremost the economic aspects of the transformation and its detrimental implications for the trade unions or other exogenous factors (e.g. Bohle and Greskovits 2004, Crowley and Ost 2001). In the attempts to explain reasons of weak unionism after the fall of the Berlin wall, scholars listed several causes, including economic transformation and expansion of financial capitalism to the East, negative influence of communist legacy on labor activism, global ideological reasons, such as crisis of social democracy and 'procapitalist predilection' of workers (Ost 2000: 505). However, as I showed elsewhere¹ the problem with these causes is that it might explain the sharper decline of unionism in Eastern Europe than in West², but it cannot explain sufficiently the variation among cases (Dimitrova and Petkov 2005). Second, without challenging that the outcome was due to these causes, it was not assessed sufficiently well *how* different factors contribute to the decline of unions in different post-communist countries, and how important are different factors. Most importantly, the exceptional case of Slovenia, with high union density level and mobilization/concertation capacities, and almost full coverage of collective bargaining was not sufficiently explained, nor understood. Although there are several studies stressing the exceptional strength of Slovenian organized labor (see esp. Stanojevic 2003), we do not understand fully how and why it became different from other Eastern European cases. In Stanojevic's account, whereas the role of the political elite indeed might explain the different outcomes in the cases of Serbia and Slovenia, this variable cannot explain variations in the destinies of union movements in different Eastern European countries. The main point to be raised here is that the literature did not include and apply endogenous variables rigorously in explaining different destinies of the labor movement, but treated organized labor as a passive force. I attempt to explain the relative success of Slovene union in comparison to other late communist cases of Serbia and Poland with endogenous organizational factors.

Although the role of organized labor in democratization and regime change is recognized as important (e.g. Berins Collier 1999, Berins Collier & Mahoney 1997, Stephens 1989, Valenzuela 1989), the literature on post-communist unions rarely treated trade unions as active actors in the

1

² If we take post-communist Eastern Europe and Western Europe as regions for units of analysis and comparison

course of transformation (for a notable exception, limited to the early post-communist period see esp. Avdagic 2003, but also Meardi 2000, Ost 2005). At the same time, the effects of nationalism and ‘state’ and ‘nation’ building (Linz & Stepan 1996: 24-26) for the activity of trade unions in (early) post-communism remains unexplored. In taking a step further in centering the attention to trade unions, my attempt is to focus on trade unions as *organizations* and actors of economic and political transformation, and as organizations which respond to the changing environment. Trade unions are thus organizations in need to change in order to be influential. I will offer an explanation for the variation in union movements’ strength based on organizational theory. More particularly, my explanation stresses the importance of the consolidation of authority structure of the union movement and proper repertoire choice for success and failure of post-communist unions (Martin 2005, Gusman 1966, Robnett 1996; Staggenborg 1998). In order to develop the explanatory framework, in this paper I critically examine and operationalize the explanatory potential of the concept of trade unions’ self-positioning in late communist, early post-communist political-economic macro arena, and self-positioning in terms of internal organizational reform during the same period for variation of union success. I differentiate thus between macro level, political-economic strategic activity of the peak level unions (‘unions’ participation in the transition game’), and internal organizational self-positioning (‘bridging the storm of reforms’). Both macro level and organizational self-positioning(s) are processes which happen simultaneously. The critical issue for internal self-positioning is whether and if so, where do the principles of plant level activism and centralization of the movement for the new needs meet.

In short, my hypotheses can be summarized that the more active role in macro arena, and more successful reforms, the higher the authority of the union movement will be. Second, reconciliation of the dual logic of internal change is essential for establishing a consolidated ‘union regime’ (Hancké 1993). In short, the authority of the peak level union can be successfully restored if and only if there are not only revival of union activism (especially on the shop or plant level) and reorganization of the formal organizational principles of the peak level movement organization, but more importantly if grass root level activism happens in a coordinated way, not undermining the authority of the peak level organization. In a form of a summary, the conceptual frame and the hypotheses are applied to three cases: Serbia, Poland and Slovenia.

The second step in the critical junction argument posits that the organizational authority stemming from self-positioning in times of system crisis explains the varying strength of contemporary unions in contemporary post-communist settings.

The central body of this paper is divided into two parts. In the next, longer section I outline the theoretical and conceptual frame for the analysis of labor unions, and outline hypotheses. In the second, I introduce the three selected cases, and discuss implications and issues of possible problems.

1. Trade unions and transformative politics: Definitions and concepts used

Trade unions are complex organizations. On the national level, a ‘formalized’ or institutionalized trade union movement is usually led by a peak level ‘parental’ organizations, trade union (con)federations. The trade union federation or confederation however consist of branch and/or sectoral and/or territorially organized federations, but also plant or shop level trade unions as member organizations. Rank-and-file membership is usually the membership base of member organizations.

Trade unions are usually understood as intermediary interest-representative organizations (Müller Jentsch 1985, Schmitter 1974). Trade unions have all systemic roles (on the macro level), organizations facing internal tensions and adaptation to the new environment (on the meso level) and changing membership functions (on the micro level). Yet, for the socialist-post-socialist period this definition requires critical reflection and possibly some amendments. It can be accepted that trade unions as intermediary organizations, both during communism and in post-communism, had some autonomy from both their membership and from public authorities. More precisely, the organizational behavior and ‘operative logic’ of such ‘goal oriented’ and ‘system-dependent’ intermediary organizations is neither a sum of the individual preferences of members or groups composing them, nor an expression of group solidarity, nor a mere instrument for manipulation by the state or more powerful agencies (Lipset 1960, Schmitter, 1992: 423). The autonomous ‘operational logic’ of the intermediary trade union organization comes into being through translation of external constraint and membership expectations into practical policy. It includes autonomous interpretation of the situation, formulation of the interests of membership into demands, and choosing the optimal strategy for action (Müller-Jentsch 1983: 20). Apart from a representative function, trade unions are channels for mediating pressure between their members – social groups and public authorities and vice versa. Of course, the amount of pressure to deal with (especially from the state), and the membership trust they enjoy all influence the amount of their ‘self-regulation’ and autonomy.

Yet East European labor unions and movements are intermediary organizations in the making. Squeezed between decision making elites and masses of workers and citizens they participated in broader transformative processes. For unions these processes included overcoming (or not) constraints of post-communist legitimacy crisis of trade unions and fierce competition for resources and members, along with emerging opportunity structures in a democratizing space and freedom of building up new organizational structures and priorities for action.

In late communism as state supported ‘sociopolitical’ organizations, unions had a secured place in the political and economic system. At the same time, trade unions were organizations of secondary importance with limited inclusion into decision making on all levels, having main tasks of contributing to such areas as (socialist) development and raising economic productivity levels. For trade unions, the peculiarity of East-European post-socialist transformations to market economies and democracies, in comparison to their earlier Western, South American or South European counterparts, is that a simultaneous organizational process occurred: a change of trade unions from highly institutionalized roles (‘transmission belts’) to interest associations. Thus, we can see late communist trade unions as (genuine) interest representative intermediary organizations in the making. This organizational process however had political and economic opportunities and constraints to which unions needed to respond to.

While coping with legitimacy problems, the main challenge for post-communist unions was in finding their own place in the changed political and economic environment – to survive and if possibly, to develop. As of the political arena, trade unions had to respond to issues of party pluralism and find potential allies on the left and right, against and taking sides with the first democratically elected governments. Moreover, on a more fundamental political level, unions were affected by the issues of redefinition of the political community along with (participating in decision about) constitutional changes. Redefinition of the political community – the issue of ‘state-nation building’ (Linz & Stepan 1996) was indeed a major issue for many ethnically mixed states of Eastern Europe (Brubaker 1996). In the economic arena, representing the interests of employees for unions was murky and difficult to accomplish in a straight-forward way due to inevitable restructuring of the economy (deindustrialization) and privatization. Moreover, potentially the greatest ‘losers’ of economic transformation were the blue collar workers of large state owned enterprises, many of which were either to shrink or cease to exist. The trouble for the unions was that the bulk of its rank and file, and potential strength in terms of showing off with

collective action were unions and workers in exactly in such large enterprises. In this difficult period, the need of organizational reform also emerged within the late communist-early democratizing national union movements, denoting not only democratization of the movement, professionalization and inventing effective methods for interest representation (along with issues of funding of the activity), but also redefinition of internal issues of organization such as the relations among plant (shop) level, branch-sectoral, territorial and peak level union organizations.

I apply the concept of trade union self-positioning within a framework of a critical juncture argument, in order to explain diverging fates of post-communist unions. Such an approach assumes the critical importance of the ‘transition years’ of systemic crisis. The critical juncture argument can be applied also to the field of organizational development and change. As formulated by Powell and DiMaggio, organizations may change goals, missions and practices, and new organizations may emerge, but ‘in the long run, organizational actors making rational decisions construct around themselves an environment that constraints their ability to change further in later years’ (1991: 65). Moreover, selection of strategies important for the survival and success for organizations acts powerfully only in the early years (Carroll and Delacroix, 1982 cf. Powell and DiMaggio, 1991: 66). On the other hand, the focus can be limited to older and larger organizations, since only these are capable to dominate their organizational environment, instead of adapting to or reacting to practices of ‘successful’ others (Freeman, 1982: 14 cf. Powell and DiMaggio, 1991: 66).

In the analysis of the transformation of labor movement organizations, it is thus sufficient to focus on and explore only the dominant trade union movements within selected countries. In most countries of former communist Europe, the dominant union organizations were the ‘old’ communist trade unions, inheritors of (even if passive) rank-and-file members and infrastructure. There were only a few countries where stronger ‘alternative’, democratic anti-communist labor unions emerged. First and foremost this was the case in Poland (Solidarity), and to a lesser extent in Bulgaria (Podkrepa), and Hungary (LIGA), republics of Yugoslavia, such as a union cum ethnic mobilization in Kosovo, smaller union movements in Slovenia and Croatia, and Estonia. In contrast, more significant alternative labor federations did not emerge in Latvia, Czech Republic Slovakia, or Russia and even less in ‘laggards’ in democratization and marketization such as Byelorussia or Moldova.

In the early transition years, the trade union scene in more reform advanced post-socialist states went through multiplication, fragmentation due to establishment of unions of professionals, with the reform challenge in internal re-organization, reconfiguration of the relations among plant, branch, territorial, federal and confederal levels. The process of separation and reform was going from local or branch level to confederal separatism, competition between old and new confederations for different plants and branches, reform on the hierarchical and vertical structures of 'old' confederal level to please the appetites of the constituent units, until a compromise decision was not reached, e.g. in the allocation of membership fees and relative weight of union authorities. Historically, in terms of dynamics in this reorganization, in trade unions' new morphology, but also organizational changes of trade unions, Petkov and Thirkell (1998: 88-9) reported that

at the beginning of the changes, the centre and the base were the most active, while the middle level had the intermediary function or was inclined to resist the increasing power of the centre. [...] [In Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, but not in Czechoslovakia...] separation of the branch trade unions from the centre occurred because of interorganizational controversies and conflicts. Most often, the separatist tendencies occur in the chemical industries, culture and energy, and specific professional groups such as air-traffic controllers and customs officers. Gradually, the initial pressure from the base organizations on the centres and governments for the resolution of local problems (wages, change of managers, social allowances, etc.) has weakened. In 1993-4 the researchers noted a general decrease in the militancy of enterprise organizations, while the middle level of the federation gained considerable importance.

Such a development justifies a primary focus on 'parental', national level peak union organizations, and its relations, reactions to activities of shop, plant level unions, along with reactions to the emergence of small unions of highly skilled professionals and other attempts in effectively organizing the workers.

It is clear thus that first, late communist unions had to cope with a broad agenda – broader than the concept of intermediary interest representative organization would predict - and that second, we can differentiate between a macro level, political-economic strategic activity of peak level unions and an internal, organizational level of change. Under strategic activity I understand steps of calculated self-positioning in the changing political and economic environment. We can call the first somewhat metaphorically "unions' participation in the transition game", while the internal organizational self-positioning can be named metaphorically "bridging the storm of reforms". Of course, both macro level and organizational self-positioning(s) are processes which happen simultaneously.

Self-positioning in the macro arena denotes meaningful participation in, at best contribution to (successful) political and economic reforms in a late communist, newly democratizing-marketizing country. Participation in economic reforms refers first and foremost to formulating stances of unions on ways and speed of restructuring (or reforms), labor policies and ownership transformation. Moreover, participation also refers to (transparent) activity of the union organizations on 'grass root' plant or shop levels. Among the great challenges for unions is to find a strategic solution to protecting rank-and-file during the restructuring of large industrial enterprises, many of which lost markets while others continuously depending on state protection (ADD ref). In the political macro arena unions take stances on political pluralism, redefinition of political community (which has implications on union members), and establish and maintain ties with legitimate political actors in the new, changed circumstances. Trade unions could not possibly further their interests without finding new political allies. On a more fundamental level, dominant unions in all Eastern European countries accepted a socially responsible role in participating in the creation of new post-communist (democratic) authorities (comp. Elster, Preuss & Offe 1998, Wiesenthal 2004).

As it is mentioned, the time period in which I assess union self-positioning as the explanandum (or independent variable) of varying strength of union movements is the period of system crisis. System crisis denotes the time period bridging the last year of communism with the second multiparty elections. The sequence of time connecting the disappearing system with the emergence of the new one, e.g. the period connecting the last years of socialism and first years of post-socialism is, as Campbell and Pedersen warn, a sequence of time filled with a process of intensive struggle among different actors, where some try to preserve positive institutional elements of the past, while others try to dismantle them (Campbell & Pedersen, 1996: 209). As Bauman pointed out, in this period the main social and political 'revolutionary' actors 'not only dismantled an old regime, but found themselves also in the situation that a new society and its actors have still to be constructed' (Bauman 1993 cf. Elster et al. 1998: 49). Not surprisingly, the period of transition witnessed intense struggles over the definition of new economic and political institutions, over both their boundaries and content (Campbell & Pedersen 1996: 210). The most important issue was how much autonomy different institutions, organizations and actors, trade unions, but also enterprises, firms, business associations, and individuals could gain in the new, legally regulated environment and what their responsibilities will be (Campbell & Pedersen 1996: 210). It is important to keep in mind also that in the case of surviving social actors and organizations such as trade unions the organizational transformation happens not from *ex nihilo*

but from existing scratches of efficient practices/social structures/assets at disposal to them (c.f. Stark and Bruszt 1998). Trade unions thus survived the old system and found themselves in a new environment with new opportunities to continue operation. That is, we may speak of adaptation to changing environment starting from organizational capacities and assets for influencing decision making.

Self-positioning in the external, macro arena denotes peak level unions' (formulated) stance and (active) participation in political and economic reforms, including alliances with (commitment to) or opposition to political actors and (reform related) issues. Internal self-positioning denotes a duality of organizational change and reform: revival of (democratic) union activism on the plant, shop and/or professional associational level and designing or reorganizing a (democratic), influential (centralized) intermediary formalized organization of the labor movement by the peak level organization. In short, the critical issue for internal organizational self-positioning is whether and if so, where do the principles of plant level activism and centralization of the movement for the new needs meet. Changes within the movement can come and spread fully from the top; nevertheless a viable strong union organization is hardly imaginable without devoted, competent and trustworthy plant level trade union activists at base. On the other hand, activism and protest actions or strikes organized by zealous grass root level activists can come in conflict with silent policies of the peak level union organization, supportive or patient with governmental economic policies. Such actions have a significant price in the erosion of union authorities. The critical issue for the peak level unions' authority and for the consolidation of the union movement is the available professional capacities, information and expertise, and last but not least the available resources for all educating, disciplining and ultimately mobilizing its rank-and-file in critical moments.

The concept of trade union self-positioning is a concept which is appropriate to pack in it our observations on multiple challenges of trade unions during the (post)-communist transformative processes of political and economic changes in the period of system crisis. Nevertheless it remains to operationalize the concept of macro level and organizational self-positioning. The following table summarizes the constituting analytical elements of self-positioning:

<i>Internal (organizational) self-positioning (In:)</i>	
Factors:	
➤	I1 commitment to (internal) thorough reforms of the peak level organization
➤	I2 relations between peak and member organizations stemming from organizational reforms

- **I3 peak level policies of disciplining, educating and mobilizing trade union members and grass root level leadership**
- **I4 strategies of gathering resources, professionalization**
- **I5 activism on the plant/workplace level (incl. strikes/mobilization, education, concertation - pacification) and reactions/control from the peak level union organization**
- **I6 Internal leadership conflicts and their resolution: alternative visions on unions role in transformative processes.**

➤

(External) Self positioning in the macro arena

Political self-positioning (E_{pn})

- **E_{p1} trade union: a voice during redefinition of the political community/inclusion in constitutional changes/legislation?**
- **E_{p2} stance of union movement vs. political and union pluralism (including fragmentation and other professionalized unions)**
- **E_{p3} Alliance/ties with political parties: Level of strength; Level of transparency**
- **E_{p4} Alternative strategies of increasing political visibility and influence**

Economic self-positioning (E_{en})

- **E_{e1} economic reforms: meaningful proposals**
- **E_{e2} Strategies for concessions for unions for its social role in appeasement of the workforce**
- **E_{e3} Policies towards restructuring of large SOEs**

➤

These analytical factors are both heuristic elements grasping the essence of union self-positioning understood as a sequential process of the system crisis period, and almost needless to say, organizing categories for transparent assessment of concrete cases of union movements in selected national settings. These are descriptive, qualitative categories, but in order to achieve a greater rigor in analysis, we can assign basic values to each³.

³ The concept and its elements with assigned values should offer a frame for comparative analysis which allows exploring both uniqueness/exceptionality of the cases and comparable assessment of similar or different outcomes with adequate rigor.

The first set of my *hypothesis* posits that, in short, self-positioning determines the level of consolidation of the authority of the union movement at the point of the end of the transition process (system crisis period). Under the organizational consolidation and authority of the union I understand the concertation capacity, legitimacy and (level of) consolidation of the internal organization of the (re)formalized union movement. In the macro arena, economic and political reforms along with gains from political ties turn to be either successful or unsuccessful, retroactively affecting the prestige and authority of the union. Both external and internal reforms have a reactive effect on the unions' (recognized) authority depending on the positive or negative outcomes. We judge 'success' of reforms and alliances first of all through the eyes of the organization (self-assessment) itself, its members and rank-and-file during reforms and alliance formations, but also from a later perspective, along with its effects on the authority of the peak level union, along with assessments/observations of scholars or third parties (e.g. public assessments by journalists – judged to be sufficiently objective). I expect the above listed elements - factors to be in positive or negative correlation with the establishment of union authority (function – f). These factors/elements need further clarification:

1. $f(I_1)$ commitment to (internal) thorough reforms of the peak level organization. Where $I_1 \rightarrow \text{sg } I_1 = \{1 \text{ if } I_1 > 0 ; 0 \text{ if } I_1 = 0; -1 \text{ if } I_1 < 0\}$

Hypothesis (H) H1. Expectation: Correlation with union authority: positive

2. $f(I_2)$ relations between peak and member organizations stemming from organizational reforms: conflictual – passive – harmonized –; where conflictual stands for -1; passive for 0; and harmonized for +1 where thus $I_2 \rightarrow \text{sg } I_2 = \{1 \text{ if } I_2 > 0 ; 0 \text{ if } I_2 = 0; -1 \text{ if } I_2 < 0\}$

H2. Expectation: Correlation: positive, i.e. The more harmonized – the less conflictual – the higher the union authority will be.

3. $f(I_3)$ peak level union policies of disciplining, educating and mobilizing trade union members and grass root level leadership (Y/N): binary (dummy), where existence is 1; non-existence 0

H3. Expectation: positive correlation

4. $f(I_4)$ strategies of gathering resources, professionalization Y/N (1/0)– positive correlation, binary (dummy), where existence is 1; non-existence is 0;

H4. Expectation: positive correlation

5. $f(I_5)$ activism on the plant/workplace level (incl. strikes/mobilization, education, activism) and reactions/control from the peak level union organization: supporting – passive/tolerating – repressing/disciplining/discouraging, where repressing/disciplining/discouraging stands for -1; passive for 0; and supporting for +1 where thus $I_5 \rightarrow sg I_5 = \{1 \text{ if } I_5 > 0 ; 0 \text{ if } I_5 = 0; -1 \text{ if } I_5 < 0\}$

H5. Expectation: Correlation: positive. Nevertheless, it is possible that causation works in different directions – i.e. peak level organizations making sure/investing efforts so that no (wild cat) strikes will occur.

6. $f(I_6)$ Internal leadership conflicts and their resolution – as a measurement of democratization of the movement and internal activity on creating alternative visions on unions role in transformative processes: where internal leadership conflict and its resolution stands for 1; no internal leadership conflict stands for 0 and internal leadership conflict and no resolution on professional/democratic grounds stands for -1; where thus $I_6 \rightarrow sg I_6 = \{1 \text{ if } I_6 > 0 ; 0 \text{ if } I_6 = 0; -1 \text{ if } I_6 < 0\}$

H6. Expectation: Correlation: positive.

7. $f(E_{p1})$ union participation in nationalist discourses, (informal redefinition of the political community) /inclusion in constitutional changes/legislation; where participation/inclusion in constitutional changes/drafting legislation stands for 1; no involvement stands for 0 and participation in nationalist discourses stands for -1; where thus $E_{p1} \rightarrow sg E_{p1} = \{1 \text{ if } E_{p1} > 0 ; 0 \text{ if } E_{p1} = 0; -1 \text{ if } E_{p1} < 0\}$

H7. Expectation: Correlation: positive.

8. $f(E_{p2})$ stance of union movement vs. political and union pluralism (including fragmentation and other professionalized unions): supportive – passive/ignorant – antagonistic; where antagonistic stands for -1; passive/ignorant for 0; and supportive/tolerant for +1 where thus $E_{p2} \rightarrow sg E_{p2} = \{1 \text{ if } E_{p2} > 0 ; 0 \text{ if } E_{p2} = 0; -1 \text{ if } E_{p2} < 0\}$

H8. Expectation: Correlation: positive.

9. $f(E_{p3})$ Alliance/ties with political parties with level of strength of ties/alliances; and level of transparency in case of ties where strong ties, high transparency stands for 1, no or weak ties: 0; Strong ties, low transparency -1 where thus $E_{p3} \rightarrow sg E_{p3} = \{1 \text{ if } E_{p3} > 0 ; 0 \text{ if } E_{p3} = 0; -1 \text{ if } E_{p3} < 0\}$

H9. Expectation: Correlation: positive.

10. $f(E_{p4})$ Alternative strategies of increasing political visibility and influence: Y/N (1/0) binary, where existence is 1; non-existence is 0;

H10. Expectation: Correlation: positive.

11. $f(E_{e1})$ economic reforms: meaningful proposals – Y/N and assessment of effects on organized labor Y/N. Where meaningful proposals with assessment on the effects on organized labor stands for 1; no proposals stands for 0; and proposals with no assessments stands for -1; where thus $E_{e1} \rightarrow \text{sg } E_{e1} = \{1 \text{ if } E_{e1} > 0 ; 0 \text{ if } E_{e1} = 0; -1 \text{ if } E_{e1} < 0\}$

H11. Expectation: Correlation: positive.

12. $f(E_{e2})$ Strategies for concessions for unions for its social role in appeasement of the workforce? Y/N (1/0) binary, where existence is 1; non-existence is 0;

H12. Expectation: Correlation: positive.

13. $f(E_{e3})$ Policies towards restructuring of large SOEs: Existence (Y/N) and active positive protecting role (Y/N) of unions; where active restructuring policies and active protection of the workforce stand for 1; no policies stand for 0 and restructuring policies without active strategies/protection of the workforce stand for -1; where thus $E_{e3} \rightarrow \text{sg } E_{e3} = \{1 \text{ if } E_{e3} > 0 ; 0 \text{ if } E_{e3} = 0; -1 \text{ if } E_{e3} < 0\}$ ⁴

H13. Expectation: Correlation: positive.

More controversial issues and their effects on consolidation and strength of organizational authority of the union movement deserve a special consideration and detailed (in-depth) exploration. Above all, these factors (issues) include the solutions of unions to respond to the challenge of representing workforce during the restructuring of state owned enterprises in leading (largest) branches of industry; as well as the development of relations between the peak level unions and grass root level activists and unions. I expect that especially these two factors explain to a great extent the variation in union authority as of the time of the second multiparty elections.

In the second step, I hypothesize that the level of established union peak level authority in the system crisis period determines the strength of the formalized union movement in the post-communist era. We can measure the strength of the union movement by combination of three properties: union density; concertation and mobilization capacities of the unions and collective bargaining coverage rates.

⁴ Note: based on literature, a more detailed explanation for such expectations will follow.

To summarize, I outlined here a chain causation argument. First, union self-positioning determines the strength of union authority as established until the point of second multi-party elections. Second, I posit that union authority explains the varying strength of post-communist union organizations in the period after the second free multiparty elections.

2. Selection of cases and possible problems

The research question of this project is to explain the strength of Slovene unions and explore reasons of variation in union strength in countries of post-communist Eastern Europe. In addition to high density rates, mobilization and concertation capacities of the Slovenian union movement are much higher than in any other country in the region, while the coverage of collective agreement is almost full. Moreover, Slovenian trade unions have a recognized authority among civil society organizations.⁵ In order to Slovene exceptionality, but also to explain variation among Eastern European cases, the case of Slovenian union movement is compared to two other cases.

There are three criteria for case selection. On the starting point level these are the highest possible similarities in structural background conditions (as of 1988) among the selected countries, along with variation in labor activism and union reformism. In other words, those countries are selected where institutional, political and economic background conditions were the most similar, but the trade union scene and self-positioning was different. The third criterion is the greatest variation in terms of unions' strength at the outcome level. Thus, in case selection I attempt to find the greatest possible similarity in the structural variables at the starting point level, the greatest presumable variation in the independent variable (union reformism/labor activism) and the most different outcomes.

In 1988 Slovenia was a constituent republic of socialist Yugoslavia. Therefore, for comparison a then republic case should be selected which is most similar at the starting point but as lower as possible in variation in hypothesized union reformism than Slovenia, and most different at the outcome level. We can select a case among the other two economically advanced or 'developed' republics of Croatia and Serbia, with separate union confederations. I select the Serbian union movement: although organized labor in Croatia is more similar at the starting point level, at the other two criteria – union activism (reformism) and outcomes, Serbia is more optimal for comparison, since it varies more on both the independent and dependent variables: labor was

⁵ the exploration of mobilization and concertation capacities

less active in late communism, and the outcome is weaker labor in post-communism than it is the case in Croatia.

In order to draw more general insights for whole region, the other country is a non-Yugoslav successor state. Here, labor movement in Poland is the optimal case for comparison. In terms of the economic and political background conditions in late 1980s, Poland shared with (republics of) Yugoslavia a relatively liberal political and economic climate, and the institution of worker self-management. The nearest on this dimension is Hungary. On the other hand, it was in Poland where the most dynamic union politics emerged, with especially strong anti-communist labor union – Solidarity, but also with a reform oriented ‘ex-communist’ union movement. On this dimension a less vibrant but pluralist and reformist unionism was present in Bulgaria and Hungary – which are more similar to Slovenia. Finally, on the outcome level, Polish labor is among the weakest in Eastern Europe – with lower union density rate and collective bargaining coverage than any Visegrad country; only unions in the Baltic states are weaker.

If we put the three cases next to each other, and compare them initially, some interesting questions arise. Most importantly, how come that it was in Slovenia that unions became the strongest in whole post-communist Europe and not in Poland: with the strongest democratic, anti-communist movement – without doubt more active than the Slovenian union movement? If strong unions emerged in Slovenia, why was it not the case also in Serbia, since there are many common legacies⁶? To repeat, I hypothesize that the success of the Slovenian labor movement was due to union movements’ self-positioning in the macro- and internal arena between the last years of communism and in the 1988-1992 period.

A few justified objections may be raised to such an account of union transformation which are stemming from comparative analysis as such (Hyman 2001), and second from treating union movement organizations on equal footing as ‘free’ agents of transformation, environmentally unconstrained organizations. I need to respond to these points.

It is impossible to oppose the claim that, even if I selected the most similar cases in structural background conditions, the selected union movements were not to some degree country specific organizations and that the challenges, constraints and opportunities stemming from economic and political environment to which they needed to respond were similarly different during the system

⁶ such as the legislation on strikes and collective bargaining

crisis period. In order to remedy and soften such bold claim, in addition to categorization I offer additional descriptive in-depth accounts of transformative processes and responses of different union movements. The analysis takes into account also the differences among union organizations. As of the second objection, I certainly do not claim that unions' destinies were fully in their hands, and that we can compare and judge union performance without taking into account the country specific economic and political limitations and constraints of union action and self-positioning. In order to remedy judgments stemming from straight forward comparison of (endogenous) union transformation, I outline separately country specific political and economic structural environment in the selected countries, as well as in the European (post)-communist region. The properties according to which I present the Eastern European region, and in more details the structural environment of the three selected cases are the level of political and economic reforms, the significance of nationalism and 'state-' 'nation building' process, and finally economic characteristics of countries (level of industrialization; available markets - roles in international division of labor etc.)

Finally, it is important to stress that the selected three cases do not follow all possible categories of cases of union transformation. Most importantly, changes within the union movement in laggards in reform and in least industrialized, poorest countries are not covered. Union movements were the most inert e.g. in Albania, Moldova or Georgia. Yet, since there were few changes and very little to say about union transformation in these countries, a short exploration of unions in these countries will suffice. With this, a detailed assessment of the three cases will allow me also to make some general assessments on union politics in the whole region, along with the significance of union self-positioning for the explanation of the variation in union movements' strength in former communist countries.

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