

LEFT AND RIGHT IN THE POSTCOMMUNIST COUNTRIES

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Abstract

By giving a short overview of the relevant politicological literature for the ideological positions of political parties in post-communist countries, the purpose of this work is to reveal to which extent these differ from the conditions and processes in established democracies and what these differences owe to. The knowledge gained will serve as a reference framework to analyze the ideological profilation of the parties in the Macedonian post-communist society. Here, we will pay special attention on the position of the political subjects (political parties and citizens/voters) on the two-dimensional specter: left - right and conservatism - liberalism. With the use of the data from the empirical research of the political identities in Republic of Macedonia, the author has come to the conclusion that in the Macedonian case the intriguing Kitschelt's thesis (of 1992) according to which economic liberalism in post-communist societies is accompanied by political liberalism (double liberalism) has only partially been confirmed.

Key words: political parties, party policies, ideological specters, post-communist countries

Area of expertise: Political science

There's a really rich politicological literature that gives an analysis of the situation of political parties in post-communist societies¹, which encompasses either several dimensions of the problem or is concentrated on one aspect of the complex structure of the issues regarding the political and party systems, such as: interparty democracy, party elites, social rifts, ideologies, financing, corruption, party policies, party identities, election behavior etc.

The text that follows is going to give only the most important findings related to the ideological-political profiling of the parties and their positions on the ideological specters in order to present the specifics of the post-communist societies, but to also create a wider framework that would allow to more easily evaluate the processes and political developments in the Republic of Macedonia.

In her comparative analysis of the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, Milada Vahudova sets forth the following thesis: the moderate right-wing parties are the best promoters of democracy in post-communist countries.² The key factor that explains the dominance of these parties in politics is the existence of strong and organized political opposition in communism before 1989. In the first years of the transition process, they promoted themselves as a strong cohesive factor of democratization only in a small number of post-communist countries, whereas in the other countries dominant were the parties that had focused on the defense of the nation and the national culture of the countries that they considered their threat as well as the defense of the status quo situations in the economy, says Vahudova. The first group of countries included Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic while the second one included Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia and Slovakia; where in the second group dominant were the extreme right/radical wing

¹ Diamond, L. and R, Gunther (2001), von Beume, K. (2002) Vahudova M. A. (2008), Kitshel H. (1992, 1995) Merkel (1997), Klingeman (1994), Kaldor M. and Vejvoda I.: (2002), De Waele J. M (ed), (2002). Literature actually uses both terms: post-communist and post-socialist societies.

² Vachudova, M. A., Centre-right parties and political outcomes in East Central Europe, *Party Politics*, 4/2008 pp.387-405. Vahudova's thesis can be seen in other authors as well.

and/or the national-communist parties. This contributed to making the national issues and the economic populism become dominant transition landmarks of political life of the second group, according to the author. Nevertheless, the end of the nineties was marked by a marginalization process or a transformation of the parties with communist or national orientation while the moderate right wing assumed authority in almost all transition democracies, which influenced their political stabilization and their approach to the liberal democracies.³

Vaduhova's thesis according to which the strength and the coherency of the right wing is in great deal a result of the character of the opposition in communism, is contradictory to the basic thesis of the ones that felt that only the communist party was the only applicable political force at the end of the eighties. This kind of tabula rasa standpoint for the post-communist politics suggests that everyone started from zero in the political transition, i.e. all post-communist countries in the transition period started with the same baggage – a monolithic communist past. The representatives of this hypothesis (Jon Elster, Claus Offe и Ulrich Preuss⁴) had practically neglected not only the meaning of the differences in the political life of countries of the so-called Eastern block, but also the meaning of the pre-communist period. And there had obviously been many differences.

How does the Left– Right Political Specter Work in the Post-Communist Countries?

Maybe we have to start by finding out the answer to the question: what is “right” in the post-communist countries? The strong support for the market reforms and the nationalistic agenda, which are the two crucial elements that differentiate the right wing from the left, have a specific meaning in post-communist countries. If we took into consideration the economic programs and policies of the parties in these countries, it would be impossible to make a differentiation between the left and right wings. All parties promised higher living standard of the people, slow reforms, more substantial social transfers

³ Vahudova, 2008, p. 389

⁴ In Vahudova 2008, p. 397

by the state, and with that a firmer position of the state itself. In this way, the economic liberalism, whose social price as a rule was higher and needed to be mitigated, was found on the agendas of both, the left and the right wing parties, making it harder for analysts to differentiate them according to the customary criteria. The findings from some researchers according to which the painful economic reforms are always preceded by a difficult economic crisis, leads to the conclusion that they are not a result of the ideological concepts of the parties, but a result of the realistic (cruel) demands of the economy.

How do we then differentiate the right from the left wing in post-communist countries? A fair number of authors feel that we should be looking for the answer by analyzing the relation of the parties towards national and socio-cultural issues (Kitschelt 1992, Marcs et al. 2006). Herbert Kitschelt⁵, for example offers triple classification: 1. liberal parties (secularism, tolerance, civil liberties, mild decommunization, pro-market orientations, cosmopolitanism, support for the integrations towards the West); 2. christian-national (authority, social order, collective morale, hard decommunization, populist corrections of market legitimacies, national autonomy); 3. post-communist or social-democrat parties (express liberalist concern for the social libertarianism, but also mild support for the economic populism).

The famous researcher of parties and party systems in Yugoslavia and later in Serbia, Vladimir Goati, who refers to Sartori, says that in conditions of multidimensional political space, the dichotomy left wing – right wing is not a sufficiently strong analytical tool to express its complexity. This is why he says that aside from the X-axis we need a Y-axis too and offers the following classification of the political parties in the Republic of Serbia: 1. left - pro-European, 2. right – pro-European, 3. traditional-left, 4. traditional-right. So according to Goati, the role of the Y-axis in the case of Serbia is played by the dichotomy pro-European - traditional.⁶

⁵ Kitschelt, H. Formation of Party Cleavages in Post-Communist Democracies: Theoretical Propositions, *Party Politics* 1995/1, 447-472

⁶ Goati, V. Partiski program kao klucni element partiskog identiteta, in Goati, V. *Programski identiteti socijaldemokratskih partija*, Socijaldemokratski klub Friedrich Ebert Stiftung: Beograd, 2005

Klaus von Beyme⁷ supports the thesis that the clear structure of the social cleavages is an important factor in the establishment and consolidation of the party system. What happens in a situation when those rift lines are difficult to identify, as is the case in the post-communist countries? According to the author, the political memory related to the pre-totalitarian era, as well as socialistic experience helped the new parties in their profiling only slightly. The traditional lines of division have the same meaning (village - city, church – secular state) since through the intensive process of industrialization and secularization, socialism relativized their meaning substantially. The classic and most important cleavage of the line labor – capital was completely underdeveloped, especially in the first years of democratization when neither capital nor labor were represented in politics.⁸ Those conditions emphasized the conflict between the center and the periphery, rationalized through nationalism and regionalism.

The social setting of post-communism which allowed for the development of party systems was quite complex and atypical (from a point of view of western democracies) in order for the four-element Rockan's typology to be sufficient. Thus, von Beyme considered more appropriate the eight-element division, but emphasizing that the meaning of certain divisions in specific environments is preconditioned by other variables as well. So for example, the dominance of the socio-cultural conflict is to be expected where strong ethnic fragmentation persists and here, he mentions Republic of Macedonia as well as in cases where the process of separation from a bigger state community has not yet been finalized (Slovakia). The author points out that the desirable dominant type of conflict is the social-economic one, which is oriented towards the future and which we come across in conditions of market economy (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Hungary, Latvia).

Based on the analyses on the democratization in six post-communist societies, Kaldor and Vejvoda⁹ have come to the conclusion that after the year of 1989 there were three basic types of parties that were created: 1. ex

⁷ von Beyme K. *Transformacija politickih stranaka*, Fakultet politickih znanosti Sveucilista u Zagrebu, Zagreb 2002

⁸ Klaus Von Beyme, also p. 83

⁹ Kaldor M., Vejvoda, I. *Democratization in central and Eastern Europe*. London-New York: Routledge, 2002

communist parties that got rebranded under different names, taking up the space left of the center; 2. parties that tried to pick up from the political traditions in the period from before the Second World War; 3. completely new political parties that were made up of communist dissidents or other individuals that were not related to the communist nomenclature. The inherited infrastructure (party network, membership), political experience as well as the strong ties with certain state institutions turned out to be quite an important comparative advantage over the ex communist parties, which resulted with them winning the elections.¹⁰ It is very difficult to differentiate parties according to their philosophical or ideological concept is the opinion of the authors. Basically, we're talking about the so-called catch all parties (which advocate for market reforms, social justice, integration within the European Union etc) among which one general distinction can be made: a part of them are of mostly civic orientation while the other part are closer to some national and/or religious values.¹¹

An observant analyst will notice that in the attempt to identify some regularity in the structure of the party systems, authors have the tendency to call upon exceptions to specific historic, socio-cultural and other circumstances in certain countries. The numerous intervening variables further complicate matters and the authors are likely to be aware of this, too. In his conclusion, von Beyme admits that the research on party change is a field of many hypotheses and not much accuracy in the results. "The one who lists a number of reasons in fact has none," says Kant. Or in more modern language: the hunt for the independent variable continues.¹² This observation does not deny the analytical and methodological value of these comparative studies, but it surely makes more careful the researcher himself.

¹⁰ According the authors, in the coalition with the liberals with whom there was almost a consensus with regard to the rule, politics was becoming a boring or normal thing. As opposed to this first mode, typical of Slovenia and Hungary, in other countries a serious political front opened, i.e. a severe polarization between the communists and the anticommunists (Romania, Bulgaria, Poland and Lithuania).

¹¹ The big political debates turn mostly towards the past – communism as apposed to anticommunism, or around certain public figures like Mečiar and Kováč in Slovakia, Kalus and Havel in the Czech Republic, Valensa and Kvasnevski in Poland, Brazauskas and Landzbergis in Lithuania, Kaldor and Vejvoda, also, p.11

¹² von Beyme, 2002, p. 184

If this was the first general conclusion that can be drawn from the previously presented classifications, the second one refers to the inevitability of the use of the two-dimensional specter, if we wish to present the ideological positions of the parties, and also of the other political subjects. This second dimension is related to the social issues and on the two-dimensional specter is marked mostly as liberalism against authoritarianism.

Before operationalizing these categories, the key task of the researchers would be to identify the issues that are a subject of political debate in certain countries. Most frequently, these are issues regarding economy (the height of taxes and a country's expenses, rationalized through the dimension regulation-deregulation). Empirical research shows that those that have chosen to go for a free market have different understanding in terms of the state-owned/private enterprises, in terms of the progressive income taxes, the scope of healthcare, free education and social welfare from those that went for or accepted egalitarianism as the core value. When it comes to the policies related to the economic dimension, the ideology is expressed through the position of the party or the voter on the one-dimensional scale of left wing - right wing. But this scale doesn't take into account the second dimension – liberalism against authoritarianism, which on the ideological specter is related to the social issue, most commonly operationalized through the standpoints of the political subjects on tradition, abortion, sexual orientation, protection of the environment etc.¹³ When it comes to the post-communist countries what stands out also is the position of the parties regarding privatization, religion, the participation of the ex communists in political life, free media expression, EU integration, nationalism etc.

The Use of the Two-Dimensional Specter in the Determination of the Ideological Position of the Political Subjects

How do we merge the two dimensions? Is it possible to combine them at all? There is numerous research that refers to certain *regularities* or usual patterns of behavior. Such is the case with Britain and most of the European

¹³ In some countries other specific issues can arise, in terms of the country's stance on immigration, foreign and safety policy, different aspect of the EU policy etc.

countries where the egalitarian and the liberal voters position themselves on the left wing, whereas the anti-egalitarian and authoritarians on the right wing. Even at a level of political elites these two dimensions have the same correlations, even more than is the case with ordinary citizens.¹⁴

But even though these are similar or same combinations, there are many differences between these two dimensions in the terminology, definitions and measurements that these authors refer to. In the early 50s of the twentieth century Eysenck (1954) analyzed diverse political attitudes in terms of radical/conservative and weak/strong; Inglehart though, talks about post-materialism as well as a new approach to measuring liberal/authoritarian values. Similarly, from Palmer's analysis (1995) of the data obtained from Eurobarometer for the period of 1979-1987 we can see that the libertarian - authoritarian values were a much more powerful determinant for the support of the Laborists and Conservatives than the income and the occupation of the voters (i.e. the class dimension). Some researchers drew a conclusion from this data that these values can provide a strong basis for electoral behavior in the lack of deep social rifts or long-term party identities.¹⁵

When it comes to post-socialist societies, Herbert Kitschelt reached an interesting yet essential observation according to which in post-communist countries the party support for economic liberalism is followed by political liberalism and not political conservatism as is the case in the West.¹⁶ Therefore, the merging of the two dimensions on the ideological specter in these societies is going to be different from the one in the established democracies. This will be the key characteristic of the party systems of these societies, says Kitschelt, as a result of his analysis of the post-communist societies at the beginning of transition.

Does this observation of Kitschelt's refer also to the Macedonian post-communist society? The answer to this question is neither simple nor onefold.

¹⁴ Miller, W. L., Timpson, A. M. and Lessnoff, M. H., *Political culture in contemporary Britain: people and politicians, principles and practice*. Oxford, U.K and New York: Clarendon Press and Oxford University Press, 1996 pp. 100-1, 304

¹⁵ William, L. M. and Niemi, R. G. Voting: Choice, Conditioning, and Constraint in. LeDuc L, Niemi R. & Norris P. *Comparing Democracies 2- new challenges in the study of elections and voting*, London and New Delhi: SAGE Publications Thousand Oaks, 2006, pp. 172-175

¹⁶ Kitschelt, H. The Formation of Party Systems in East Central Europe, *Politics & Society*, March 1992, p.7-50

Firstly, because the analysis can be conducted at a level of political parties and at the level of citizens/voters where the conditions of both these levels may not be the same and secondly, because in Republic of Macedonia, as in many other post-socialist countries, it is very difficult to differentiate between the left and the right wings in the classic sense of the word.¹⁷

Determining the Position of Macedonian Political Subjects on the Two-Dimensional Specter

In the case of Macedonia, the left wing is usually identified with SDSM, while the right with VMRO DPMNE.¹⁸ Not only because of the self-identification (the first group refer to themselves as socio-democrats, left-wingers while the second one, right-wingers, conservatives/demo-christians), but also because of their association with the international party families.¹⁹ This polarization is confirmed with the fact that VMRO DPMNE was oriented in great deal towards the improvement of the business climate in the country and strived more to implement the denationalization project than its main political opponent, cut down taxes considerably etc.

However, many experts, as well as figures from the wider public will agree that realistically in their policies, the left and the right values are intertwined, which is (somewhat) visible in the programs of the parties as well.²⁰ The poor social foundation of the parties, i.e. the lack of target groups

¹⁷ Because of the lack of space and the specifics of the political scene in RM, the upcoming analysis will be reduced to the biggest / most important political parties of the Macedonian / Albanian political block: VMRO DPMNE, SDSM, DUI and DPA.

¹⁸ The very creation process of the parties reveals their profiling. SDSM is the heir of an earlier communist party (at the beginning of the transition period its name was SKM-PDP, whereas VMRO DPMNE, according to its name and the way it was formed is related to the traditions/endeavors of the Macedonian people for the creation of an independent country. For more, refer to Hristova L. Electoral Behavior of Citizens and in Hristova L., Shopar V., Jovevska A. Sasajkovski S. Parliamentary Elections in 1998 in Macedonia, Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research: Skopje, 1999, p. 60-70 (in Macedonian)

¹⁹ The former are members of the Socialistic International and an accompanying member of the European Socialist Party, while the latter have the status of an accompanying member of the European People's Party and have contacts with the sororal demochristians parties of Western Europe.

²⁰ Thus, the objection to SDSM is for their implementation of the managerial, paid privatization which allowed for a bigger concentration of the national treasure with a small number of people, for having close ties with the economic oligarchy, fro cutting down on the rights of the employees and having poor collaboration with the unions, while the objection to VMRO DPMNE was regarding their implementation of social policies typical of the left

to address as well as the inconsistency regarding the division of the free market – egalitarian values will make many include them both in the catch all parties, which in fact gravitate towards the center.²¹

When it comes to determining the position of the parties on the conservatism-liberalism specter, it seems that the situation is much clearer. VMRO DPMNE is turned more towards the affirmation of values related to patriotism, defense of national interest, family, religion (by introducing religious education in schools), also introducing order, applying severe punishments for those who violate the law which made the party profile itself as a conservative party. SDSM did not succeed to profile itself to that extent through its actions and promoted secularism (by opposing the introduction of religious education in schools), internationalism etc.²²

The ideological profiling of the political parties of the Albanian political block is even more specific of an issue. Even though the two most important parties DUI and DPA have positioned themselves as the left (the first one) and the right (the second one) on the ideological specter, it is very hard to find evidence in their policies that would justify their decision to take up those positions.²³ The policies of both parties have their focus on the so-called Albanian national issue, which was rationalized with the Ohrid Framework Agreement and the only differences in their policies lie in how radical their standpoints are with regard to this issue.²⁴

Therefore, on the level of political parties, the use of a two-dimensional space model (aside from all of the relativizations) points to a usual pattern of

oriented party (the increase of pensions, increase of salaries in the state and public administration, accepting the demands of (just one category) of workers of bankrupt enterprises etc. For more, refer to Hristova L. *Political Identities in the Republic of Macedonia*. Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research, Skopje, 2010 (in print, in Macedonian)

²¹ Siljanovska- Dafkova G., *Macedonian political parties through the prism of ideology*, in Lutovac Z., (edit.) *Political parties and voters in the countries from ex Yugoslavia*, Institute of Social Sciences, FES, Beograd, 2006 p. 213-214 (in Serbian)

²² "...people knew us as: a party of peace, stability, dialogue, interethnic tolerance, secularity and for respecting differences. It's time we said something more: we believe in solidarity and social justice; we fight for equal opportunities and protecting the weak (Radmila Shekjerinska: the Utrinski Vesnik newspaper, issue from June, 30th, 2007

²³ "... the parties in Macedonia still haven't been ideologically profiled,... there's no competition of ideas and programs and the position chosen by the governing power serves only one purpose: to make a personal profit. (from the interview with Ali Ahmeti from the weekly Globus, May, 6th, 2008)

²⁴ And radicality depends on whether that is a ruling party or a party in opposition which basically means that there are virtually no differences.

behavior which is typical of the Western democracies: economic liberalism is accompanied by cultural/social conservatism. This means that Kitschelt's thesis cannot be applied in the case of Macedonia, at least when it comes to the political parties. Do we see the same behavior pattern in citizens/voters as well? As it is customary, when it comes to the ideological profiling of citizens, we obtain our findings by using a questionnaire on a national sample²⁵ where several scales of values were used.

How are the values from both of the scales combined: left wing – right wing and conservatism – liberalism in Macedonian citizens? Do they follow the same pattern of logic as the one of the political parties, to which we've pointed out before or are they in line with Kitschelt's thesis?

Table 1. Percentage of Conservatives and Liberals that Support the Values of the Left-Right Scale

Left-right values (attitudes)	% of liberals that support the particular attitude	% of conservatives that support the particular attitude
<i>The social differences in one society should be as small as possible</i>	45.5%	77.5%
<i>Private enterprises are more successful than state-owned ones</i>	86.2%	38.0%
<i>In the time of socialism, everyone was taken care of</i>	18.2%	78.4%
<i>All citizens are entitled to the same health care services (private-state health care system)</i>	62.1%	89.2%
<i>The state should provide social security for its citizens</i>	56.1%	76.6%
<i>The more state-owned enterprises, the bigger the benefit for economy</i>	31.8%	71.6%
<i>All citizens are entitled to the same quality education (state-private)</i>	60.6%	80.2%
<i>In socialism people had enough liberties</i>	38.6%	73.1%
<i>When making decisions about the main issue regarding the development of companies, the opinion of the workers should also be taken into consideration</i>	45.5%	75.5%
<i>Countries should provide better public</i>	81.8%	63.1%

²⁵ The survey was carried out as a part of the scientific research project "Political Identities in the Republic of Macedonia", implemented by the Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research (2006-2009), with Lidija Hristova as the main researcher. The first scale referred to the classic division of left wing – right wing, related to free market and equality. The second one was supposed to express the division liberalism – conservatism, while the third scale of values referred to the personal dimension of autonomy against social conformism, where we started off from the premise that all of them can reveal the political (ideological) positions and positions of values of the citizens.

services (education, health care, culture, social security) even though that would mean imposing higher taxes

The analysis of the answers obtained from the survey shows that the conservative voters support the so-called left values, i.e. they have a bigger understanding/expectations for the regulatory role of the country than the liberal voters that support in great deal the free market and the consequences resulting from it in the socio-economic sphere, i.e. the so-called right values (Table 1).

Why do we have such a combination of specters in the case of Macedonia? By analyzing the data available, we tried to *identify* more specifically the liberals and conservatives. Or in a few words: the majority of the citizens with a lower degree of education, those from the older category of respondents, pensioners and unemployed were of more conservative standpoint than the respondents with a higher degree of education, the young, the students and those who own a private business. (The second ones are a part of the category of liberals much more frequently.) One can assume that the first category of citizens – the conservatives – are of smaller capacity (according to age, education, occupation) for dealing with the challenges of transition and it is precisely because of this that they are more susceptible to accepting the left values, i.e. the protective role of the country in the socio-economic sphere. And vice versa, the category of liberals, according to their socio-demographic characteristics (again this would be age, education, occupation, but in a different direction) shows greater capability to deal with the challenges of the market economy and entrepreneurship, which classifies them as supporters of the so-called right values. It is precisely on this assumption that one of Kitschelt's special hypotheses is based on: "those who expect to become winners" in the market system will accept the libertarian/pro-market policies whereas the potential losers will seek protection from the process of privatization and market economy."²⁶

What is the conclusion here? According to many of its characteristics, the political scene of the Republic of Macedonia resembles the one of the rest of the post-communist societies. But in reference to the basic thesis of

²⁶ Refer to Kitschelt, also p. 26

Kitschelt's, that in these countries the support for economic liberalism is accompanied by political liberalism and not political conservatism, it is only partially confirmed in the case of the Republic of Macedonia, which means that in the Macedonian post-communist society there are some other variables present. The type of circumstances concerned here is a totally different matter of discussion and asks for a completely new research that would have to take into consideration all elements that Kitschelt's model is based on and of course, all of the specifics of the Macedonian transition story.

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