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Original Articles

'Red Mobs', 'Yuppies', 'Lamb Heads' and Others: Contacts, Informal Networks and Politics in the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania

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Abstract

This article addresses the use of contacts and informal networks in the political sphere in post-communist states in East Central and South East Europe. It tests two major hypotheses: (i) informality is functional and mainly a result of transition; and (ii) informality is embedded in the national culture and/or a leftover from communism. These hypotheses are tested on findings from 360 in-depth elite interviews. The article concludes that although informality is largely a response to problems and opportunities caused by transition, the manner in which it is expressed, to quite some extent, reflects the national culture and communist experience.

Notes

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers as well as Einar Braathen, Martin Hanssen, Arne Tesli and Aadne Aasland for their useful comments.

[1]A comparison of each country's score on Transparency International's corruption perception index for 2001 and 2005 shows that there has been very little improvement in terms of reducing corruption in all countries except Slovenia. On a scale ranging from 1 to 10, where 1 represents high levels of corruption and 10 represents low levels of corruption, Bulgaria was given a score of 3.9 in 2001 and 4.0 in 2005. Romania's score for 2001 was 2.8. In 2005 the score had improved by 0.2 to 3.0. The Czech Republic fared rather worse with a score of 3.9 in 2001, compared to 4.3 in 2005. In contrast, Slovenia's score for 2001 was 5.2, compared to 6.1 for 2005. Source: www.transparency.org, accessed 15 June 2006.

[2]In February 1999, 39% of those polled said they considered almost all or most of Bulgarian politicians to be corrupt. By January 2002 the percentage had risen to 47.78%.

[3]Alena V. Ledeneva, ‘How Russia Really Works’, Open Democracy, Feature Article, 16 January 2002, available at: http://www.opendemocracy.net/globalization/article_253.jsp, accessed 9 November 2006.

[4]As reducing corruption is only one of several requirements made on EU applicant states, this article does not seek to address the link between EU accession, on the one hand, and the extent of informality and corruption, on the other.

[5]The project was funded by the Research Council of Norway (award no 156856/730) and carried out by the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research in collaboration with Charles University/GfK-Prague (Czech Republic), University of Maribor/CATI (Slovenia), Vitosha Research (Bulgaria) and the Romanian Academic Society/Gallup (Romania).

[6]Each interview lasted for approximately an hour, was conducted in the local language by professional interviewers and carried out according to a pre-prepared interview guide. The following categories of respondents were interviewed: (1) elected representatives; (2) political party representatives; (3) public procurement officials; (4)

prosecutors and judges; (5) national business representatives; (6) international business representatives; (7) media representatives; (8) national and international NGOs; and (9) EU/Council of Europe representatives and national government officials working in the field of anti-corruption.

[7]English language transcripts of the interviews were coded in QSR NUD*IST (version 4). The text unit—the basic unit to be coded—was defined as a respondent's answer to a question. Some double-coding did occur in cases where the respondent's answer to a question addressed issues covered by more than one node. In other cases respondents provided answers to one question when answering others. Furthermore, some respondents failed to answer all the questions. The total number of text units (N) in the tables below therefore does not always correspond to the total number of respondents interviewed, although findings in this article are also based on a count of the respondents who answered the questions referred to in the article in the same way. Once the dataset had been coded, the total number of text units coded at each node was recorded and percentaged. Further, we created nine independent variables—one for each category of respondents included in the project—and cross-tabulated these against the dependent variables. The total number of text units retrieved from each cross-tabulation was inserted in tables and percentaged.

[8]Quotations are marked as follows: El-r (elected representative); PP (political party representative); N-bus (representative of national—i.e. local company); I-bus (representative of international company); Med (media representative); NGO (NGO representative); Proc (public procurement official); Leg (judge or prosecutor); G-off (government official working in anti-corruption); EU (EU representative); CoE (Council of Europe representative). The number of the respondent is also indicated, as is the country in which the interview took place: Thus ‘El-r-3, CzR’ indicates that the respondent quoted is an elected representative and the third respondent interviewed within this category in the Czech Republic. Similarly Sl refers to Slovenia, Bu to Bulgaria and Ro to Romania.

[9]Findings from the in-depth interviews with the ‘politicians’ (i.e. the elected representatives and the political party representatives) are presented in the columns to the left (Political) whereas findings from the other categories of respondents (Other) are presented in the columns to the right.

[10]Zhan Videnov was chairman of the Bulgarian Socialist Party from 1991 to 1996 and Bulgarian Prime Minister from 25 January 1995 until he resigned from his post on 13 February 1997.

[11]Lyuben Berov was prime minister in Bulgaria's first non-communist government for 46 years, from 1992 to September 1994, when he resigned from office.

[12]Partidul România Mare, or the Greater Romania Party, is a party to the far right, headed by Vadim Tudor.

[13]Maramures is located in the north-western part of Romania, along the border with Ukraine. It is considered to be the most isolated and underdeveloped part of the country.

[14]At the time of interviewing, Octav Cozmanca was Romanian Minister of Public Administration.

[15]These findings are rather surprising in that corruption in Romania—at least if one is to judge by Transparency International's corruption perception index—is more extensive than in the Czech Republic. One explanation might be that an anti-corruption campaign was launched in Romania some time before we collected our data. Romania has also been—and still is—under heavy pressure from the EU to reduce levels of corruption. Our findings might therefore to some extent reflect a certain caution on the part of the respondents in this regard—although it is of course also possible that requests for favours are widespread in all post-communist countries regardless of their status with regard to the EU.

[16]Iliescu was elected President of the Council of the National Salvation Front (Frontul Salvării Naţionale, FSN) in December 1989 and was leader of the Provisional Council for National Unity (Consiliul Provizoriu de Uniune Naţională) from February to May 1990. In May 1990 he was elected president. He was re-elected in popular elections in October 1992 for a four-year period. From 1996 to 2000 he was Senator for the Social Democratic Party and from 2000 to 2004 President of Romania. He was defeated by the President of the Democratic Party, Trajan Basescu, in the 2004 presidential elections.

[17]For a more detailed account of state capture in post-conflict states, see World Bank (2000, 2004).

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