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Electoral democracy in Central and Eastern European member states of the European Union: values, efficacy, incongruities and their relevance to socio-political alternatives[1]

Introduction

Electoral democracy is a form of representative governance. Historically, electoral democracy lay at the heart of both philosophical and political debates which aimed at devising the optimum method of translating the ideals and values of democracy into the practices of democratic societies. Today electoral democracy seems so natural and obvious that it is almost considered to be an *a priori* form of governance for democratic communities and those who aspire to join them. Free and fair elections have become a symbol of modern democracy.

The emergence of modern political representation was, in part, due to the demands of reconciling the size of the sovereign body, the resources available for fulfilling the political nature of the individual, and the democratic spirit. This has informed a 'new conception of citizenship', which is far removed from the initial ideas underlying democratic thought. 'The people' has, since then, been considered 'primarily as the source of political legitimacy, rather than as persons who might desire to hold offices themselves' (Manin 1997, p. 92). The notion of popular consent overrode alternative forms such as the equal distribution of public offices among citizens. When it was first introduced, the egalitarian spirit embodied by the notion of popular consent contrasted sharply with more traditional forms of power distribution such as hereditary systems. Another prevalent view, as expressed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, was that 'democratic government works best, when the people, who, above all, are the Sovereign, have the fewest possible occasions to make particular decisions as the Government' (Manin 1997, p. 75).

When the first modern democratic governments were established, other methods of selecting representatives had already fallen out of favour. Allocation of office by lot or rotation – methods which played a significant role in Athenian democracy and the Italian republics of the Middle Ages and Renaissance – were later considered to be consistent with 'the nature of democracy' by both Montesquieu

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and Rousseau (Manin 1997, p. 74). Perhaps surprisingly, they associated the idea of elections with aristocratic rule. Modernity has comprehensively rejected allocation of office by lot and settled upon a different perception of the political role of the individual. Modernity gave birth to what we now call liberal democracy. If general consent and legitimacy are the goal, elections are an appropriate method of reaching it, on the condition that 'the people' elect through the means of voting. This leads us to the question: What are the consequences and ramifications if 'the people' do not vote in democracies?

The main goal of this paper is to present an investigation and discussion of the current status and efficiency of electoral democracy as represented by the example of the CEE member states of the European Union and, consequently, political parties, and as considered from a participatory angle. The European Union is a democratically-defined community which draws together countries with different backgrounds. The analysis conveyed herein highlights these differences and poses numerous questions about the underlying reasons for them. Nevertheless, this study only touches upon a greater issue. Liberal democracy, 'one of the sturdiest political systems in the history of the modern West' (Barber 1984, p. 3), presupposes that elections should be free and fair and settled in a competitive contest between multiple (and distinct) political parties. This definition became the unquestioned motto and *idée fix* of the democratic community, and eventually it eroded the democratic spirit and the purposes for which it was originally intended. Elections ought to be free and fair in order that people can participate in them – in accordance with the standards of democracy – but the mere fact that they are free and fair (due to institutional arrangements) does not equate to their fulfillment of the ideals of democracy.

Another argument against this assessment of the evolution of democracy maintains that there are alternative ways of participating in liberal democracy. These ways include; activism within the local community, volunteering and joining pressure groups. The above cannot be underestimated. They are valuable contributions to society and it should be noted that these forms of participation are becoming substitutes for the real political power which should be in the hands of the people. However, these substitutes for participation are not always legitimated by popular consent, and their influence is rarely ever comparable to that of national elections or decision-making outcomes at a national level. The various forms of civic participation, ranging from voting to acting within local communities, should not be dismissed as a façade or a method of releasing the tensions of the electorate, but as a crucial condition of democracy.

There is an alarming electoral trend characteristic to post-communist new member states. Their most recent processes of democratisation can be more informative, as they are not biased by a long tradition of liberal democracy which could produce misleading results from the perspective of a researcher.

'Liberal democrats have little sympathy for the civic ideal that treats human beings as inherently political' (Barber 1984, p. 8). These words, though harsh, reveal some truth about political systems and cultures. The 'game' of being elected and

staying in power – as expressed by political campaigns and the spin that surrounds them – have subverted the very ideals which the 'game' was created to serve. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, we find ourselves somewhat confused by the system of political parties, where some adopt the views of their opposition, and where all centre around compromises. These compromises are the result of, for example, elements of global governance, or at the very least transnational processes. We live in a century in which the resources – such as means of communication – which originally contributed to rendering direct democracy impractical are no longer a barrier. Moreover, improvements in this area have been vast and reflected in various aspects of social life. Therefore, highlighting the shortcomings and incongruities of modern liberal democracies, and refocusing the political imagination using the prism of the ideals of democracy is a way to go forward in seeking socio-political alternatives.

Review

The term democracy has often justifiably been considered to have a dual nature; both as a form of government and as a political value, or even ideology. The question of of *democracy: with or without the people?* may sound slightly confrontational. However, challenging democracy in this way allows one the opportunity to answer the question of civic factors in governance, as determined by certain principles inherent to modern democracy. The story of democracy has its roots in the fifth and fourth centuries BC and ancient Athens, when its dual natures – institutional and ideological – were united. However, 'no modern population can govern themselves in the same sense' (Dunn 2006, p. 18). 'In the same sense' implies direct modes of participation and contributions to political life, which have both positive and negative connotations. Democracy, in its present form of liberal democracy, is, in most cases, a product of social consensus and no longer makes demands of its citizens which would be incompatible with the individualistic modern lifestyle. Yet it was not until modern times that everyone – regardless of gender, social class or race – was recognised as a citizen with equal political status and a right to vote in countries belonging to the democratic community. Modern forms of democracy are also capitalist in nature; intertwined with global processes and transformations. The story of democracy has reached the point where the assumptions upon which it was initially based have been distorted. Much has been said about possible causes of this state of affairs, but far less has been done to attempt to analyse its import, or what bearing it has on the political status of individuals. Is modern democracy – as a form of government – still worthy of the name? Or would it be more appropriate to think of democracy instead as a political value, 'imperfectly embodied in any actual form of government' (Dunn 2006, p. 162)?

These are very broad – and, in this work, rhetorical – questions. This method of thinking about democracy is typical of a school of thought which prioritises civic participation. When dealing with the topic of democracy, one has to emphasize the

existence of a variety of approaches, definitions and systems of classification. For the purposes of this paper, it suffices to say that *democracy* is understood here as a value which is shaped and characterised by other value-laden terms. This way of understanding democracy is often accused of minimalism, as it conflicts with more technical and complex measures of extant democracies in the modern world.

According to Welzel and Inglehart, who tend to refer to democracy literally – as 'government by the people' (Welzel 2009, p. 75) – democracy can only be considered genuine if mass preferences shape public policy (Weltzel and Inglehart 2008, p. 126). The latter assumption echoes the discussion of *democracy assessment,* and what elements ought to be taken into account in that assessment. Democracy, seen as a method of institutionalising 'people power', leads to the assumption that the model of representative regimes – those most common in modern states – is dependent on free, fair, competitive and regular elections. Therefore within this school of thought, the substantive efficacy of a given democracy could be assessed through an examination of the most common form of participation: the institution of elections. Voter turnout, as one of the indicators measured by this approach, is 'democracy's unresolved dilemma' (Lijphart 1997, p. 1–14). There are social scientists, however, who claim that equal participation, especially in elections, is not as necessary to democracy (Estlund 2008, Heyd and Segal 2006) as other standards, such as the institutional protection of one's political rights and civil liberties, which democracy guarantees. Another justification for considering mass electoral participation to not be necessary to democracy is that civic apathy may even be 'functional' for democracy – 'fortunately for the democratic system, those with the most undemocratic principles are also those who are least likely to act' (Prothro and Grieg 1960, p. 294). Similar sentiments were also expressed by Seymour Martin Lipset who, while analysing working-class authoritarianism, noticed that high turnout may involve participation by those with antidemocratic attitudes (Lipset 1960).

Furthermore, there are also explanations deriving from the need to preserve stable democracies – 'Democratic governments require a healthy degree of authoritarianism not only for the sake of congruence between government and other aspects of society, but for the even simpler reason that a representative government must govern as well as represent – must satisfy two values which, on the evidence, are not easily reconcilable' (Eckstein 1966, p. 265). This surprisingly pessimistic vision was shared by Samuel Huntington, who warned that post-industrial societies may, in fact, face a problem of *over*participation – 'widespread education tends to produce too much interest and participation which leads in turn to political stalemate. Innovation is easier when substantial portions of the population are indifferent' (Huntington 1974, p. 177). The term 'democracy', although often ambiguous and extremely complicated in nature, has, however, always been associated with the maxim 'one person, one vote' (Birch 2009, p. 23). This is why one should not neglect studying democracy and democratisation from a participatory angle.

Following the discussion in the literature about 'democracy' as perceived as a value affecting the condition of individuals within the political system, it should

be noted that 'the participatory ideals of democracy were pushed to the margins of mainstream liberal democratic theory and ideology' (Warren 2002, p. 678) and that presently the 'political landscape is more favourable to participatory ideals than in the recent past'. According to some authors, this notion exceeds even institutionalised forms of participation, and brings 'innovative ways of civic engagement' to the debate (Marien, Hooghe and Quintelier 2010, p. 187). It has been found that non-electoral participation significantly increased in the democratic world at the time during the period 1967–1987 (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995, p. 72). Opinion surveys also suggest that there is 'widespread popular support for the institutions of direct democracy' (Bowler, Donovan and Karp 2007, 351), which undermines assumptions of civic apathy, and could in theory be extrapolated to voting behaviour or activism aimed at policy-making. Essence of the latter validates the possibility that the ideals of democracy are broken, as argued, for example, by Norberto Bobbio who claimed that 'the people do not constitute an agent in the manner of a sovereign' any longer, if significant electoral participation in changing government personnel is taken into account (Bobbio 1987, p. 27–36). On the same basis Pippa Norris concludes that there is 'a growing tension between ideals and reality' within democracy which may have led to the emergence of 'disenchanted democrats' (Norris 1999, p. 27).

Steven Fish lists Schumpeter, Huntington, Di Palma, Bobbio, Sartori, Shapiro and Dahl as authors who 'avoid the error of defining democracy as elections alone' (Fish 2005, p. 17). Among the traits shared by their approaches, there are the communicative and associational 'rights necessary for the electors to be informed and capable for organizing themselves for political participation'. In reaching this threshold, a country may be considered to be a democracy. To differentiate between countries which reach this stage, participation levels may be taken as further measures of the exercise of the basic requirements for democracy.

After the World War II, it was common to link the sustainment of democracy to economic development. In other words, researchers claimed that the wealthier a country was, the greater the chance its society stood to participate in politics and suppress the 'appeals of irresponsible demagogues' (Shannon 1958, p. 367). The language of hypotheses of this kind was strongly influenced by concerns related to transitions in political regimes after the War. Nonetheless, it centred around participation as a way of maintaining the substantive characteristics of democracy. Lipset, whilst testing the social and economic preconditions theory, took into account the following variables: wealth, industrialization, urbanization and education. He proved it right; higher levels of these factors were attributed to more democratic countries (Lipset 1964, p. 50).

These empirical findings also have firm, compelling, theoretical foundations. Daniel Lerner sees the same variables as the means of the modernization process, the developments of which lead to the 'crowning institution of the participatory society' (Lerner 1958, p. 84). It has to be noted that in Lerner's work 'education' was rated at a basic level (i.e. literacy) which would, in theory, strengthen such

institutions as voting (Lerner 1958, p. 60). Contemporary circumstances, especially among what we call 'established democracies', differ and it would be appropriate to change the thresholds from literacy to, for example, the percentage of citizens who attain higher education. This angle is often criticised for its maximalist character, which is rooted in the socialist tradition and its idea of democracy. For some authors, involving socio-economic variants in the set of conditions for assessing a political regime is an excess resulting in the creation of 'overly restrictive and demanding' definitions (Fish 2005, p. 18). However, this approach should not be neglected, as the unavoidable economic and social differences between democratically defined countries may transpire to be an additional explanatory tool for levels of electoral participation within certain societies. What should be taken away from looking at democracy from this perspective is the fact that socially embedded features may influence the 'democraticness of democracy'.

Substantive participation – rarely considered in the literature to be a crucial factor in the assessment of democracy – allows for an interpretation of the efficacy of electoral democracy which presupposes that it is required to fulfil democratic ideals. This rule is proposed by Robert Dahl and vindicated by emphasizing the requirement for maintaining equality in participation (Dahl 2006, p. 15–16). Besides playing a role of a symptom of democracy, participation may also be a factor resulting in consequences for the stability of the democratic system (Lipset 1964, p. 216). In general, political participation consists of 'legal activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and the actions they take' (Verba, Nie and Kin 1978, p. 46). Although this is 'not confined to the electoral process nor is it limited by any particular type of political act' (Verba 1967, p. 56), the act of voting remains the main institutionalised and most legitimate means of political participation. In addition, 'participatory' or 'citizenship' theories, (Pateman 1970) which presuppose the significance of voting, are recognised in the literature as methods of developing other 'positive democratic character traits' (Finkel 1987, p. 442). One of those most likely to be affected is legitimacy (Thompson 1970). Many participatory theorists stress the legitimising function of participation (Ginsberg 1982, Olsen 1982). This method of considering democracy posits that political efficacy is fostered when participation occurs (Finkel 1987, p. 444). Political efficacy is a central concept within theories of participation (Acock, Clarke and Stewart 1985, p. 1062). One of the founding fathers of this school of thought, Angus Campbell, defined political efficacy as 'the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process, i.e., that it is worthwhile to perform one's civic duties' (Campbell, Gurin and Miller 1954, p. 187).

The literature offers many competing paradigms and references to the distinction between 'pure' democracy and its empirical forms; such as *electoral* versus *representative democracy.* Joseph Schumpeter described electoral democracy as 'the rule of the politician' (Schumpeter 1994, p. 285). In his seminal work *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy,* Schumpeter argued that electoral democracy had been

reduced to the struggle of politicians for citizens' votes, through which they gained the power to govern. Niklas Luhmann went even further, defining democracy as 'the bifurcation of the top of the differentiated political system by the distinction of government and opposition' (Luhmann 1990, p. 232). Other authors, however, found positive compatibilities between democracy's electoral and representative factors – 'the claim connecting democracy and representation is that under democracy governments are representative because they are elected' (Przeworski, Stokes and Manin 1999, p. 29).

This reasoning leads one to the conclusion that both electoral and representative democracy can be assessed in two separate dimensions; representativeness and electoral efficacy. Modern electoral democracies are perfect examples of distortions in the ideals initially associated with democracy. One of the core assumptions of democracy ought to be electoral participation, a reasonable and sufficient degree of which should guarantee the maintenance of the ideals behind the concept of democracy; the involvement and approval of the people. Political participation is a broad notion, the significance of which is often contested; its modern popular forms should not be considered as substitutes for direct democracy, but rather as 'a way for democracy to constantly recreate itself and improve' (Urbinati 2006, p. 223).

Since the 1960s, there has been a declining trend in voter turnout in established democracies (Niemi, Weisberg 2001, p. 31). Much of this decline has been attributed to dismay at what electors have got for their votes (Dunn 2006, p. 166) and their preferences for private and individual enjoyments (Putnam 2001). These are very general explanations which are difficult to measure with methodological tools on a large scale. Social scientists also offer many different – often highly detailed – arguments; such as discussions of the characteristics of institutional arrangements and electoral systems which may, or may not, encourage citizens to cast a ballot (Franklin 2006, p. 160).

Electoral context theoreticians argue that considering micro-level observations could serve as a means of answering macro-level questions. Traditionally, any electoral context was considered to be a 'locality' – in the geographical sense – as it was the setting for social interactions (Marsh 2002, p. 211). More recent assessments of electoral contexts have considered communication networks, which exceed closeness and cultural boundaries, and are therefore less tangible. In general, however, it is relatively easier to assess electoral democracy through the institutional approach, as the variables are more stable.

The second school of thought – one centred around participatory values and political culture – also aims at providing explanations on a macro level, suggesting less tangible measures. However, this drawback negates neither its usefulness nor its applicability. The literature on this approach introduces reasonable and often research-based theories which account for differences in the levels of voter turnout between countries. Even democratically defined countries differ in political culture. Prominent theorists in the field, such as Sidney Verba, argue that it is citizens'

'subjective orientation to politics' which reveals their commitment to participation and, thus, democracy (Verba 1965, p. 513). 'Where cultures are more participatory, citizens display heightened enthusiasm for politics: they exhibit greater political satisfaction with and pride in their institutions and are generally more efficacious in the role they and their fellow citizens play in politics' (Jackman 1987, p. 405).

The value-based approach to explaining democracy through the method of mass participation is currently represented by Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, who see the possible development of 'effective democracy' as happening via values and resources which enable citizens to pressure the elites (Welzel, Inglehart 2008, p. 126). The conviction that values are determinants of political attitudes and behaviours is also reflected in the extensive World Values Survey, which they coordinate. Inglehart and Welzel link the issue of values to democratization processes. 'This is why values are important. To advance democracy, people have not only to be capable to struggle for its advancement; they also have to be willing to do so' (Welzel 2009, p. 84). In support of this statement, both authors make reference to the 'habituation model' introduced by Dankwart Rustow, a social scientist known for breaking from a prevailing school of thought which sees social and economic conditions as undeniable foundations for democracy; claiming instead that democracy can be maintained only if citizens accumulate enough experience to exercise freedoms and practice democratic tools – such as participation – and then embrace voting in elections as a part of the 'game' (Rustow 1970).

Welzel and Ingelhart developed Rustow's idea by saying that it is not only first-hand experiences of democracy which may shape the character of, for example, participation, but also that one possesses resources which enable one to assess the utility of the freedoms and rights ascribed to democracy (Welzel and Inglehart 2008, p. 130). This assumption was first independently presented by Walt Rostow, an American economist and political scientist. In the 1960s, Rostow claimed that the more resources people have, the more they require the freedom to make use of them (Rostow 1971). However, many later researchers warned against reductionist theories 'that treat all political attitudes as if they were simply derivative of economic conditions' (Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer 1998, p. 157). This was the conclusion drawn by Geoffrey Evans and Stephen Whitefield, who focused on the contexts of post-communistic countries in the early 1990s (Evans and Whitefield 1995, p. 469). Both research groups found that 'economic and political factors determine levels of popular support for democracy', but whilst these are expressed via participation, other factors matter more (Chu et. Al. 2008, p. 75). Most of the scholars within this school of thought, which stresses citizens' status and involvement, agree that there are other paths to democracy, besides participatory and political culture; such as its imposition by foreign powers, or its adoption through elites. However, as they often emphasise, only 'mass responsive democratization' can lead to socially embedded and 'sustainable' democracy (Welzel 2009, p. 89).

Analysis

CEE democratic electoral systems without compulsory voting 1990–2023: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia

Table 1. Voter turnout in parliamentary elections 1990–2013; BG=Bulgaria, CZ=Czech Republic, EE=Estonia. HU=Hungary, LV=Latvia, LT=Lithuania, PL=Poland, RO=Romania, SK=Slovakia, SL=Slovenia

	VI									
	BG	CZ	EE	HU	LV	LT	PL	RO	SK	SL
1990		96.33	78.2	56.94	81.2				96.33	
1991	83.87						43.2			
1992		84.68	67.84			75.22		76.29	84.68	85.9
1993					89.88		52.08			
1994	75.23			68.92					75.41	
1995			68.91		71.9					
1996		76.29				52.92		76.01		73.67
1997	58.87						47.93			
1998		74		56.69	71.89				84.25	
1999			57.43							
2000						58.18		65.31		70.36
2001	66.63						46.18			
2002		57.95		73.51	71.17				70.07	
2003			58.24							
2004						46.07		58.51		60.64
2005	55.76						40.57			
2006		64.47		64.39	60.98				54.67	
2007			61.91				53.88			
2008						48.59		39.2		63.1
2009	60.2									
2010		62.6		64.37	62				58.83	
2011			63.5		59.49		48.92			65.6
2012						52.93		41.76		
2013	51.33	59.48								
AVERAGE	64.55	71.97	65.14	64.13	71.06	55.65	47.53	59.51	74.89	69.87

The strong correlations of data from the ten elements in this sub-set are not coincidental. All these countries started their most recent democratic history at the same moment, as a result of the same historical event. The fall of communism in the late 1980s and early 1990s was, in most of these cases, crowned by their first free and fair elections in over forty years, or the first elections ever held in the newly-emergent states.

The numbers are alarming. The decline in the number of voters exercising their franchise – expressed as the result of simple subtraction between the first and most recent elections – may not be very accurate in statistical terms, but highlights a trend

which should be considered more descriptive than statistical. The vast majority of the new member states present an outstanding pattern of the evolution of electoral democracy – considered from a participatory angle – over a relatively short period of time. This is worthy of further examination and elaboration.

Discussion and conclusions

There is a worrying, decreasing electoral pattern in post-communist member states of the European Union, which embarked on their democratic paths in the early 1990s. This poses a new question which is worthy of further consideration – how does one explain the declining trend, which first started among most established democracies with the European Union and then repeated itself with greater intensity in cases of Central and Eastern European countries? If a slight simplification can be applied, countries in Europe can be divided into two groups; those which are representative of older democracies which emerged from the first and the second wave of democratisation combined, and those from the more recent third wave (Huntington 1991, p. 14). Obviously, various factors shape the processes of democratisation, many of which are unique (such as culture and geography), but the distinction between these two groups remains valid. However, from a more general perspective, the division can be used for the purposes of comparing kinds of transformations into democracy. In the case of this particular study, it is useful to examine the implementation of electoral democracy under the different circumstances arising from the social and political changes which occurred over the period of time between waves of democratisation. What happened between the moment when second wave democracies were created and the later collapse of communism?

Social change and electoral participation

It is no accident that I have linked cross-national voting patterns with social change. As the ultimate explanation for a decline in electoral participation in member states of the European Union has not been arrived at by the analysis of the previous chapter, it would be reasonable to examine the background which shapes general electoral contexts. The political landscape after World War II was referred to as an 'institutionalised class conflict' (Dahrendorf 1959), or 'democratic class struggle' (Lipset 1960). Class-oriented parties and class ideologies – such as socialism and liberalism – played a 'central role' within these configurations (Pakulski and Waters 1996, p. 132). As the divisions (or inequalities, as some authors would have it) between classes were both apparent and significant. Each class had broad and distinct interests. In many ways, to paraphrase Gyorgy Lukacs, the party was an expression of class. According to Jan Pakulski and Malcolm Waters, 'a reversal in this trend took shape between 1960 and 1990'. The conclusions of these scholars do not directly answer the main question of this study, but are definitely one of the means of formulating an answer. Pakulski and Waters pointed out three processes: a decline of class voting and class-based allegiance to political parties, a decline of class-based

organisations and a decline of the use of class imagery and consciousness in politics (Pakulski and Waters 1996, p. 133). These were hotly contested, and the debate was settled despite contradictory comments and empirical investigations.

The degree of decline of class significance is a separate issue and it is not addressed by this study. Undoubtedly though, there have been significant changes in class stratification. Thus the party system – formerly based on strong class divisions – has also experienced a transformation. This transformation is said to diffuse the electorate in a new way, which is hard to conceptualise; namely through the decline of 'cleavage politics'. 'This breakdown of traditional linkages involves nothing less than the disintegration of cleavage politics, which in turn, makes it possible for other factors to play an increasing role in influencing voter choice' (Franklin, Mackie and Valen 1992, p. 408). Frankie, Mackie and Valen's study found that between 1960 and 1990, social structure became a far less useful variable for explaining voting behaviour, as party alignment was less predetermined. No similar studies – such as that of Alford Index (Alford Index 1963, p. 80) – considered electoral participation rates as a consequence of disaffiliation to be noteworthy. It should be noted that both declines – one in the significance of party alignments basis of class and the other one in voter turnout – began at the same time and intertwined with each other in one crucial dimension of social life; selecting representatives via elections.

As Pakulski and Waters claim, 'the waves of class conflict that washed across Western societies in the 1950s and 1960s have since diminished to a ripple' (1996, p. 141). Changes in property ownership, progressive capitalism and increasing consumerism led to the growth of the middle-class at the cost of a significantly diminishing working class and less visible upper class. Therefore, as more social groups gravitated towards the centre stratum, their fundamental 'class sentiments' (Graetz 1983, p. 80) also became more unified. The middle class (or as some commentators prefer, middle classes) do not have a single set of clearly defined interests, as they are 'not internally coherent' (Giddens 2009, p. 452). Undoubtedly, the middle class is far less cohesive than the working class. The latter, especially in its heyday of the early and mid-twentieth century, was strongly associated with the leftist parties which represented their interests (or, at least, the party agendas touched upon issues relevant to their needs).

The relation between the state and the market was also different in the two decades following the end of the World War II. 'Embedded liberalism', which essentially meant governments' interventionism (Ruggie 1982, p. 383), was 'some sort of class compromise between capital and labour' (Harvey 2005, p. 10), which had very distinct interests. Robert Dahl and Charles Lindblom went even further and saw this new approach as a result of the collapse of both capitalism and communism (1953, p. 23). As history showed, the initial prosperity and growth was not long-lasting. The late 1960s brought the first signs of the inefficiency of the system. This facilitated a discussion between those who supported the idea of 'social democracy and central planning' on the one hand and those 'concerned with liberating corporate and business power and re-establishing market freedoms' on the other (Harvey 2005,

p. 13). The latter took over in the form of neoliberalism, which transferred control over the economy from the state to the market. This process was later termed the Washington Consensus (Williamson 1990), a concept which embraced a set of reforms which were implemented in established democracies of the European Union from the 1970s to the 1990s. These reforms included a change in public spending from subsidies to services, liberalisation of trade and foreign direct investment and privatisation of state entities.

Apparent affiliations with political parties merely reflecting the particular interests and values of certain classes is a plausible (if partial) answer to the question of why electoral contests of the 1950s and 1960s in Western Europe were met with high rates of voters. As the analysis of the voter turnout records showed, in some cases – such as those of Finland, France and Ireland – the first breakdown of the high participation rates occurred in the mid–1970s, or shortly after this period. It may not be a coincidence that these two processes – the start of the decline in electoral participation and the new policies which significantly transformed relations between the market, the state and its citizens – happened at the same time. This connection is easier to explain using the example of how particular ideological parties lost voters. For example, in the late 1970s forty percent of the working population were still considered to be working class, whilst now the figure is a mere eighteen percent, with a declining trend (Giddens 2009, p. 453). Parties on the left, over more or less the same period of time, are said to show a 'consistent abandonment of social welfare state/distributive issues' (Lipset 1991, p. 132). One reason for this 'abandonment' is the loss of the section of the electorate which would sought the reflection of their interests in party agendas. Furthermore, 'a concomitant global shift to marketized strategies of economic growth' in many ways deprived the state of its influence and introduced a new factor in governance; global governance. The latter concept is often contested and resolving the issue is not one of the aims of this discussion. However, there is no doubt to the genuineness of its apparent influence on various dimensions, which for decades was attributed only to the state.

Pierre Bourdieu argues that social stratification is no longer settled along economic lines but on the basis of 'cultural capital' which comprises of, for example, education and patterns of consumption (Bourdieu 1992). These aspects have also undergone an important transformation as the result of the gradual rise in general well-being of societies within established democracies after World War II. The generations growing up in these times has brought about new values and preferences, which Ronald Inglehart calls 'post-materialist' (1990, p. 43). What differentiates them from people of previous generations is that they no longer prioritise material well-being, or security, and advocate self-actualisation and individual quality of life. Pakulski and Waters interpret this as a shift away from class-based values towards a situation in which the generation is the 'major social referent' in political sociology (1996, p. 142). As the 'new generations' do not define their priorities in such a way that they could feasibly be fulfilled by the state (due to their individualistic components) political parties do not have much to offer them. Therefore, electoral

contests may seem to be less exciting than they once were, when their outcomes were strongly correlated with citizens' priorities.

Neoliberalism is strongly correlated with globalisation, which is not only economic, but also echoes the spirit of social change which began in the last century. One of the dimensions often considered as being under the influence of globalisation is citizenship. Many theorist – ranging from August Comte to Anthony Giddens – expressed hopes that humanity would 'transcend national boundaries by moving toward a global culture and society' (Norris 2005, p. 287). This was followed by many scholars foretelling the end of the nation-state and the emergence of cosmopolitan citizens. However, empirical research proved that there is 'little evidence of growing cosmopolitan identities' (Norris 2005, p. 288). The reason for this contradiction may lie in commentators confusing different processes – economic globalisation happens at a faster pace than its political and cultural counterparts. Hence, whilst many economic issues are decided on the behalf of the state by the intergovernmental or transnational bodies, civic identities remain on a national level. This may also give rise to confusion regarding the allocation of electoral votes.

Daniel Bell argues that national government is 'too small to respond to big questions' and, at the same time, 'too big too to deal with the small questions' (1987, p. 8). This is why many commentators suggest that this now signals the end of the governance as we have known it for over a century. It is argued that the changes occurring around us are too rapid to be handled by governments, and that global forces, such as market forces, should be allowed to manage further developments at their own pace. This cutting-edge approach does not seem consistent with the ideology and values of pure democracy. The latter vindicates the political subjectivity of the individual, and as there are undoubtedly 'big' and 'small' questions, the citizenry cannot be completely deprived of the ability to have their say in resolving them. It has been proven that market forces are by no means democratic, especially given the fact that they lack legitimacy of any kind. David Held strongly contests the opinion that governments are inadequate, and argues than in a global age there is an even greater need both for government and a deepening of democracy on three levels – local, national and global (Held 2004). In order to achieve this, he recommends a global social democracy, which on one hand would be adjusted to the circumstances of our times, and on the other hand would return decision-making processes to the people, provided that each level was associated with accountability.

New democracies in post-communist countries

Analysing voter turnout records of member states of the European Union reveals a clear pattern in post-communist countries. Briefly, their current voter turnout rates are *low* or *very low*, and the majority show a decreasing trend. Eight out of ten countries in this group had a *very high* turnout in their first free and fair electoral contest. I argue that this particular outcome was the result of hopes and expectations of a regime change to the democracy which these societies had desired for so

long. Furthermore, I argue that the sharp decline in voter turnout observed in these countries has been occurring as a consequence of social change (as described in the previous subsection of this chapter) but at an increased pace.

Post-communistic countries show the pure correlation between social change and electoral participation. Societies within these states have not experienced gradual social and global changes similar to those in established democracies between the 1960s and the 1990s. This excludes the possible factor of socialisation; citizens of established democracies may, for example, be more accustomed to voting and this could explain why the decline in their electoral participation rates are not as sharp as those of new member states of the European Union.

The implementation of democratic regimes and transitions to capitalism in the early 1990s happened at a time when the majority of the other European states were established capitalistic democracies. Societies previously associated with the former USSR or its allies suddenly found themselves in a globalised world which contrasted to their pre-transition experiences. New Central and Eastern European democracies promptly started applying to and joining intergovernmental organisations and altering various dimensions of their legislation to adjust to the international arena. Besides making significant economic transitions, they also joined the ranks of liberal democracies. The efficiency of this could easily be called into question, partly because it was at this time that the first concerns were raised regarding the efficacy of electoral democracy, considered from a participatory angle. Many political observers optimistically expected the revival of class politics (Pakulski and Waters 1996, p. 146) and the arrival of a new breed of democracy, but post-communistic countries failed to define their own democratic models. The legacy of Soviet-style regimes and social arrangements – such as social policies – found few reflections in these new constellations. These disappointments were expressed by voter attrition, especially as 'the transition itself raises expectations' (Haggard and Kaufman 1999, p. 89).

Rapid changes in occupational structures contributed to the accelerated process of dealignment. Social democratic parties have gradually been failing to cater for the part of the electorate which had many pre-transition sentiments. This helped ferment signs of apparent nationalism in political agendas and the interim popularity of nationalistic parties, which emerged due to the fact that freshly defined democracies 'could not cope with an increasingly interdependent, globalizing world' (Snyder 2000, p. 17). In the case of post-communist countries which have joined the European Union, these opposition forces have not managed to halt the adoption of the common (and conventional) "ways and means" of liberal democracies which are embedded in capitalism and globalisation.

'We care about formal democracy because it tends to be more than merely formal. It tends to be real to some extent. Giving the many a real voice in the formal collective decision-making of a country is the most promising basis for further progress in the distribution of power and other forms of substantive equality' (Huber, Rueschemeyer anf Stephens 1992, p. 10). This optimistic view concerning the

implementation of formal liberal democracy in transitioning countries, whilst overlooking the ideals and values of democracy, has been proved incorrect and was also revised later by its authors. As the analysis in this dissertation shows, new member states of the European Union have not advanced towards participatory or social democracy. According to the Freedom House scoring (http://www.freedomhouse.org/), their formal democratic arrangements have significantly improved, but at the same their legislative bodies have been increasingly losing their legitimacy to govern. Hence, electoral democracy and political parties prove to be inefficient when implemented under modern circumstances, due to processes that make "the people" disinclined to participate in decision-making.

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Electoral democracy in Central and Eastern European member states of the European Union: values, efficacy, incongruities and their relevance to socio-political alternatives

Abstract

This paper is based on research into levels and characteristics of electoral participation in CEE states currently belonging to the European Union. The data covers the time period from 1989 to 2013 and excludes Croatia as the youngest formal member of the community. An analysis of voter turnout records proves the pattern of formal participation decline at an accelerated rate and with graver consequences in post-communist countries which joined the democratic community in the early 1990s. The author's paradigm in the paper upholds the initial ideals and values of democracy - which presuppose the subjectivity and participation

of citizens – and differentiates between these and the practical implications of modern forms of democracy, such as liberal democracy. That leads towards a discussion which highlights the social changes which occurred over the time period in question as the main cause of the observable inefficiency of electoral democracy in modern circumstances. Last but not least the paper makes an argument for socio-political alternatives and high probability of their flourishing in Central and Eastern Europe.

Key words: democracy, electoral democracy, electoral behavior, transition, Central and Eastern Europe