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Vít Hloušek and Lubomír Kopeček, *Origin, Ideology and Transformation of Political Parties: East-Central and Western Europe Compared*. Farnham and Burlington, VT; Ashgate. 2010. £60.00 (hbk). xv+ 263pp. ISBN 978 0754 678 403.

*Origin, Ideology and Transformation of Political Parties* gives a parallel overview of the development of party families in Western and Eastern Europe from their origins in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to the present day. East European cases covered are, however, restricted to Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Slovenia. After an opening chapter reviewing the literature on party families, the book settles on an understanding of the term loosely derived from Klaus von Beyme as uniting parties with shared socio-historical and/or ideologies. Chapters then make assessments using a version of von Beyme's *familles spirituelles*: far-left parties, Greens, agrarians, liberals, Christian Democrats, conservatives, ethno-parties and the far right, considering in each chapter a party family's origins; development over time; electoral performance; the role of national party systems; and the extent of convergence around a common European identity and programme. The book concludes with a discussion of overall patterns of party convergence.

Hloušek and Kopeček give a competent, clear and accessible overview of party family development, synthesizing a wide range of party literature in English and German, Polish, Czech and Slovak, which would make their book an excellent introductory text for both students and scholars. However, although they give equal space to West and East European cases, the main analytical concern is to establish to the extent to which Czech, Slovak, Polish and Slovene parties have (re-)integrated into West European party families. This is assessed by comparing national party programmes with the core party family positions found in the programmes of relevant Euro-parties.

Many of the book's findings will be familiar to specialists on party politics in East Central Europe: despite the cross-cutting effects of nationalism and the hiatus of communist rule, party systems in the region can be interpreted as roughly corresponding to the classic West European party families, albeit with important caveats and differences. Agrarian parties, which dominated many CEE states electorally during brief pre- and post-war democratic interludes, now survive precariously as special interest parties. Instead, Socialist and social democratic parties are the most widespread major CEE party family, although most have their origins in reformed former ruling communist parties rather than 'historic' social democratic parties (a weak and divided force in the region even before the advent of communism). The Czech Social Democrats are a significant (partial) exception. While niche Christian parties exist and Christianity informs the ideology of centre-right blocs in Poland and Hungary, West European-style mass Christian Democratic parties are conspicuous by their absence. Instead, the region has given rise to a diffuse mix of centre-right groupings, which loosely break down into conservative-nationalist and liberal-conservative camps. Liberal parties in CEE are, as in Western Europe, diverse and politically weak, often tending to be squeezed (and ultimately assimilated) by more powerful blocs of left and right.

Green parties too are a faltering and peripheral presence in the region even in comparatively rich CEE states studied here, probably because of the lack of a strong post-materialist middle class, and unlike their Western counterparts often have a pro-market or anti-communist leanings. The CEE far-right is eclectic but limited presence ideologically comparable to West European equivalents, but more rooted in historic nationalism and (in Poland and Hungary) religious ultra-conservatism. With the

exception of the Czech Republic's Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), the radical left is weaker still, although small workerist groups hovered on the verge of electability in Hungary) and enjoyed short sojourns in parliament in Slovakia. Both, like KSČM, were remnants of the old ruling party whose ideologies sit uncomfortably with those of Western Europe's more modernized Marxist and anti-capitalist left, rather than socially-rooted political movements. The authors find one major ethno-regional party in the five CEE states survey – the Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK in Slovakia)- making meaningful comparison with Western Europe difficult. Here, a wider sample of East European states would have yielded greater insights: comparable parties representing similarly sized national minorities are well-established political actors Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia and Estonia.

*Origin, Ideology and Transformation of Political Parties* offers a clear, readable and up-to-date survey of the party landscape in key CEE states, making a number of effective and interesting cross-regional contrasts. However, it makes only a modest contribution in research terms. While occasionally suggestive, basic cross-tabulation of CEE party positions against Europarties' programmes provides little robust evidence of real convergence and does little to address possible causes of such convergence (if it is occurring). Indeed, the book shies away from issues of causation more generally, barely touching on the many sophisticated discussions on cleavage, social and historical structure in the literature, which are usually central to party family perspectives. Kitschelt's seminal work linking the transformation of social-democratic, Green and radical right parties to changing nature of capitalism and the welfare state, for example, goes largely unmentioned.

The book's reliance on the concept of party family is, however, problematic in other respects. It leaves little scope for discussion of party organization or the nature of

party-voter linkages and also seems to obscure the analytically more pertinent concept of party systems: national *configurations* of parties, not party families, structure political outcomes. Most of perplexing of all, however, is the assumption that contemporary Central and Eastern European parties can best be understood through prism of historical West European patterns. While CEE politicians have naturally sought out the legitimacy conferred by historic West European party labels, Western Europe be increasingly converging towards Central and Eastern European model of fragmented, fluid electorates; ideologically rootless parties; and pragmatic managerial politicians, whose hold on power is disturbed only by periodic populist upsurges at the polls. Perhaps it is time to turn round the telescope and reflect upon what CEE can tell us about the rapid erosion of historically-based party configurations in Western Europe.

Seán Hanley

*University College London*