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NEW PROSPECTS FOR ALTERNATIVE POLITICS?

1. INTRODUCTION: GAUGUINIAN QUESTIONS

It seems like ages have passed since groupings like the Friends of Beer Party entered the pre-election scene in 1990 when then Czechoslovakia was heading to its first free elections since 1946. Though the young founders of the party in Pilsen known worldwide for Pilsner beer insisted that they take it seriously, it was also a kind of joke ridiculing the era of mushrooming political parties after the fall of communism. And even if the Polish version of this devotion to the drink of gods, The Beer Lovers' Party, became more successful, capturing almost three percent of the vote and winning 16 seats in the Sejm in the 1991 parliamentary elections¹, its founder, humorist Janusz Rewiński, besides promoting “cultural beer-drinking in English-style pubs instead of vodka and thus fighting alcoholism” also used to say that with his party “it won't be better, but funnier”.

The parties analyzed in this book on “alternative politics” depicting the rise of new political formations in four Central European countries (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia – the “Visegrad Four”) are anything but jokes: they are all deadly serious in their mission, work and goals. They wanted to perform better than traditional actors, they promised to change the way politics is done, and some of them even desired to put an end to the rotten system and to create a new one.

And it has become crystal clear that, more than two decades after the revolutionary changes of 1989, they have ascertained themselves as influential

¹ Twenty-nine political formations were elected into the Parliament. The Beer Lovers' Party was a part of a small coalition of liberal pro-market parties successfully supporting the candidacy of Hanna Suchocka for the Prime Minister.

12 | players in the messy and controversial politics of almost all new democracies. Therefore it seems appropriate, in the spirit of the famous work by Paul Gauguin, to ask his questions: Where do alternative political formations come from? Who are they? Where are they going? This book attempts to offer answers to these queries.

Thoroughly prepared and empirically rich research papers authored by ten scholars from four countries meticulously examine the nature of new political parties, circumstances that led to their emergence, and information related to the conceptual background of their birth and the later stages of their development. Election statistics, repeated public opinion polls and special surveys, in-depth interviews with party representatives and experts, focus group discussions, qualitative content analysis – all these instruments help to explain the nature and essence of this phenomenon. The authors explore the sociological aspects of the rise and performance of new parties and the socio-demographics characteristics of their supporters, as well as the social climate in which such parties tend to thrive. They pay attention to their ideological profiles and activities and strategies, including candidate selection processes, electoral campaigns, and political communications. They evaluate the electoral results of the newcomers, their impact on politics and broader public, reflect upon their similarities and differences and analyze how far those groupings constitute a real alternative to the existing party system. Finally, they try to ponder their future, considering various options of their developments.

The readers will, hopefully, appreciate that the book is not only an academic endeavor and not just a collection of purely scholarly inquiries and theoretical treatises. Its ambition is also to serve as a policy-making tool, as an instrument for better understanding the character and impact of new political subjects and to cope both with their predictable impact as well as with their unintended consequences on the fate of democracies.

2. GHOSTS FROM THE PAST: THE SPECTER OF POPULISM AND ILLIBERALISM

Any attempt to study contemporary new political parties struggling for their place under the sun in the Eastern-Central European region should take into consideration that it is not a completely novel phenomenon. Slovakia might be an illuminating example. Almost two decades ago, Oľga Gyárfášová

compared trends in voters' behavior in general elections held in 1994 in Slovakia and Austria. One of the chapters of her study focusing on the success of Jörg Haider's Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and analyzing Haider's ideological and populist equipment (nationalism, anti-foreigners rhetoric, scapegoating, scandalizing the government and underlining a conflict between citizens and political class) was called "The Unbearable Attraction of Populism". She found "a common platform" between FPÖ and the Slovak so-called "non-standard" populist parties, anti-reform leftist Association of Slovakia's Workers and radical rightist Slovak National Party.²

Yet, in Central Eastern Europe the first decade of building a new regime was not about "alternatives" – it was rather about the endeavor to establish a standard multiparty political system organized on a left-right dimension, with strong and vibrant political parties creating or controlling the government, with a solid popular support and sufficiently clear political profiles. The task of the first years of transformation was to design and reach consensus on a new constitutional order, to move from the first stage of democratic transition towards democratic consolidation.³

However, this gradual maturing of new democracies has been challenged by an upsurge of various forms of populism that has gradually penetrated the political scene in many European countries. Cas Mudde even spoke of "a populist Zeitgeist." According to him, "at least since the early 1990s, populism has become a regular feature of politics in western democracies" and "the rise of so-called 'populist parties' has given rise to thousands of books, articles, columns and editorials". He also noticed "while populism is still mostly used by outsider or challenger parties, main-stream politicians, both in government and in opposition, have been using it as well – generally in an attempt to counter the populist challengers".⁴

Ivan Krastev agreed that "populism is on the rise all over Europe": he saw populist parties of left and right winning more votes than ever and the populist Zeitgeist helping to reject the European constitution in referendums held in France and the Netherlands in 2005. "Moreover," he wrote, "a populist agenda is prevailing at the center of many countries' national politics, and establishment parties are trying their best to recapture the outright populists' themes and messages." However, even if the trend was Europe-wide (Austria,

² See Gyárfášová, 1995.

³ Pridham, 2009.

⁴ Mudde, 2004.

14 | Belgium, Portugal, Switzerland, Italy or Scandinavia might be added to countries where populist parties scored high), Krastev considered Central Europe as “the capital of the new populism”. According to him, populist style is ascendant in most of post-communist countries, and “the magic formula” of its success consisted of ten elements, with “authentic anger”, “unrestrained hatred of the elites”, “policy vagueness”, “cultural conservatism”, “declared nationalism”, “undeclared xenophobia” and “anti-corruption rhetoric” among them: “This is the new, electoral version of the Molotov cocktail.”⁵

What worried the authors discussing the proliferation of populist ideas and practices was the accompanying rise of democratic illiberalism. “The specter of populism is wandering through Central Europe,” asserted Jacques Rupnik, noting that populist movements are not antidemocratic (in fact, they claim to be the “true voice of the people”) but antiliberal.⁶

Indeed, a comprehensive book on the 2005-2006 parliamentary elections in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic held after all four countries joined the European Union concluded that the region of Central Europe, until recently acknowledged as “an enclave of stability, successful integration, and radical socio-economic reforms”, underwent domestic political turbulences and a regrouping of political forces caused by the growing strength of populist parties.⁷ In autumn 2007, a collection of studies resulting from an international conference held under the title “Populism in Central Europe” pointed at “populist backlash in Central Europe prior to EU accession”. The book, with more than twenty contributions, tried to examine whether there is a specific “Central European populism”, and if so, what are its historical and ideological roots and its consequences.⁸ Another illustration of rising concerns was a series of studies published also in fall 2007 in *Eurozine*, a network of European cultural journals.⁹ Presented under the title “Illiberal Europe? On the New Populism”, the authors focused on populist politics enjoying renewed success in Europe, above all in the former socialist countries.¹⁰ “Election results and

⁵ Krastev, 2006.

⁶ Rupnik, 2006.

⁷ Mesežnikov, 2007. Among the authors were Kevin Deegan-Krause, Jacek Kucharczyk, László Kéri, Kai-Olaf Lang, Robin Shepherd, Pál Tamás and Peter Učeň.

⁸ See Nekvapil and Staszkiwicz, 2007. Among the authors were Klaus von Beyme, Maria Marczevska-Rytko, Jiří Pehe, Soňa Szomolányi, Michael Shafir, Grigorij Mesežnikov, Paul Luif and Juraj Marušiak.

⁹ It links up more than 80 partner journals and just as many associated magazines and institutions from European countries.

¹⁰ *Illiberal Europe?...*, 2007. Among the authors were Ralf Dahrendorf, Jacek Kochanowicz, Gáspár Miklos Tamás, Klaus Bachmann, Ivan Krastev and Jacques Rupnik.

other political events in the region over the past two years indicated that the health of democracy in East-Central Europe was not necessarily assured,” stated the editors of the *Journal of Democracy* in their introduction to the collection of essays published also in the fall of 2007 under the title “Is East-Central Europe Backsliding?”¹¹ All in all, as Ivan Krastev wrote in his piece, populism is no longer merely a feature of certain parties or other political actors. It is the new condition of the politics in Europe.¹² And finally Freedom House, one of the most prestigious monitoring agencies, announced its annual study of democratic development in twenty-nine countries and territories from Central Europe to Eurasia for the year 2006 under the title “A Governance Crisis in Central Europe – Is the Democratic Consensus Eroding?” “Populism and antiliberal trends are on the rise,” stated the report.¹³

At that time, there were many explanations for this phenomenon (a sense of malaise after EU accession – “post accession hangovers¹⁴,” “reform fatigue¹⁵,” “anger over corruption¹⁶,” “narrowly focused technocratic reformers”).

Certainly, there are some differences between West Europe and East Central Europe. To a certain extent, the origins of populism in East Central Europe lay in agrarian societies (according to Joseph Held, peasant societies have presented an alternative to both socialist and capitalist development strategies). Authoritarian nationalisms, weaker liberal traditions, resistance to modernity, and rural-urban cleavages have played a role. In some parts of the region, the anti-elitist discourse was often coupled with anti-communism. High levels of unemployment, vulnerable open economies with many transition “losers”, prevalent corruption, an imperfect system of checks and balances, the insufficient performance of judiciary, and undeserved privileges of those rich who have accumulated their wealth in problematic ways have contributed to a massive dissatisfaction. Some of Eastern-Central European countries have a dark history of pervasive anti-Semitism; many have overwhelmingly negative attitudes to Roma. At the same time,

¹¹ *Is East-Central Europe Backsliding?* 2007. Béla Greskovits, Krzysztof Jasiewicz, Ivan Krastev, Alina Minhiu-Pippidi, Jacques Rupnik, Vladimir Tismaneanu and Martin Bútorá wrote the essays.

¹² Krastev, 2007.

¹³ See *Nations in Transit 2007...*, 2007.

¹⁴ Before May 2004, says political analyst Jiří Pehe, there was a general consensus on the importance of the EU membership, so populist temptations were put aside. However, after the entry into the EU, “some politicians felt that they could now address some popular frustrations that had been artificially suppressed; others began to misuse the membership status to promote populist policies.” See Pehe, 2006.

¹⁵ Larrabee, 2006.

¹⁶ Tupy, 2006.

16 Euroskepticism has been until recently blocked by expectations to profit from EU membership; anti-Americanism, however present, was calmed down by the non-presence of US military.

And yet, especially rightist populist groupings from East Central Europe shared similar leanings toward nationalism, xenophobia and suspicion of minorities, distrust of elites, resistance to deeper European integration, and emphasis on law and order with their partners in other European countries. In January 2007, twenty-three far-right or nationalist members of the European Parliament joined together to form a political group in the European Parliament known as Identity, Tradition, and Sovereignty (ITS). The members included parliamentarians from far-right parties in Austria, Belgium, United Kingdom, France, and Italy as well as Bulgaria and Romania.¹⁷ After Romanian ITS members found remarks made by ITS member Alessandra Mussolini insulting, the Greater Romania Party withdrew from the group, thus disqualifying it as an official group. Hence, in November 2007, it formally ceased to exist.¹⁸ But the attempts at coalescing have continued. In October 2009, at the 6th party congress of Jobbik, the Movement for a Better Hungary, held in Budapest, The Alliance of European National Movements was formed by a number of nationalist and far-right parties from several countries in Europe.¹⁹ In February 2012, the European Parliament surprised the public by its decision to award a grant to a pan-European coalition of 13 far-right parties.²⁰ Parliament officials stated that the far-right parties had “satisfied the general conditions for being eligible” to receive subsidies.²¹ However, in January 2013, the European Parliament’s major political groups launched a bid to stop EU party funding for far-right alliances. Five political groups have written to Martin Schulz, the Parliament’s president, asking him to arrange a stop in funding for the European Alliance for Freedom and the European Alliance of National Movements from Parliament’s budget. They believed the funding is not in compliance with the Union’s founding principles, as outlined in the Parliament’s rules of procedure.²² The leaders of the groups

¹⁷ *Far-right group formed in European Parliament*, 2007.

¹⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Identity,_Tradition,_Sovereignty

¹⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alliance_of_European_National_Movements

²⁰ The European Alliance of National Movements – EANM; the subsidy was €289,266.

²¹ *Taking a right turn...*, 2012.

²² One of the rules defines these as “the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law”. Opponents maintain that the two alliances – which include far-right parties such as the British National Party, France’s Front

of the European People's Party, the Socialists and Democrats, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, the Greens and the European United Left wrote to Schulz to press their case.²³

Sometimes it feels like *déjà vu*. Surely, it was barely a decade ago that a popular topic for researchers analyzing political transformations was the quality of democracy in societies recently freed from totalitarian or authoritarian rule. Mary Kaldor and Ivan Vejvoda, for example, cautioned that while CEE states largely met the formal criteria for democratic governance, their weak democratic cultures might constitute “a *sui generis* post-communist political model” of something not quite fully democratic.²⁴ Other scholars contrasted so-called electoral democracies with genuine liberal democracies. Both Larry Diamond and Fareed Zakaria noted that free and fair elections alone do not make a liberal democracy. Many elected governments during that period did not truly respect the rule of law, division of power, or protection of basic liberties. Thus, asserted Zakaria, “democracy is flourishing, constitutional liberalism is not.”²⁵

Ten years later, it seemed that the “old wine” of illiberal democracy was back in the “new bottle” of political populism.

Even if East Central Europe has not appeared on the verge of an authoritarian reversion²⁶, the gradual strengthening of the fundamental indicators of liberal democracy – such as the rule of law, protection of minority rights, opposition participation in governance, a free media able to influence public opinion, decentralized structures of governance, citizen participation in administering public affairs, and a pluralistic and diverse civil society with strong institutions – has certainly slowed down.

Another indirect reason²⁷ for the rise of populist patterns in politics has been the lack of informed public debate on some issues of social, political,

National and Hungary's Jobbik – are xenophobic and hence should no longer receive grants from the Parliament's fund for European parties. See Vogel, 2013.

²³ Hannes Swoboda, leader of the group of the center-left Socialists and Democrats in the Parliament, said that his group did not seek to ban any party. “But parties that oppose the existence of the EU and that repeatedly violate EU principles with xenophobic, racist and hateful statements should not be funded with European taxpayers' money.” *Ibid*.

²⁴ Kaldor and Vejvoda, 1997.

²⁵ Diamond, 1996; Zakaria, 1997.

²⁶ Zakaria's article struck a particularly strong nerve in the Slovak Republic, especially since the author classified that country—along with Sierra Leone, Ghana, Pakistan, and the Philippines—as one of illiberal democracies that “are routinely ignoring constitutional limits on their powers and depriving their citizens of basic rights and freedoms.” See Zakaria, 1997.

²⁷ The next three paragraphs draw upon Bútorá, 2007.

18 | and economic development. Owners and publishers of media argued that readers do not want stories on politics and governance. Provincialism has been widespread, banalization has become the rule, and the promotion of a political public sphere in a Habermasian vein has been an exception. These circumstances helped radical populists in a number of CEE countries seize their opportunity and attract the attention of the public.

Also, EU accession and its discontents have played a role. While pro-democratic leaders perceived the Union's entry requirements as a soil in which liberal constitutionalism could take root and generally considered reforms required by the EU to be justified and beneficial to their countries and not simply something to do because "Brussels wanted it," populists of all stripes and colors saw these requirements as the intrusion of the European reform agenda into the domestic arena and criticized reformers for "making concessions to Brussels," being insufficiently patriotic, and inadequately "protecting national interests." According to Ruby Gropas, the rise of populist radical right parties in Europe is linked to the expansion of the European Union. Together with Aleks Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart²⁸, she sees four reasons for it: the elitist character of the EU project; the democratic gap; the depoliticization of the EU; and the liberalization of the European economy.²⁹ In the absence of widespread public understanding of how the EU actually works, the media often ignored major EU decisions and focused instead on symbolic skirmishes. Populists usually preferred domestic protectionism, and the less people understood political and legislative nuances of the European agenda, the more they listened to populist arguments – protesting the supposed looming extinction of traditional Czech *utopenec* (pickled sausage and onion), Slovak *bryndza* (traditional sheep cheese), or Hungarian poppy seed products, and weighing in on disputes, like in Poland, over which alcoholic beverages could be sold as vodka.

One should not forget that virtually all Central and Eastern European countries have experienced the governing of various political elites. Parties of nearly all political orientations have been in power and almost all of them – including communists or radical nationalists – have at least once made it to parliament. Unfortunately, many political parties and politicians have discredited themselves over that same period. So the public – instead of perceiving the tremendous magnitude of problems caused by the communist

²⁸ Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2008.

²⁹ Gropas, 2011.

heritage and teething problems of democracy – tended to observe the negative aspects of political parties and their leaders. This is why political parties usually have commanded low respect in the eyes of the public; this is why the profession of a politician has not evoked positive feelings; and this is why many institutions of the democratic system have not enjoyed sufficient credibility, esteem and support.

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Several strategies for coping with populist trends and their protagonists have been suggested and applied, from isolating populists or suppressing them by legal means to decreasing their appeal by allowing them to participate in government. However, it has not prevented new political formations repeatedly to enter the political scene. And what should be emphasized, not all of them could be labeled as populist.

Indeed, at the end of the first decade and the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, new and/or alternative parties were still in fashion. “In the era of global television, Internet and social networks,” wrote political scientist Soňa Szomolányi in her introduction to the book “Visegrad Elections 2010: Domestic Impact and European Consequences”, a comprehensive overview of recent elections in Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland, “it is highly improbable that the formation of party systems in new democracies would follow the same pattern that was set during the fledgling stages of now established democracies.” Procedural stability of party systems in V-4 countries, she adds, “was undermined by the emergence of newly-founded parties”.³⁰ An even if she, together with other experts, does not see “weighty evidence that these displays of instability would jeopardize democracy or undermine the party system’s legitimacy,” the arrival of new actors has had controversial impact and has attracted the attention of policy makers, media, and general public.

3. THE VISEGRAD NEWCOMERS: NEW WIND IN THE SAILS?

Right at the beginning we would like to underline that – with the exception of the Jobbik party in Hungary, “a principled, conservative and radically patriotic

³⁰ Szomolányi, 2011.

20 | Christian party protecting Hungarian values and interests”, as the party wants to see itself, or “an extreme right”, “fascist”, or “racist” grouping as it was labeled by scholars, media and its political opponents³¹ – the remaining seven political entities analyzed in this book do not belong to the era of “illiberal populism” described above. Two of them can be characterized as “moderate conservative” parties (TOP 09 in the Czech Republic and Most-Híd in Slovakia). One is officially pro-conservative, but with eclectic and incoherent positions on various issues (Ordinary People and Independent Personalities – OLaNO). Two others are in principle liberal political parties professing liberal solutions (Freedom and Solidarity – SaS in Slovakia predominantly in the economic field, Palikot Movement in Poland mainly in the cultural and ethical fields). The next one is green-liberal (Politics Can Be Different – LMP in Hungary), and the last one (Public Affairs – VV) is a protest party without a clear ideological profile.³²

In his study “Populist political parties in the Czech Republic” Vlastimil Havlík identifies Public Affairs as a party that built its identity exclusively on its populist appeal.³³ Yet, even if this party, together with Ordinary People and Independent Personalities uses populist rhetoric, neither of them – similar to the remaining five political formations analyzed in this book – is the old type of the populist wave from the first decade of the 21st century.

One of the possible conceptualizations of these new parties was offered by Seán Hanley and Allan Sikk in their reflections upon emerging “centrist (or liberal) populists”.³⁴ “Notwithstanding the spectacular rise of far-right in Hungary,” they wrote, “recent elections in CEE states suggest that voters in the region are turning to new parties, which combine familiar anti-elite, anti-establishment populist rhetoric with mainstream pro-market policies, a liberal stance on social issues and calls for political reform.”³⁵ The authors believe that such “anti-establishment reform parties” – among which they include the party of Palikot in Poland, Public Affairs in the Czech Republic,

³¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jobbik>

³² See the chapter authored by Peter Spáč in this book.

³³ Even if the author considers the usage of the label “populist” problematic, in case of Public Affairs his conclusions are unequivocal: “By presenting itself as a pure alternative to all established political parties and as an advocate of the people’s interests but lacking any strong ideological attachment, the party can be classified as an example of an exclusively populist political party.” Havlík, 2012.

³⁴ Peter Učeň described centrist populism as “a new competitive and mobilization strategy in Slovak politics”. See Učeň, 2004.

³⁵ Hanley and Sikk, 2012.

Freedom and Solidarity in Slovakia, and, “with some qualifications”, also “Hungary’s Green-ish” Politics Can Be Different (LMP) – are “a growing and important phenomenon in Central and Eastern Europe and, perhaps Europe more generally”.³⁶ Florian Hartleb goes even further as he not only sees Europe “on the threshold of a new environment that is changing the face of political parties themselves”, a Europe with “new types of populist parties – virtual, ‘flash’, ‘couch’ or ‘one seat’ parties”, but also predicts that “all political parties have to accept the fact that democracies are developing from party democracies into ‘virtual audience democracies’ (...) As a consequence, parties are focused virtually exclusively on media communication.”³⁷

Sean Hanley and Allan Sikk analyzed elections in the region since 1998 and found that anti-establishment reform parties broke through electorally in three distinct sets of circumstances:

- When a relatively narrow core of established mainstream parties, flanked by strong radical outsiders, faces a deteriorating social situation characterized by rising corruption and/or rising unemployment.
- When established governing parties of the mainstream pro-market right fail to engage new or re-mobilized voters.
- When the left or market skeptic conservative-nationalists are in office and opposition mainstream pro-market right – and the party system generally – is weakly consolidated and/or fragmented.³⁸

However, before making any conclusions on the character of the parties presented in this book, let us focus on what the authors describe in their studies – the ideas, values and messages by which the newcomers have been addressing their constituencies, and the alternatives they have been offering.

Although some underlying reasons for their birth were similar (widespread dissatisfaction with politics; low confidence in politicians; frustration about corruption and clientelism in politics; disenchantment with democracy; profound economic crisis resulting in the decline of living standards accompanied by decreasing trust in the capacities of any government and

³⁶ “Although highly diverse, anti-establishment reform parties share a number of features: a common broad outlook; an inclination towards loose, flat structures using internet and social networking as key organizational tools; and an anti-political sheen involving the transformation of non-partisan public figures and celebrities into anti-establishment political crusaders: aristocrats, academics, artists, technocrats, bankers, businesspeople, bloggers, journalists and entertainers have all fronted successful AERPs.” Ibid.

³⁷ Hartleb, 2012.

³⁸ Hanley, 2011.

traditional parties to handle it, the inability of politicians of all colors to fulfill promises and to deliver; the loosening of traditional links between parties and classes, the wearing down of classical party affiliations; increased voter volatility; popular dissatisfaction with the ruling political elite's performance and the rise of anti-establishment moods within the population), the authors provide specific historical contexts for each country and analyze the sociopolitical circumstances related to the origins of the new parties, offering insightful narratives of new political structures.

In the case of Slovakia (Freedom and Solidarity – SaS, Bridge – Most-Híd and Ordinary People and Independent Personalities – OLaNO), Hungary (Movement for a Better Hungary – Jobbik and Politics Can Be Different – LMP) and the Czech Republic (Public Affairs – VV and TOP 09), the authors describe not only competition and conflicts with established or traditional parties, but also battles between the newcomers.

Sloboda a Solidarita (Freedom and Solidarity – SaS), the party that has passed the sustainability test by being elected into the Slovak parliament in two consecutive elections (2010 and 2012), profiled itself as a socially liberal and economically neo-liberal grouping. SaS wanted to be a political and socio-economic alternative, especially to the ruling party Smer-Social Democracy. SaS leaders, writes Grigorij Mesežnikov in his chapter, portrayed themselves as professionals and emphasized “that their party was the only truly new political formation that did not continue the legacy of any other party previously operating in Slovakia and was not a product of existing parties’ disintegration”.³⁹

The promise offered by the Most-Híd and its chairman Béla Bugár was clearly stated by its very name: Most-Híd means “bridge” (in Slovak and Hungarian, respectively). The Bridge wanted to become a party of Slovak-Hungarian cooperation. “In this respect, Béla Bugár’s decision to define his party as one of ‘Slovak-Hungarian collaboration’ – rather than as a new representative of Slovakia’s Hungarians – has proved wise, for it also appeals to many Slovaks fatigued by years of manufactured tensions who trust Bugár’s established image of civility and politeness.”⁴⁰ Thus the Most-Híd party, writes Grigorij Mesežnikov in his chapter, profiles itself as an alternative especially in the field of the minority and/or ethnic agenda: “Its leaders portrayed Most-Híd as a party of Slovak-Hungarian understanding that was open to all citizens of

³⁹ See Grigorij Mesežnikov’s chapter in this book.

⁴⁰ Sokolova, 2010.

Slovakia regardless of their ethnic origin. The party leadership was more or less evenly divided between people of ethnic Hungarian and Slovak origin; the party established its regional and district branches even in those regions of Slovakia where the overall share of ethnic Hungarians on the local population neared zero.”⁴¹

The most vocal example of a rejection of the whole party system was Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OBYČAJNÍ LUDIA a nezávislé osobnosti – OLaNO), the most recent newcomer entering the Slovak Parliament in the 2012 elections. Here, too, the name is indicative: a “fresh”, “new blood”, “new breed of politicians”, appealing in particular to the protest electorate and to disenchanted voters. One even hesitates to call it a party – because it is precisely the parties that have become a subject of OLaNO’s fierce attacks: “We don’t pretend to be a political party (...) We don’t intend to emulate political parties; we aim to mock them (...) Big parties are one like another; they are all thieves...” said its leader Igor Matovič. According to OLaNO, political nominations in government institutions and state-run enterprises should stop, as they are “the cancer of the political system”; all candidates running in elections should be subjected to lie detector tests; parliamentary privileges should be abolished; salaries of members of parliament, ministers, and civil servants should be frozen and the parliament should have only 79 members instead of 150 (Slovakia has 79 districts); losses caused by anti-constitutional laws should be covered directly by those who initiated them; and the third sector and civil society’s representatives should be involved in government’s control organs.

The OLaNO did not present itself as a coherent programmatic alternative. In fact, it was hardly possible: how could it unite in a systematic and consistent way environmental activists, Christian conservatives and people professing prevalingly liberal views? How would it build a common firm value platform in a grouping that from the very beginning has not had a clear ideological profile and whose representatives emphasized diversity of opinions within the movement, considering it a great asset? Thus the only aspect in which OLaNO represented a true alternative, says Mesežnikov, was the lack of organizational structure and continuous reluctance to change into a standard political party. The new member of the Parliament has done what it promised: to profile itself as an antipode to any party, as an “anti-party” attacking other political parties as such, refusing to evolve into a political party, declining

⁴¹ See Grigorij Mesežnikov’s chapter in this book.

to build its own organizational structures or membership base.⁴² According to Olga Gyárfášová and Zora Bútorová, the OLaNO fully complies with all of the characteristics of new alternative parties: “In terms of the electorate’s structure, the party enjoys above-average support among younger, mobile and protest voters. During the mobilization phase it portrayed itself as a new actor that comes from the outside of the established political elite. Novelty seems to work as a winning formula.”⁴³

Moreover, they continue, OLaNO fits into two out of three categories of newly-emerging political parties that were identified by Paul Lucardie: it is perceived as a “purifier” that has embarked on combating rampant corruption and political party clientelism, and also as a “prolocutor” that represents the interests of voters neglected by established parties (i.e. those of ordinary citizens).⁴⁴

While disillusionment served as an organizing force, anti-establishment attitudes were key to the expansion of Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom (Movement for a Better Hungary), write András Bíró Nagy – Dániel Róna⁴⁵ in their intriguing description of the secret behind the rise of the Hungarian radical right. They show how Jobbik was able gradually to apply “a more diverse rhetoric” and how besides “the standard menu” consisting of the main anti-establishment themes (peppered with anti-communism and anti-Semitism), anti-globalist, nationalist and anti-Roma messages were added to the main anti-establishment themes. Anti-Roma sentiments were combined with pro-order attitudes, like the titles of Jobbik leader’s homepage suggest – “Program of Order, Welfare and Justice”; “Jobbik does something against Roma-terror” – and with the party’s rhetoric characterized by expressions that refer to the alleged tendency of Roma to breed children for more social benefits. “The vast majority of Jobbik voters agree with the statement: ‘The tendency to commit crimes is in the blood of the Roma’, thus the Roma break the law because of their ethnicity, and not because of their social status. Consequently, ‘Gypsy crime’ has a different meaning in a radical voter’s mind and in the official party manifestos.”

Also, the way Jobbik handled corruption issues has appeared attractive for the voters. In Jobbik’s eyes (in unison with many protest parties throughout the whole Europe), all political parties bear responsibility for the wrongdoings after the regime change, “not only the Socialists and the Liberals but the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ See the chapter authored by Olga Gyárfášová and Zora Bútorová in this book.

⁴⁴ See Lucardie, 2000.

⁴⁵ See the chapter authored by András Bíró Nagy and Dániel Róna in this book.

former governing party Fidesz as well. ‘20 years for the 20 years’ was the Jobbik slogan on many placards, suggesting that the leading politicians of both major parties should spend 20 years in prison for the 20 years of ‘politician crime’ they committed.”⁴⁶

The core of the “alternative” offered by Jobbik was the radical rightist ideology of a identitary populist party: it was known for “demands for the ‘lost’ Hungarian territory, allocated to neighboring countries in the post-World War I settlement; overt racism and violence against Roma, gays and foreigners; and an associated paramilitary arm that carried out street demonstrations in uniform and employed insignia and a salute reminiscent of the Arrow Cross, the Hungarian fascist movement of the 1930s and ‘40s.”⁴⁷ Jobbik describes itself as a “radically patriotic Christian party” – but in the eyes of many it is a “fascist,” “Neo-Nazi,” “racist,” and “homophobic” grouping. One of its MP called for the creation of a list of Hungary’s Jews, especially those in government, “who represent a certain national security risk.” For the protagonists of “Hungary’s Constitutional Revolution”, the Fidesz Party, Jobbik has been, at least as of yet, an unacceptable partner: Zsigmond Perenyi, Fidesz’s international secretary, evaluated Jobbik as a “Nazi, xenophobe, and extremist right party” which after the economic crisis swelled with support in areas with large Roma populations, where poor, uneducated Hungarians were susceptible to simplistic explanations blaming the Roma for the country’s plight.”⁴⁸ Jobbik continued with this type of activities also after it entered into the Hungarian Parliament. In February 2013, Jobbik presented an initiative for a referendum on depriving serious offenders and their family members of welfare benefits. “The measure would affect the families of under-18 offenders who are found guilty of murder, robbery, blackmailing or other serious crimes. The families concerned would be for three years deprived of certain type of welfare benefits, such as pay supplement for low earners and financial aid.” Jobbik’s deputy leader Tamas Sneider blamed the ‘extreme liberal policies’ of the past 23 years for the “endless tolerance towards criminals”.⁴⁹

In the case of another Hungarian party, Politics Can Be Different (Lehet Más a Politika – LMP), the name, too, speaks for itself. Although its basic message was based on anti-establishment creed, at the same time the party (which has grown from the NGO’s environment embracing green, social, and human rights civic organizations) pursued positive goals too: to activate civil

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Esbenshade, 2011.

⁴⁸ Wheeler, 2013.

⁴⁹ *Jobbik...*, 2013.

society against the corrupt and incapable political elite, to improve radically Hungarian democracy and renew Hungarian politics. LMP leaders have perceived domestic politics as dominated by a left-right conflict; Socialists occupied the left space, and anti-communist Fidesz and a far-right party Jobbik the opposite side of the spectrum. “This senseless political competition about simplifying interpretations of history strongly contributed to the loss of moral integrity that characterizes the last 20 years of Hungarian politics. Parties divided the society, and each camp became indulgent with the mistakes and the immoral actions of its own party, just to avoid the possibility that the other party would take more power.”⁵⁰ LMP has distanced itself from the historical debate and has campaigned for transparency in political life, against corruption and discrimination, for freedom of the press, for social inclusion, justice, sustainability and for a participatory and transparent democracy”.⁵¹

As the author of the analysis of LMP’s origin and performance in this book, Zoltán Pogátsa, shows, “in terms of symbolic positions, LMP has managed to obtain the status of a third pole” (and from this perspective, it has presented an alternative): “Hungarian politics has managed to overcome its long term ‘entrenched’ twofold division by becoming a political spectrum where any two of the four parties have some common ground with each other, but no two pairs are natural allies for an easy coalition”.⁵² The author also points at the next challenge for the LMP, namely its position towards the newly established opposition umbrella organization chaired by the former Prime Minister Gordon Bajnai called Together 2014.⁵³ On the one hand, he writes, the LMP can join Bajnai’s Together 2014 “olive coalition”, thereby contributing to the overthrow of the rule of Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz – “on the other hand, by doing it they are very likely to lose most of their voting base”.⁵⁴

Czech TOP 09 was founded as a moderate conservative party with a liberal economic view. Its name is an acronym for the words Tradition – Responsibility – Prosperity (Tradice – Odpovědnost – Prosperita). Its political program focused on deepening the rule of law and democracy, pursuing responsible policies with sound public finances, and building a stable economy based on a free market and non-discrimination. In their overview of professed values

⁵⁰ De Riquer, 2012.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² See the chapter authored by Zoltán Pogátsa in this book.

⁵³ Saltman, 2012.

⁵⁴ See the chapter authored by Zoltán Pogátsa in this book.

they promised to speak openly about problems and to suggest solutions, not to seek popularity at all costs, especially not for unrealistic election promises that could cause citizens' dissatisfaction with politics. They also emphasized the importance of strong municipalities, free civil society and the involvement of nongovernmental organizations in public debate. Last but not least, they underlined the language of their political argumentation: an opponent should not be perceived as an enemy, rather as a partner. "There can never be enough smiling. Not to smile at somebody all day long is a crime," says the last sentence of the abridged version of their program bases and principles.⁵⁵ The campaign tried to be positive and non-aggressive, the messages were simple, clear and well communicated. The problematic figure of one of its founding politicians (Finance Minister Miroslav Kalousek) was overshadowed by the popular leader of TOP 09 Karel Schwarzenberg, whose big X-ray photo on billboards, with a subtitle "Transparent Chairman", symbolized a resolute fight against corruption.⁵⁶ Indeed, in the words of Peter Spáč, the author of the chapter dealing with both newcomers on the Czech political scene, TOP 09 and Věci veřejné (Public Affairs – VV), "the party's greatest asset came with the arrival of Karel Schwarzenberg, a popular aristocrat who has already been a senator and minister of foreign affairs: his personality played a central role in TOP 09's campaign for the 2010 election".⁵⁷ It is true that the party has not offered any special alternative promises or policies (perhaps except the emphasis on necessity of unpopular austerity measures) – the very personality of its leader has presented a certain alternative, especially for the disappointed voters on the right side of political spectrum.⁵⁸

The contrast with the second new arrival, Public Affairs (VV), could not be starker. Even if some politicians of this party were already involved in politics, namely the Prague local self-government, the party as a whole has chosen a critical approach towards the political establishment per se. The party did not want to accept a clear ideological profile, and instead of claiming to be left, liberal or right, its protagonist inclined to be linked with "pragmatic approach to issues". Before the 2010 election, shows Spáč, the party's representatives were rather ambiguous and defined VV as a party with "a centrist ideology" and "right solutions" – in other words, "as a mostly non-

⁵⁵ <http://en.top09.cz/policy/programme-bases-and-principles/>

⁵⁶ Hejtmánek, 2013.

⁵⁷ See the chapter authored by Peter Spáč in this book.

⁵⁸ This was reflected in internet discussion in the Czech Republic. A telling illustration of positive responses is a short comment in the bloggosphere: *Brilantní projev Karla Schwarzenberga*, 2009.

ideological and protest party with a strong populist appeal”.⁵⁹ In another conceptualization distinguishing between two basic types of populist political parties, “identitary” and “partially populist” parties, the authors placed the VV into the second group.⁶⁰ The language corresponded to this orientation: the party demanded more direct democracy, fight against corruption, and a generational change in politics, removing “criminals” from politics”. The leader of the party, former popular TV investigative journalist Radek John, quickly became one of the most popular politicians in the country and the Public Affairs launched its election campaign outside the seat of the Czech Government Office, with a symbolic shot from a cannon against the Government Office, “a hatchery of political dinosaurs”.⁶¹ The repeated mantra of the party has asserted: people are disgusted by political veterans, and the Public Affairs as the only party that has not been involved in any corruption is an alternative.⁶²

Finally, in their insightful study on “the Left Messiah” – as Janusz Palikot, a philosophy student turned entrepreneur, the leader of “anti-political-establishment-party” Palikot’s Movement,⁶³ used to call himself – Marta Gałązka and Marcin Waszak explain how and why this extraordinary and provocative political figure made it into mainstream politics in Poland.⁶⁴ From the early stages of his career, he expressed his reluctance towards a political hegemony of just a few parties. He was very sharp, controversial and even vulgar in his statements: he did not hesitate to call president Lech Kaczyński an alcoholic or a boor and to compare Prime Minister Jarosław Kaczyński to Hitler and Stalin.

Worthy of public attention was the fact that while the Palikot’s Movement was built as a completely new formation, without any previously existing political structures, it was able to secure the presence of various personalities at events organized by the Movement. Among the visitors were left-wing or progressive politicians, intellectuals, feminists, representatives of sexual

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Havlík and Pinková, 2012.

⁶¹ He named former Prime Ministers Stanislav Gross, Jiří Paroubek (both Social Democrats) and Mirek Topolánek (Civic Democrats) as examples. See *New Czech centrist party...*, 2010.

⁶² Ironically enough, it was precisely this party that has been hit by a big corruption scandal. Shortly after the election, the media revealed that the Public Affairs was “a political project of the private security agency ABL, intended at helping it gain public procurement orders”. See Groszkowski, 2011.

⁶³ His party was labeled as “libertarian”, “liberal”, “anti-clerical”, anti-church”, “populist”, “left-wing”, “social-liberal”, “pro-gay” etc.

⁶⁴ See the chapter authored by Marta Gałązka and Marcin Waszak in this book.

minorities and followers of the secular state. During the first presentation of Palikot's platform, fifteen demands were announced in the declaration called "Modern Poland": "We rise up like grassroots, as a Movement of people who want to reclaim our state. We have risen up to carry out a modern change."

The Palikot's Movement, continue the authors, wanted to create its identity through a critical attitude toward the position of the Catholic Church in Poland. The separation of church and state became one of Palikot's key slogans. The Movement's platform assumes that religion should be removed step by step from public institutions, which means the end of religion lessons in schools, the elimination of all religious symbols in public buildings and the prohibition for clergy to take part in official public ceremonies. The party protested against the presence of the cross in public areas, the restrictive abortion act and the lack of sexual education in schools.⁶⁵

Some authors have also attributed Palikot's success to the fact that he spoke the language attractive for a part of Polish youth. Besides being vehemently anti-clerical, the party favored legalizing soft drugs, abortion on demand and gay civil unions: "not liking any of the other alternatives", Poland's young voters casted their ballots for him.⁶⁶ For believers in a secular Poland, he has brought a chance "to build a modern society."⁶⁷

The anti-establishment character of the movement was obvious in other proposals promoted by its members: to reduce the number of Sejm members and to liquidate the Senate; to decrease the number of councilors and middle level officials of local government; and to remove "eternal politicians" ("political dinosaurs" as Palikot used to call them) by introducing term limit of holding an office. They also called for a transparent government responsive to citizens' needs and for a free access to public documents.

⁶⁵ "Moreover, as Palikot notices, political elites are afraid of Church and therefore vote in favor of oppressive laws, threatening individual freedom of choice. The parliament's failure to legalize civil unions and resistance to financing in-vitro fertilization from the public budget are indicated as illustrations of dependence of the political establishment on religious power." See the chapter authored by Marta Gałazka and Marcin Waszak in this book.

⁶⁶ Kureth, 2011.

⁶⁷ "Social progress in Poland has been too slow and politicians aren't interested in supporting civic development," said Paulina Wawrzyńczyk, a feminist and political activist who ran on Palikot's ticket. "The ruling party has been about avoiding solving conflicts and has mostly invested in infrastructure, which is not enough." For her, Palikot has gathered together people from different fields and created a political movement without experienced politicians: "This has never happened before. For the first time there are many women, young people and entrepreneurs on the lists." Feminists and LGBTQ activists disappointed by the established left party have also supported Palikot's Movement. See Harper, 2011.

30 | The authors are convinced that the Palikot's Movement can be considered as an alternative party – in terms of its “shaker” function – activities that redefine the political agenda. According to one of the foreign observers, Palikot's movement was not only “a revolutionary innovation for Catholic Poland”, offering an alternative to right parties which the political left was unable to do, but it presented a “new force” changing the political landscape. It has challenged “a typical European phenomenon” when two parties, replacing each other in power with a certain frequency, actually confirm the absence of a real alternative”.⁶⁸ According to Gavin Rae, by combining cultural liberalism with economic liberal policies, “the Palikot Movement represents “a new strand in Polish politics: liberal populism. Previously the economic populism of the right had been combined with cultural conservatism.”⁶⁹

Marta Gałazka and Marcin Waszak also remind readers that in spite of the popularity of Janusz Palikot he has remained a politician who does not inspire common confidence.⁷⁰ At the beginning of 2013, Palikot announced plans to establish a new movement, the Plus Europe (*Europa Plus*), addressed to followers of closer European integration and the Polish euro adoption.⁷¹

4. ALTERNATIVE PARTIES: LAND OF UNLIMITED OPPORTUNITIES

The activities of the parties described above, their successes and failures, have not taken place in a vacuum. Some of the experiences from other countries where the rise of new or revived political actors has been in place might be relevant for the evaluation of developments in Eastern Central Europe – both

⁶⁸ And even if the new actors do not offer a clear value orientation and their policies might be incoherent and/or controversial, more attractive, especially for the younger electorate, is their call for a change in the organization of political life, their challenge of the adequacy of current political mechanisms. “Taking into account that new forces are mainly supported by the youth that actively assert itself on the European streets” and taking into consideration the economic hardships, “one can hardly expect the popularity of new political alliances to fade away fast”. See Andreev, 2012.

⁶⁹ Rae, 2011.

⁷⁰ “His media image as a political clown and eccentric millionaire who deals with problems like cannabis smoking hinders his ability to convince more Poles. Moreover, his formation has difficulties to define itself, balancing between left-wing and liberal demands, especially in the economic sphere. Potential voters could be confused by the many faces of the party emphasizing individual freedom and using a mix of anti-clerical, populist, socialist, and anti-nationalist slogans.” See the chapter authored by Marta Gałazka and Marcin Waszak in this book.

⁷¹ Ibid.

for putting attempts at alternative politics into a broader context as well as for comparing the trends and estimating prospects for the future.

Well known and closely followed has been the example of Greece. The explosive situation caused by a deep economic recession, budget cuts, the rapid increase of unemployment and the decrease of living standards for the middle class opened the window for radical forces both on the right and the left. The neo-fascist Golden Dawn party, campaigning on an anti-immigration platform (“clean up Greece of the stench!”) that was spread both by social media networks and big public gatherings, festivals and marches, received seven percent of the vote in the 2012 elections. The party rejects the neo-Nazi and extremists label: we are nationalists, we are patriots, say its leaders.⁷² And while the “vigilante, truculent and anti-establishment features of Golden Dawn offer a seductive alternative to the radical left or anarchist movements that have traditionally appealed to Greece’s teenagers”, the radical left embodied in the SYRIZA party has also profiled itself as an alternative. “We need to become more militant, more credible and more effective,” say its leader Alexis Tsipras. “We are looking at a radical transformation of the political system.”⁷³

British historian Mark Mazower, the author of books and studies on the modern history of the Balkan peninsula and Greece, sees the causes of the rise of the far-right above all “in the extreme delegitimation of the entire political class through the crisis and the consequent discrediting of the achievements of the post-junta regime change”⁷⁴ – and that is the reason why seemingly distant Greece might be relevant for the Eastern-Central European region. We know from repeated surveys that most of the inhabitants of these countries are dissatisfied with the state of democracy, with their living conditions and with the direction their societies are heading. However, this frustration has not been translated into the birth of robust anti-system parties that would contest the core of the current political design. Yet, persisting disillusionment sometimes tends to lead to the rejection of the whole era after the fall of communism, of socio-political and economic transformation per se – and this is a fertile soil for extremist alternatives.

⁷² “We are winning the hearts and minds of the people, because we say it as it is,” Golden Dawn spokesman Ilias Kassidiaris told supporters. “These politicians who have ruled us for decades are crooks. They have betrayed our national interests.” At a Golden Dawn youth festival, the party’s leader thundered to thousands of supporters: “They’ve called us thugs, fascists, racists but we answered: we are the future, you are the past. We are the Greece that is coming.” See Moon, 2013.

⁷³ Galiatsatos, 2013.

⁷⁴ Maglinis, 2013.

The fact that the rejection of a certain type of politics, of the corrupt “political caste” might result in a political earthquake has been proven by the unexpectedly strong showings of Beppe Grillo’s Five Star Movement in the recent February 2013 Italian election. The comedian turned political activist has shaken up Italian politics. “Italy’s political system is on the brink of dramatic pulverization”; “Beppe Grillo is changing politics”; “Clown prince takes Italian election by storm”; “The end of an era”; “The slow death of traditional party politics in Italy”; “Grillo: New Italian movement will expand to ‘all democracies’”; “Grillo predicts collapse in six months”; “Italians select a monster” – these are just some of the headlines in newspapers.

Indeed, some of his personal characteristics made him an attractive rising star for many – his unscrupulously provocative manners, fierce rhetoric full of invectives against the traditional parties (his was the only party rejecting state financing), his “Tsunami Tour” around the country, his communication skills, his refusal to deal with Italian media and usage of on-line media and social networks (over 1 million supporters on Facebook, most popular political blog in Italy), his ability to combine on-line and off-line activities, like Beppe Grillo meet-up groups, his support for direct democracy, and his “televisual theatricality” during his performances.

At the same time, he has generated a great deal of controversy. Many people disagreed with his statements like “This world – the Western world – has failed. We must have a plan B. We’re the plan B”. The others were dissatisfied with his autocratic style of leadership and with the political inexperience of his followers who have become the members of the Parliament without any knowledge about how politics works. They were perplexed “to hear the new Grillini MPs telling reporters that they have no idea how the president is elected and they don’t know where the senate is located”. One of the commentators expressed his disappointments in a telling summary: “The winner of the election in Italy this week was a mythical beast called ‘Grillosconi’. That is bad news for Italy, for the single European currency, the euro and even for the future of the European Union. Not that ‘Grillosconi’ will ever form a coherent government in Italy. The problem is that he – or rather, they – will prevent anybody else from doing that, too. While the older part of the beast is Silvio Berlusconi, the newer one is Beppe Grillo. His public appearances are angry, foul-mouthed, arm-waving rants against the whole system. ‘We want to destroy everything,’ Grillo said in a recent interview with the BBC. We have heard this sort of talk in Europe before, always from people who turned out to be totalitarians of some sort, whether Communist

or fascist. It should not be necessary for Italy to go through all that again.”⁷⁵ The result is political paralysis: no party or group of parties is able to form a stable government, and there will probably be another election within a year, concludes the author.

According to Jamie Bartlett, director of the Centre for Analysis of Social Media based at Demos think-tank in London, many of the concerns and convictions of Grillo’s supporters are shared by citizens across Europe where levels of trust in institutions is falling. The implications of Grillo’s success extend far beyond Italy: “I suspect there are plenty of other European countries where another Grillo might explode onto the scene and cause a similar political tremor.”⁷⁶

However, there are also dissenting voices that see Grillo’s contribution to the general face of politics. Charles Grant and Simon Tilford from the Centre for European Reform think Grillo and those who voted for them had a point. His success signals a rejection of the austerity policies that the former Prime Minister Mario Monti and Eurozone leaders prescribed for Italy. The scholars believe austerity measures have discredited the very reforms that are needed to boost the performance of the Italian economy. “Of course, austerity alone is not responsible; but the tightening depressed an already fragile Italian economy and made it harder to consolidate the public finances. However, if the Commission, the ECB and the German government respond to the election by saying, to quote Margaret Thatcher, ‘there is no alternative’, they will be laying the foundations for serious crises. Such an inflexible response would almost certainly undermine Italy’s already weakened mainstream and pro-EU political forces. And that, in turn, would almost certainly preclude the construction of an Italian government that was willing and able to push through structural reforms and fiscal consolidation. Politicians and voters in other southern European countries would take note.”⁷⁷

Grillo’s new party has emerged in politics in a time when crisis in Italy is not only objectively recorded in numbers, but also subjectively perceived by many. Dario Fo, an intellectual, playwright and actor, the Nobel Prize Laureate for Literature in 1997, feels that “what had taken centuries to create in Italy was degraded in a very short time”. Hope and trust “have been destroyed as well as the value of laws, the community, justice... If there isn’t a system which is

⁷⁵ Dyer, 2013.

⁷⁶ Bartlett, 2013.

⁷⁷ Italy’s voters have made it harder for Europe’s leaders to manage the euro crisis - but, the authors conclude, “Italians may have done Europe a service by shaking those leaders out of their complacency”. See Grant and Tilford, 2013.

34 | strong, solid, and based primarily on culture and knowledge, which instills in the collective consciousness equality, freedom and justice, then everything collapses.”⁷⁸

A different stream of “alternative politics” comes from Austria. As if he heard the call expressed by one of the Austrian newspaper (title story in *Salzburger Nachrichten* in March 2012 as the paper’s response to permanent corruption scandals in the established parties: “New parties are needed for the country”)⁷⁹, a newcomer has arrived on the political scene of Austria. Frank Stronach, a successful billionaire who built a global auto parts empire has returned home from Canada. And he promises nothing less than a “revolution” to change Austria. “One might not expect a country with a high quality of life, stable public finances and the lowest unemployment rate in the EU to be overburdened with protest parties”, writes a commentator in *Financial Times*. “However, with the arrival of Team Stronach on the political scene, Austria now has three.”⁸⁰

Team Stronach and its founder do not paint a rosy picture of their homeland. They believe Austria is “over-governed, over-regulated and over-bureaucratized”; the country has “gigantic debt”; its political system “is pseudo-democratic and has become rife with cronyism”; government decisions “are driven primarily by political rather than economic reasoning”; “various special interest groups ranging from big business and unions to large professional chambers influence who gets chosen to be on party lists”, and through this process, “the political status quo is maintained from election to election”; there is a “growing gap between the wealthy and the average working persons” which must be reduced by encouraging “companies to give employees a share of the profits” – in another words, the whole system is “in dire need of reform”.

To cope with “lack of citizen involvement”, people need to have a voice: new and innovative solutions should be found. The “revolution” should occur “outside the realm of traditional party politics”, using the mechanisms of direct democracy, like the creation of a new Chamber of Citizen Representatives to bring forward fresh ideas and solutions to the problems confronting the country. “These new Citizen Representatives would be much more inclined to place the country’s socio-economic welfare and long-term national interests

⁷⁸ *Dario Fo...*, 2013.

⁷⁹ Quotation comes from Florian Hartleb (Hartleb, 2012).

⁸⁰ Shotton, 2012.

ahead of political considerations or partisan views since they would not be beholden to any political party.”

Stronach’s appeal, say the experts, reflects the frustration of the Austrian electorate with “politics as usual”, with string of scandals and the paralysis of the present coalition. “People are longing for political movements,” political analyst Thomas Hofer believes. Lothar Höbelt, professor of modern history at Vienna University, reminds that Stronach has a lot of links with local politicians. “You can’t really say he is an outsider, but he behaves like one.” How long this otherness will retain its allure is an open question, adds Höbelt. “It’s a midterm feeling: we don’t like the current government, so we say we will vote for Stronach to send them a message. In general elections, when people are actually voting for a government, these effects tend to be smaller.”⁸¹ According to Anton Pelinka, professor of political science at the Central European University in Budapest, there is another element of Stronach’s attractiveness which may prove more enduring: the billionaire has made abundantly clear his hostility towards the euro and the European Stability Mechanism. Thus Stronach could pick up votes “from people who are hostile to the euro”, but “disgusted by the anti-foreigner sentiment” in the Austrian Freedom party (FPÖ), says Pelinka.

General elections in Austria are scheduled for September 2013. Currently, despite frequent media coverage for Team Stronach, they remain below the 11 percent rating scored when the party was formed in September 2012. In two Austrian state elections held in March 2013, “Stronach’s child” won 11.3 per cent of the vote in the state of Carinthia and around 9.7 percent in Lower Austria.⁸²

For the Baltic countries, the founding and demise of new parties that were able to play an influential, role in domestic politics, has been a characteristic feature of politics for more than a decade. In his study on the rise and strong electoral showings of new significant political groupings, namely the New Union-Social Liberals in Lithuania (after the 2000 elections they became a member of the governing coalition), the New Era Party in Latvia (after the 2002 elections its leader assumed the position of the Prime Minister), and Res Publica party in Estonia (after the 2003 elections its chairman also became the Prime Minister), Allen Sikk saw all three parties as “anti-establishment

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Vanderklippe, 2013.

36 reformers”.⁸³ And even if their careers as autonomous political subjects did not last very long (they merged with other political subjects), for a certain period of time they played the role of formative pro-reform forces. This analysis was indirectly supported by the research report on recent elections held in the Baltic region (in the period of 2008 – 2011) and the incidence of populism: while the authors stressed that the Baltic countries should not be assessed as a homogeneous block in terms of populism (“there is no Baltic populism, rather Lithuanian populism and Estonian-Latvian populism”), they concluded that “in all three Baltic states, populism is stronger in ‘policy’ dimension rather than in ‘identity construction’ dimension”.⁸⁴ They also noticed “a peculiar situation”: though the elections took place under the pressure of deep economic crisis that struck the Baltic region most severely – i.e. in circumstances when populism commonly surges, accumulating public dissatisfaction – in all three Baltic states, “rather non-populist parties willing to install austerity measures (or having done so previously and promising to continue)” succeeded.⁸⁵ Similarities between Baltic “state of affairs” and the Czech party TOP 09 stressing financial discipline and inevitable austerity measures of the state are evident.

The developments in Slovenia are worth of mentioning, too. In 2011 – 2013, this country has experienced several unprecedented political events. In December 2011, for the first time since becoming an independent state, early parliamentary elections were held, bringing a surprising victory for a brand new party Positive Slovenia.⁸⁶ Because the party did not win enough votes to form a government, it was left out of the negotiations and did not become a member of the ruling coalition. The center-right cabinet was created, chaired by the previous Prime Minister from the Slovenian Democratic Party Janez Janša.

But it did not rule for long. Soon, Janša’s government got into turmoil, paralyzed by nationwide strikes and protests not only against the bad economic situation, austerity measures and cost-cutting⁸⁷, but also against the

⁸³ Sikk, 2004.

⁸⁴ Jakobson, Balcerė, Loone, Nurk, Tõnis and Zakeviciute, 2012.

⁸⁵ “Perhaps this could be explained by political culture that demonstrates the dominance of rational values (particularly in Estonia and Latvia) over traditional ones according to World Values Survey, but also the dominance of right-wing parties over social democratic forces in Estonia and Latvia. Hence, there was not much alternative to the austerity measures that could have been envisioned.” Ibid.

⁸⁶ Vogel, 2011.

⁸⁷ “The Jansa cabinet, which was formed in February 2012, made an attempt to consolidate public finances by cutting social benefits and wages in the public sector. Its achievements included carrying through the long-delayed pension system reform and the preparation

“corrupt elite”.⁸⁸ Janša, who was already under investigation on corruption charges stemming from a multimillion defense contract from the previous era, was accused of violation of the integrity law by failing to properly account for his assets. In February 2013, three of the five members of the governing coalition (Civic List, Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia, and Slovenian National Party) left, and after a no confidence vote in the National Assembly, Janša’s government was ousted.⁸⁹

In fact, three consecutive governments of Slovenia were defeated after corruption charges. In 2008, the Social Democratic government led by Borut Pahor took office, defeating Janša’s governing Slovenian Democrats who were rocked by a bribery scandal. But after three years, Borut Pahor’s cabinet lost a confidence vote in parliament after several ministers resigned over corruption scandals, and Janez Janša returned.⁹⁰

Simultaneously with the Janša’s dismissal in February 2013, the parliament approved Alenka Bratušek, interim head of Positive Slovenia party as the first female Prime Minister in Slovenia’s history. A 42-year-old financial expert appeared on the political scene only very recently. In the past decade, she worked in the public administration; however, she entered politics only in December 2011 when she was elected into the Parliament.⁹¹ Bratušek was appointed due to her position of interim chairwoman of her party, the largest center-left opposition force. She assumed this post only in mid-January 2013 after Positive Slovenia temporarily suspended its leader Zoran Jankovič, a prominent businessman, the former head of the country’s largest retailer and the mayor of Slovenia’s capital Ljubljana, who created the party only two months before the elections. The new formation gained significant public support even before it was officially chartered, placing first or among the top

of an amendment to the labour code. These reforms were appreciated by employers and international institutions, but they were also disapproved of by the trade unions, which are strong in Slovenia. The negative public sentiments caused by the budget cuts were further augmented by large-scale corruption scandals.” See Groszkowski, 2013.

⁸⁸ “The whole political elite is corrupt, we need new politicians, we need a new election,” said Peter Razpet, a retired butcher on the rally.” See Novak, 2013.

⁸⁹ “As if the dire economic conditions would not suffice, accounts of greed, corruption and defiance among the political and economic elites hit the headlines,” writes Marko Bucik. “With few exceptions, no court case had been brought to a successful conclusion, creating the impression that impunity reigns. Yet despite shameless embezzlement of public funds for private profit, organized public resistance was rare. Slovenians remained largely passive bystanders. Only when one ventured into bars and student clubs, the feeling that something had been rotten all along was palpable.” See Bucik, 2013.

⁹⁰ In December 2012, Borut Pahor was elected the President of Slovenia.

⁹¹ *Alenka Bratušek...*, 2013.

three in the polls.⁹² However, as a result of the 2013 allegations made by the official Commission for the Prevention of Corruption, Jankovič appeared under criminal investigation for corruption linked to the construction of a new sports stadium.⁹³

“What was initially a protest targeting the corrupt behavior of individuals became a vast mobilization denouncing politics-as-usual,” journalist Marko Bucik noted. “Isolated cries for cleaning up politics turned into a chorus seeking more fundamental systemic changes, as well as greater social justice in the face of declining prosperity for many and the blatant opportunism of the few.” The author underlines that “the sheer number of unresolved corruption cases and scale of mismanagement of state funds, shows that the current institutional setup fails to ensure accountability. Slovenians have for many years believed that they live in a well-functioning modern state: this has proven not to be the case. State institutions have underperformed and expecting that they will soon do better, is wishful thinking. A stronger civic engagement is needed through which the population will increase their scrutiny of those holding public offices.”⁹⁴

If the originally perhaps most promising and economically well developed country of the post-communist block experiences such problems, then it is not surprising that new fighters, new political parties arise, determined to fix it, even if they, too, are often burdened by incidents of corruptive behavior committed in the past.

5. RECENT RE-DRAWINGS OF THE POLITICAL MAP

As one could expect, several changes haven taken place since the arrival of the new political forces in parliaments and/or governments after their successes in the 2110 – 2012 elections. Though these alterations document a certain level of volatility in this part of the Eastern Central Europe, they have not caused any special turmoil or chaos.

In Slovakia, all three analyzed parties are still present in their original shape. Meanwhile, due to the continuing atomization on the right side of the political

⁹² *Positive Slovenia*. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Positive_Slovenia

⁹³ *Police Raid ...*, 2012.

⁹⁴ Bucik, 2013.

spectrum, a new competitor has emerged – the New Majority Party founded by Daniel Lipšic.⁹⁵

In the Czech Republic, during the year 2012, the charm of the Public Affairs (VV) party evaporated, public support went down, and some of the highest VV officials were accused of corruption.⁹⁶ An internal conflict led to the party's exit from the government: however, while the core of the party went into opposition, its fragment called Liberal Democrats (LIDEM) remained in the government. In the polls conducted in winter 2012-2013, neither the opposition VV nor the government LIDEM had a chance of entering the parliament in elections scheduled for Spring 2014. Meanwhile, the prospects to enter the Chamber of Deputies for the extra-parliamentary Party of Citizens' Rights of Miloš Zeman (SPOZ), which has successfully supported its idol Miloš Zeman in the presidential race in January 2013, have increased. Also, former President Václav Klaus openly declared his intention not to fully withdraw from Czech politics – even if it has not materialized yet in a creation of a political formation. In March 2013, a new party, Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO 2011),⁹⁷ founded by one of the richest Czech entrepreneurs Andrej Babiš held its election conference. According to chief political commentator Martin Komárek of the daily *Mladá fronta Dnes*, “the effort of billionaire Andrej Babiš to enter the Czech political market has been undoubtedly serious” and ANO 2011 may succeed in the 2014 general election.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Its founder Daniel Lipšic, former minister of interior, has left his mother party Christian Democratic Movement. According to some of the polls conducted in the first months of 2013, the party seems to have chance to get into the Parliament; however, there is a long time to go before the Spring 2016 election. See *Poll: Lipšic's New Majority...*, 2013.

⁹⁶ In April 2012, its informal leader, Vít Bárta, the owner of a powerful security and detective agency, was found guilty of bribery. However, in November 2012, the municipal court accepted his appeal, reversing the previous ruling of Prague Circuit Court: Vít Bárta has been acquitted of all charges. In February 2013, The Public Affairs Party has overwhelmingly elected him its new leader.

⁹⁷ In Czech, the acronym ANO stands for “action by dissatisfied citizens,” and also means “YES.” The new party's goal is “to achieve a more just and functional society based on the rule of law. And we can only achieve a clear victory in the next parliamentary elections with a civic movement made up of credible and independent people from the Czech Republic.” Its partners include the Society Against Corruption (VPK) and the Endowment Fund Against Corruption (NFPK), founded by Karel Janeček, a mathematician, financier and trader. See Kenety, 2012.

⁹⁸ “The present political system is not sustainable for a long time because its two pillars, the Civic Democrats and the Social Democrats (ČSSD), are undermined. The citizens are watching the poor performance of politicians with disgust and they cannot understand the government's reforms. Major political parties have been recycling old politicians and they do not seem to know that this way of creating new faces is detrimental in the long term and that it will soon stop working, especially when new ideas and leaders are lacking. The political system can be

In Hungary, two formative events took place recently. First, former Prime Minister Gordon Bajnai established a new political movement Together 2014 (Együtt 2014), a left-liberal opposition alliance striving for defeating Fidesz in the 2014 elections. The movement turned political party wants to build “a coalition of hope” challenging Fidesz rule.⁹⁹ Bajnai believes the current government is the key reason why hundreds of thousands of Hungarians left the country and millions are struggling. All of these people must be offered a new hope.¹⁰⁰ Secondly, this has afflicted the situation within the Politics Can Be Different (LMP) party. A part of the leadership of the LMP wanted to cooperate with Together 2014; the other wing was rejecting this option, arguing that Bajnai’s alliance includes politicians from the elite that ruled Hungary since 1990 – and the liberal-green LMP has been formed as a political formation independent from this elite. The disputes resulted in a split: in January 2013, eight parliamentarians left the LMP and seven LMP lawmakers stayed with the party.¹⁰¹ While opinion polls conducted by different agencies vary regarding the support of Together 2014 (around 10 percent, plus/minus 5), neither of them look optimistic for the LMP which, together with the leftist Democratic Coalition (DK – headed by another former Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány), does not seem to pass the 5-percent parliamentary threshold.

Palikot Movement, a surprise of Polish elections in 2011, is still visible and present on the Polish political horizon. Its topics, in particular liberal attitudes in cultural and ethical issues, are still relevant. Recently, Janusz Palikot got into a conflict with former President Lech Wałęsa who shocked not only Poland by his anti-gay statements denigrating sexual minorities to second-class citizens.¹⁰² However, due to several reasons, including Palikot’s clashes with his own people, the public support for his movement has declined (to approximately 5 percent¹⁰³) and the

changed only by a revolution in the ODS and the ČSSD, which is not probable, or by an offer of new parties. *MfD: Babiš’s effort...*, 2013.

⁹⁹ *Bajnai’s “Together 2014”...*, 2013.

¹⁰⁰ According to him, the Socialist Party does not have enough voters for changing the government, enough credibility for starting a new era or enough competence for governing. This is why we will establish a party, Bajnai said. Together 2014 is “the road to changing the government and starting a new era in Hungarian politics”. See *Bajnai’s Together 2014 to set up...*, 2013.

¹⁰¹ *LMP splits over cooperation...*, 2013.

¹⁰² “Nobel peace prize winner Lech Walesa sparked outrage by saying that as a minority, gays have no right to a prominent role in politics, need to ‘adjust to smaller things’ and should sit on the back benches, or even outside the chamber. Janusz Palikot, the leader of progressive party Palikot’s Movement, reacted by promoting the party’s gay lawmaker, Robert Biedroń, and transgender lawmaker, Anna Grodzka, to the front row for a three-day session starting Wednesday. In Poland’s Parliament, the front row, which is closest to the Speaker and gets the most TV attention, is generally for party leaders and senior lawmakers.” See *Focus on gay lawmaker*, 2013.

¹⁰³ *Ruling party PO ...*, 2013.

party is struggling to preserve its chances to get into the parliament in the next elections. One of the steps that might help to improve the PM's position is the creation (together with former Polish president Aleksander Kwaśniewski) of a new political entity called Europe Plus, a center-left political movement which wants to draw up a voting list for the 2014 European Parliament elections. As the EU elections will be held earlier than the Polish Sejm vote, it could revive Palikot's agenda and attract new voters.¹⁰⁴

6. CONCLUSION

Hopefully it is not too daring to predict that in the upcoming years, new political actors will enter the political scene of Eastern Central Europe, including in the Visegrad Four countries. There are many reasons speaking in favor of this trend. Let us briefly summarize them.

There are people, who would simply say, and rightly so: "It's the corruption, stupid!" Indeed, until corruption with its pervasiveness is not at least partially tamed, it will continue to nurture public discontent with the political establishment, and potentially encourage resistance to it, which can take a form of anti-corruption oriented political parties.

The others would add the poor performance of the judiciary and courts and the unwillingness to remove undeserved privileges of those who have accumulated their wealth in problematic ways in a system that Václav Havel has called mafia capitalism.

Still others would point at the traditional political parties calling them "the chief parasites within state structures" resembling "informal coteries" rather than formal institutional structures, extracting significant resources from the state and staffing state institutions with their own people.¹⁰⁵

Also, some people feel that the reason lies in a widespread decline of trust – not only of politics, democratic institutions and politicians, but also a more general decrease of social trust, which, however, generates a response: "The public is convinced that the current rotten system must be put to an end, which opens ways to various 'saviors'," says political commentator Bohumil Doležal.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Adekoya, 2013.

¹⁰⁵ Rupnik and Zielonka, 2013.

¹⁰⁶ *LN: Politics suffers*, 2012.

42 | Beyond any doubt, for some people the driving force is their opposition to the European Union. As Sczzerbiak and Taggart put it,¹⁰⁷ the opponents stress that the Union is “too capitalist/socialist/neo-liberal/bureaucratic, depending on ideological positioning (communist/conservative/socialist/populist respectively)” and therefore call for “a fundamental recasting of the terms on which their country is an EU member”. Regardless from their political line, they tend to act, and sometimes the response consists in building a new party with a Euroskeptical profile.

There are also positive feelings, like a sincere and justified desire for more direct democracy, for implementing procedures of deliberative democracy: however, to push them through, a political change is needed, hence the motives for imposing pressure by new parties. The incentives coming from civic initiatives, the popularity of parties that have emerged from the civil society environment, the rapid dissemination of new, non-traditional parties like The Pirates, has also played a role.

No one knows what forms it might take. Florian Hartleb mentions “cyberparties” as an ideal type. According to him, “the rise of newer, user-driven ‘web 2.0’ technologies such as blogs, social networking sites and video-sharing tools has raised new possibilities for party activism and organization.” Not only these new means of communication help parties to organize activists, they can also stimulate the mushrooming of unofficial networks, which are loosely aligned with party politics but are not under their control: “Voters can now interact in new ways, both to promote and to criticize party policies.” As the next step, he sees the creation of “purely on-line parties”. And even if his imagination might go too far, he is probably right to say that “all political parties have to accept the fact that democracies are developing from party democracies into ‘virtual audience democracies’”.¹⁰⁸

However, even if new parties will most probably enrich political life, it does not mean that they will present a genuine, efficient, and vibrant alternative to the existing traditional parties.

Time and again we see many of them shine, glitter, attract attention and succeed – and then, fade. Either they appear as unable to govern; or, they try to co-govern, thus becoming a part of “the system”. Over and over again, they split, break up, and divide, fighting internal battles, neglecting original aims and becoming indecipherable and inward-looking. And last but not least,

¹⁰⁷ Quoted by Gropas, 2011.

¹⁰⁸ Hartleb, 2012.

due to various reasons, they quite often lose their appeal and charm. Their astounding rhetoric magnetizing the crowds evaporates. Unfortunately for them, and for the whole social and political organism which they wanted to improve and to innovate, they only confirm that nothing can be done with “the system”: it is not possible to change it.

And yet, quite soon the game goes on, the cycle repeats itself, and a new story evolves, with other novices on the stage.

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More than two decades have passed since the times when the Civic Forum in Prague, the leading force of the political transformation, came with its slogan for the first free elections in June 1990: “Parties are for party members, the Civic Forum is for all.” It has reflected deep distrust of political parties resulting from Communism as well as aversion and reluctance of many former dissidents to build party structures as key pillars of pluralistic democracy.¹⁰⁹ And even if a proportional electoral system was approved already in January 1990, and the basic framework for the functioning of political parties was established, general mistrust of politicians and political parties has been one of the typical features of the political system in former Czecho-Slovakia as well as in the two successor states, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. However, this has not prevented new political subjects from entering the political stage.

Some of them are founded by public-spirited citizens enthused by their mission to create a new and better order. The others desire to become public entrepreneurs, agents for change which they believe is needed. Some of them reject the whole party system as flawed, perhaps similarly to nonconformist rebels in the Communist era. The others are more modest, cautiously offering alternatives of improving everyday politics and people’s lives. Some new parties are created and ruled by shrewd pragmatists following their own goals, not societal betterment. And alas, speculators, manipulators or even deceivers are not missing either.

This book aims to assist both current and future actors to re-think various aspects of their undertaking and to help a broader public to better understand who is who. In other words, to answer the questions inscribed in the unforgettable painting by Paul Gauguin:¹¹⁰ Where do alternative political formations come from? Who are they? Where are they going?

¹⁰⁹ According to de Candole, rejection of partisanship formed the philosophical core of Charter 77. De Candole, 1991.

¹¹⁰ D’où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?

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