



The Adaptation of Ex-Communist Parties to Post-Communist East Central Europe: a Comparative Study of the East German and Hungarian Ex-Communist Parties

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The “Ex-communist party” label has often been used to describe the political ideas and political behavior of the former ruling communist parties operating in post-communist political systems. Yet, the former ruling communist parties have not only followed diverse paths of organizational transformation, but also have developed very different strategic visions of their role in the politics of post-communism. By comparing the political environments faced by the former ruling organizations of East Germany and Hungary and then utilizing content analysis to identify the strategic visions of each of the two organizations, this article demonstrates how different post-communist national political settings have resulted in divergent strategic visions for successor parties in Germany and Hungary. © 1998 The Regents of the University of California. Published by Elsevier Science Ltd

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The collapse of communism posed a fundamental challenge to the ruling communist parties of East Central Europe. After 1989–1990, they were removed from an international imperial hierarchy with Moscow at its center; they were rejected as the hustlers of a de-legitimated world-view; and they were dislodged from the pinnacle of authoritarian regimes. Organizational death for these parties was, however, not the outcome of communism’s collapse. Without regimes to rule or states to govern, the leadership of the former ruling communist parties had to find a new purpose, or what this paper calls a new *strategic vision*, to survive in the new context of post-communism¹.

This paper presents a comparative study of the post-communist strategic visions of the two former ruling organizations of East Germany and Hungary—the East German Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and the Hungarian Socialist Party (HSP). In so doing, this paper looks

1. A political party’s strategic vision refers to the shared conceptions held by party leaders and activists regarding the role that their political party ought to play in society. A political party’s strategic vision, like any organization’s strategic vision, is “operationalizable” in the sense that it links an abstract set of ideas to the more concrete everyday problems confronted by the organization. My conception of strategic vision and the methodology for analysing content themes is borrowed from an approach originally developed by Nathan Leites (1953) but further developed by Alexander George (1969), Holsti (1977), Walker (1990, 1995).

behind the commonly used “ex-communist party” label to explore and compare how two former ruling communist organizations have adapted and transformed in response to two different post-communist environments. Why study the cases of East Germany and Hungary? While the Hungarian communist party was East Central Europe’s leading protagonist in the dismantling of communism in 1989, the East German Communist Party was the leading opponent of change. Just as these organizations existed under different conditions in the communist era, the two parties also faced two radically different institutional settings in the wake of communism’s collapse. The East German party found itself after 1989 as a marginal player in a fully established, consolidated and functioning political system². The Hungarian party was a leading, and after 1994, governing player in a still unconsolidated political environment. Taken together, the comparative examination of how the leadership of these two communist organizations adapted to the dramatically changed external environment of communism’s collapse serves two purposes: First, we can explore the wide diversity of the ex-communist party phenomenon itself. Second, within this diversity, any underlying common patterns of adaptation between these two otherwise dissimilar parties provide us with a way of exploring the nature of post-communist organizational change.

This paper begins by discussing current accounts of ex-communist parties in the post-communist world. Next, it turns to the specific cases of the East German and Hungarian ex-communist parties and analyses the new external environment that confronted the two parties after 1989. Finally, the main body of the paper identifies and compares the post-communist strategic visions that each ex-communist party has adopted since 1989. My central contention is twofold: first, the East German and Hungarian ex-communist parties have been conditioned by different post-communist contexts and as a result have followed two distinct strategies since communism’s collapse. Second, both of these paths of adaptation—though reaching different outcomes—taken together can tell us something about the nature of post-communist political change.

Ex-Communist Parties and the Study of Post-Communism

By the early 1990s it became clear that ex-communist political parties were playing leading roles in post-communist political developments of East Central Europe. While the founding elections of 1990 were by and large electoral disasters for ex-communist parties, the electoral returns of the second round of national elections in post communist states (1992–1995) surprised many analysts: the renamed and “reformed” communist parties staged a dramatic comeback in national and state elections across the former communist world. Since 1992, analysts have increasingly focused on the so-called ex-communist party “phenomenon” in East Central Europe. A survey of the current literature reveals that discussions of ex-communist parties have by and large been limited to the *external* life of ex-communist parties—their relationship to their new post-communist environments. More specifically, current literature on ex-communist parties focuses on their role in the emergence of party systems; their role in the process of democratization; and structural explanations of the varying electoral performances of ex-communist parties themselves. I shall first outline each of these three general approaches. I will then argue that current discussions of ex-communist parties, by only focusing on the

2. For a case study of the post-communist fate of the East German ex-communist party, see Daniel F. Ziblatt, “Putting Humpty-Dumpty Back Together Again: Communism’s Collapse and the Reconstruction of the East German Ex-Communist Party,” *German Politics and Society*, vol. 16, no. 1, Spring 1998.

external life of ex-communist parties—rather than *internal* organizational processes of adaptation—have ignored the diversity of the ex-communist party phenomenon.

The first attempt to introduce ex-communist parties into the comparative study of East Central Europe is articulated most clearly by Machos and Segert (1995), Klingemann (1995), and von Beyme (1992). All three analyses identify the former ruling communist organizations as important factors in the study of the emergence of post-communist party systems. In their 1995 work on Eastern European political parties, Segert and Machos offer a typology of “Eastern European parties”. Their main assertion is that all significant current political parties in Eastern Europe have three possible historic roots: the opposition organizations that emerged during the communist collapse in 1989, the “historical” political parties of the pre-communist era, and finally the former communist organizations that ruled Eastern Europe for 40 years (Machos and Segert, 1995, p. 242). A similar argument is offered by Klingemann, who also asserts that three types of political parties dominate political life in East Central Europe: “socio-cultural parties”, “new programmatic parties”, and “reformed communist parties” (Klingemann, 1995, p. 6). In his work on the emergence of party systems in East Central Europe, von Beyme has also emphasized the role played by ex-communist parties. Rather than three, von Beyme identifies nine types of parties in the emerging party systems in the post-communist world and asserts that “reformed communists” are the only constant across all six of the countries he studies (von Beyme, 1992, p. 284). All of these accounts have recognized the importance of ex-communist parties in the emerging party systems in the post-communist world but have failed to examine the different roles played by each ex-communist party in each system.

A second approach, articulated by Mahr and Nagle (1995), Mangott (1995) and Higley *et al.* (1996), focuses on the effects of ex-communist parties on the processes of democratization. Mahr and Nagle summarize this approach: “The electoral survival of successor parties ... now needs to be included as an important variable in the prospects for continued democratization.” They identify three direct benefits provided by the ex-communist parties to the process of democratization in East Central Europe: the “re-socialization” of an otherwise excluded segment of the post-communist electorate, the establishment of a more coherent party landscape, and the channeling of discontent away from right wing nationalist xenophobic movements (Mahr and Nagle, 1995, pp. 406–407). Another analysis of the effect of ex-communist parties on democratization is offered by Mangott, who writes, “the greatest danger resulting from the post-communist renaissance could be its impact on the political culture of these countries”. Mangott argues that the rapid return of communist parties to positions of power could result in what he calls a “distorted interpretation of the communist past” (Mangott, 1995, p. 14). In a more recent study, Higley, Kullberg and Pakulski examine the effect of the persistence of communist elites (though not explicitly ex-communist parties) on the process of “democratic consolidation” in East Central Europe. The authors assert that elite continuity has not threatened democratic change but has instead guaranteed a stability that has been conducive to democratic competition (Higley *et al.*, 1996, p. 145). Though these authors disagree on the impact of ex-communist parties on democratization, all have placed ex-communist parties at the heart of their analysis.

The third and final approach to the study of ex-communist parties shifts its explanatory focus away from the process of democratization and toward the electoral fortunes of ex-communist parties. This approach, articulated by Waller (1995), Evans and Whitefield (1995) and Ishiyama (1995, 1997), explores the factors that have determined the varying levels of electoral success of ex-communist parties in East Central Europe since the collapse of communism. Waller emphasizes the organizational advantages possessed by ex-communist parties vis-à-vis

their main electoral competitors. He writes, “The ability of the communist parties to adapt to their changed circumstances is due in good part to an organizational strength and leadership skills inherited from the communist past” (Waller, 1995, pp. 487–488). Though Waller refers to the organizational dynamics of ex-communist parties, he does not systematically explore the *internal* life of ex-communist parties. Evans and Whitefield examine two other variables: the degree of ideological extremism of the parties and national differences in the experience of economic transition. Using survey data from the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, Evans and Whitefield show that the more difficult a population perceives the process of economic transition, the greater the electoral success of an ex-communist party (Evans and Whitefield, 1995, pp. 565–578). Finally, Ishiyama (1995); Ishiyama, (1997)) presents the most comprehensive explanation of the electoral performance of ex-communist parties. He argues that electoral incentives, political opportunities and the structure of electoral competition, as well as the historical legacy of the ex-communist party, shape the post-communist survival of ex-communist parties. At the end of his 1995 work, Ishiyama writes that “the evolution of ex-communist parties is a product of the interaction of the dynamics of intra-party struggle during the democratic transition with the political environment which these parties face” (Ishiyama, 1995, pp. 164). In his later work Ishiyama (1997) links variations in electoral success of ex-communist parties to the structure of the communist regime from which each party emerged. Ishiyama’s account is the most systematic and convincing, but his structural explanation of the ex-communist party phenomenon reveals a weakness that all three of these general approaches share.

Missing from these accounts is a comparative analysis of the former ruling organizations that goes behind the “ex-communist party” label. All three perspectives emphasize the external life of ex-communist parties, focusing on the relationship of ex-communist parties to their new post-communist environments. As a result, with the exception of variations in electoral performance, an essential similarity is assumed. In the following, this paper proposes an alternative approach that identifies the internal processes of post-communist organizational adaptation—the process by which party elites reconceive of the definition, purpose, and identity of their organization. To that end, I compare the differing strategic visions of two ex-communist parties to show that placed into different contexts, ex-communist parties have in fact pursued diverse paths of organizational transformation.

The Challenge of Communism’s Demise: East Germany and Hungary

The former ruling communist parties of both East Germany and Hungary witnessed after 1989 the implosion of their once stable environments to find themselves as players in a new, uncertain and hostile political reality. The institutional settings, in which each party emerged, differed from each other in significant ways. The East German ex-communist party faced the challenge of being immediately inserted as a marginal and a no longer needed actor into an externally directed, fully established, and functioning West German political system. In contrast, the Hungarian Socialist Party found itself in a still undeveloped party system where it possessed the “comparative advantages” of sought-after administrative expertise, high organizational capabilities, and continued ties with the former communist trade unions. In further contrast to the East German communist party, the former ruling Hungarian organization faced the challenge, in 1994, of being in a governing position only four years after it had negotiated its way out of power. In the following, I compare the differing challenges of communism’s demise faced by the former ruling communist parties of East Germany and Hungary.

East Germany

The East German communist party's first challenge came in October and November of 1989. With party membership rapidly falling and the collapse of its regime in sight, many party leaders observed that the Socialist Unity Party (SED) was riding a wave that it could no longer control. A leading party member, Andre Brie, who would eventually become chief campaign strategist and deputy chairman of the renamed Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), submitted an article to the party-run newspaper *Neues Deutschland* (Neues Deutschland, 1990), in late November 1989 that argued:

The SED will fall into meaningless or sectarian infighting, if it does not finally pursue a path of radical, substantial, organizational and personal renewal... It would be best for the renewal of the socialist party in the DDR if it steps down from the government and hands over responsibility to others (Brie, 1996, p. 152).

Party leaders, first under Hans Modrow and then under Gregor Gysi, began to recognize only as late as November of 1989 that increasing protests and the mass exodus to West Germany had unleashed events that the ruling communist party could no longer peacefully control. An example of the sense of paralysis that confronted the SED is expressed by former Prime Minister Hans Modrow in a 1990 interview. He claims that the decision to open the Berlin Wall in November 1989 "exemplified the fact that the party had become incapable at that point of responding to the situation" (Philipsen, 1993, p. 257). Several weeks later, on December 3, 1989, the East German Parliament (*Volkskammer*) removed the SED's status as the "leading party" which guaranteed the SED's monopoly on power. As the ruling party of East Germany became a passive spectator to its own removal from power, its once stable universe had imploded.

With no clear function in the still uncertain post-communist setting of January 1990, the rapidly disintegrating SED came under increased attack from within the party itself. Twice during January 1990, a faction of party members met at Berlin's Humboldt University to propose the dissolution of the party. Recommendations were put forward to the new party leadership that the party should be disbanded and new organizations founded in its place (Land and Possekkel, 1995, p. 52). In a pivotal move for the future of the party, at the first "ordinary" party congress of January 1990, the leadership of the temporarily named "SED-PDS", under party chairman Gregor Gysi, decided against the dissolution of the party and focused its immediate attention on preparation for the first and last East German national free elections in March 1990.

The former ruling communist party of East Germany, after January 1990 renamed the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), faced for the first time in its existence free electoral competition. Unlike the former ruling party of Hungary, the PDS confronted a relatively consolidated and already established institutional setting. The most immediate contrast between East Germany's post-communist political environment and that of other post-communist states was the exogenous impact of the West German party system. No political party system in all of East Central Europe, including Hungary, was so firmly established as quickly as in East Germany. By March of 1990, only four months after the fall of the Berlin Wall and seven months before German unification, the central players in the East German party system were firmly in place. In the first and last free national elections in East Germany's history (March 18, 1990), the Christian Democratic Alliance (CDU, DSU) received 48% of the vote, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) gained 21.9% and the PDS gained 16.4%. In contrast to the relative turbulence of other post-communist party systems, the East German party system has displayed remarkable

continuity and stability. The three initial parties to emerge in 1990—the CDU, the SDP (later absorbed and renamed by the West German Social Democratic Party (SPD)) and the PDS—have continued as the strongest three political parties in almost every state and national election in Eastern Germany since 1990.

How did the East German party system develop so rapidly and what were the implications for the PDS? In January of 1990, the first free elections were planned for the East German *Volkskammer* on March 18, 1990. The initially unified anti-regime opposition, made up of a wide array of small opposition groups, began to splinter with the announcement of free parliamentary elections. Many new parties were founded and the so-called “bloc parties” that had been “transmission belts of the official ideology” under the GDR regime prepared themselves for the upcoming elections. Led by Chancellor Helmut Kohl himself, the most significant development before the first pre-unification election was the increasing involvement of the West German parties. All three dominant West German parties (Free Democratic Party (FDP), the CDU and SPD) contributed direct financial and organizational assistance to their eastern counterparts (Neugebauer and Stöss, 1996, p. 161). The leading role in this process was played by Helmut Kohl, the “master politician” and father of German unification. He discreetly lent his support to the Eastern German Christian Democratic Party (the East CDU). According to one account, Kohl actively but covertly “forced a coalition” between the disparate anti-regime groups and the former bloc party, the East CDU, to create a winning conservative coalition in the March 1990 elections (Pond, 1993, p. 197). After the elections, Kohl’s influence, as well as that of the other mainstream western political parties, only increased. As discussions of German unification became more serious in May and June of 1990, plans were developed for the fusion of Kohl’s CDU with the eastern CDU, Genscher’s Free Democratic Party (FDP) with the eastern Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and the western SPD with the newly established eastern Social Democratic Party (SDP). By the first unified federal elections of November 1990, the mainstream west German parties were firmly established in eastern Germany with local and state offices in every one of the new *Bundesländer*. Out of the post-communist political disorder, a relatively stable party system had rapidly emerged.

In the stable political setting of a unified Germany, the PDS, in comparison to its East Central European counterparts, has existed as almost an insignificant player. A dominant explanation of the “return of the ex-communist parties” across East Central Europe has focused on what one scholar has called the two “comparative advantages” of ex-communist parties (Mangott, 1996, p. 6). The first such “comparative advantage” refers to the financial and organizational strengths of the former ruling communist parties vis-à-vis their main electoral competitors. The second advantage is the greatly needed administrative capabilities of the ex-communist party cadres for the functioning of society. While the PDS does clearly enjoy access to the often controversial financial and organizational resources of the SED, its degree of comparative advantage in a political universe centered around Bonn is limited. Furthermore, with the massive transfer of western personnel and institutions to the east after 1989, the PDS’ administrative expertise has been irrelevant, except at the local level. In addition, in the 1994 federal campaign, the PDS became a target of intense partisan debate in western Germany. Dubbed by Helmut Kohl as “red painted fascists”, the PDS has been viewed by westerners as a completely delegitimized political actor³. Investigated by the Bavarian Interior Ministry for “unconstitutional activities”,

3. According to 1994 surveys conducted by the German polling agency Infratest, 71% of West Germans in contrast with only 2% of East Germans agree with the statement that the PDS is a left-wing radical party that is just as objectionable as a right-wing radical party (Lang *et al.*, 1995, p. 194).

the PDS has also received intensive scrutiny from the West German media. In perhaps the most fundamental difference, unlike the Polish and Hungarian cases, the ex-communist party of eastern Germany can not fill the niche of a “social democratic” party. With the German Social Democratic Party firmly in place in a united Germany, the PDS is forced to play a peripheral “left-wing” role in the German party system. In sum, the PDS faces the challenge of being a marginal and discredited actor in an already consolidated western democracy.

Hungary

While the East German party’s demise was sudden and dramatic, the collapse of the communist regime in Hungary, according to Rudolf Tökés, was “protracted and anticlimactic” (Tökés, 1996, p. 305). The crisis that confronted the East German communist party in the Fall of 1989 as it suddenly faced a situation that it could not control differed markedly from the slow process of decline that the Hungarian party itself initiated beginning most clearly in May 1988. The Hungarian ruling party was, according to Stark and Bruszt, the leading force that “negotiated the uncertainty” of communism’s collapse (Stark and Bruszt, 1991, p. 234). As a result, the chief challenge posed by communism’s demise was not a suddenly marginal status. Rather, it was finding itself once again the ruling party of Hungary in 1994 only four years after having negotiated its way out of power. The most important element of this challenge was the dilemma of conflicting constituencies and conflicting economic and political imperatives that confront all democratically elected political parties.

How did the ruling communist party of Hungary negotiate itself out of power? By May of 1988, the “coup of the apparat” or the “friendly takeover by insiders” removed János Kádár from power after his 31 years of leadership (Schöpflin *et al.*, 1988, pp. 253–305). As a disparate alliance of successors within the communist party, Károly Grósz, Imre Pozsgay, and János Berecz, among others, sought to dismantle the “Kádárist center” that had ruled Hungary since 1956. Their internal preemptive strike against Kádár, a threat which never materialized in East Germany against Honecker, led the way to the liberalization of Hungary. Grósz’s and Berecz’s aims were quite limited: they called for economic reforms and for symbolic multi-partyism. Though Bruszt and Stark characterize in 1991 Grósz and his faction within the party as the “hard-liners”, Grósz’s preemptive strike unleashed a process of change and eventual decline for the ruling party of Hungary (Bruszt and Stark, 1991, p. 215).

Grósz and Berecz’s limited commitment to reforms led to the emergence of a widespread opposition movement or what Àgh has called an “embryonic multiparty system” and a “reform” wing in the communist party itself (Àgh, 1993, p. 223). By January of 1989, a break within the party between the “reformers” (such as Pozsgay) and the “hard-liners” (such as Grósz) was clear. Local party leaders as well as national party leaders increasingly broke away from Grósz’s conservative line. In January 1989, the Hungarian parliament passed the Law of Free Association allowing the establishment of parties. On February 11, 1989, the Central Committee of the ruling party passed a resolution approving a multiparty system. By June of 1989, Grósz stepped down and the “reformist” leadership under Pozsgay and Nemeth pursued round-table talks with the organized opposition movements that had emerged in the mid 1980s as quasi-parties. The central goal of the round-table talks was the establishment of free elections and democratic electoral laws (Kukorelli, 1991, p. 139). Bruszt and Stark write, “The reform communists’ basic perceptions of the opportunities, incentives and advantages of shifting from a strategy of confrontation to a strategy of competition” was motivated by their perception that the ruling party could “take advantage of a relatively weak opposition to win at least a plurality of the votes in a free election” (Bruszt and Stark, 1991, p. 232). The aim of reform-

minded communist party leaders, according to Stark and Bruszt, was to emerge from the entire process as the “first democratically elected” communist party in the history of communism (Bruszt and Stark, 1991, p. 232). By September 18, 1989, free elections were planned, and the ruling Hungarian communist party had effectively given up its monopoly on power⁴.

In contrast to the PDS, the renamed Hungarian Socialist Party (HSP) had negotiated its way out of power with the expectation of re-emerging as a governing, democratically elected reform-communist party. By the March 1990 elections, the HSP—like the PDS in East Germany in its first Federal elections—however, gained only 11% of the vote. But, unlike the PDS, the greatest challenge posed by the collapse of communism for the HSP was not the position of opposition in which it found itself between 1990 and 1994. As Àgh has written, despite the HSP’s low electoral showing in 1990, “In Hungary ... it is not the left but the right which is in deep crisis in the early 1990s” (Àgh, 1995, p. 495). Even after their disappointing electoral performance in 1990, the HSP enjoyed the “comparative advantages” of the largest membership in Hungary, continued close ties to the former communist trade unions, as well as a local organizational base across Hungary that could be effectively mobilized for democratic politics⁵. As a result, the greatest challenge posed by communism’s demise for the HSP was not the demise of the regime *per se*. The HSP had after all negotiated itself out of power. Rather its greatest challenge came as it was forced in 1994 into a governing position, a position the PDS has never had to confront, in an electorally competitive environment⁶. Àgh writes:

The landslide victory catapulted the HSP from a modest oppositional position to the most powerful governing role, and this posed the greatest possible challenge for the party. After a four year period of slow transformation with positive developments, the HSP suffered the shock effect of a rapid change from being a small opposition party to being a large governing one (Àgh, 1995, p. 502).

With its victory in 1994, the HSP suddenly faced a dilemma that only a governing electoral political party could face: on the one hand, those dissatisfied with the process of economic transformation formed a key constituency of the HSP’s electoral support in 1994⁷. As a result, voters, ranging from pensioners to students, demanded of the HSP the protection of all forms of social subsidies. On the other hand, the party leadership also was committed to the free-marketization of Hungary as a result of constraints imposed by the HSP’s liberal partner in the governing coalition and requirements imposed by the IMF and the EU. An example of the role played by international organizations such as the IMF can be seen in the IMF’s September 1995 visit to Hungary. The government, under Bokros and Horn, had pursued its extensive

4. Several weeks later at the final party congress of the Hungarian Communist Party on October 6, 1989, the party’s name was changed, new leaders emerged, and in contrast to the East German party, members were forced to reapply for membership. During the party congress, Reszö Nyers, Imre Pozsgay, Miklos Nemeth and Gyula Horn emerged as the dominant actors within the party.

5. In February 1993, the HSP signed an electoral agreement with the proponents of the socialist social democratic platform of the National Association of the Hungarian Trade Unions (MSZOSZ), the successor to the former communist dominated National Council of Trade Unions. Under the agreement, the two organizations decided to cooperate during the 1994 election campaign. Likewise in 1993, the party concluded electoral agreements with the Left-Wing Youth Association (LYA). In both cases, the organizations assisted in HSP campaigns, mobilizing a wider spectrum of voters than the HSP alone could have reached.

6. In 1994, the HSP gained a majority of the seats in the national parliament (54%) and went into coalition with the second most popular party, the Young Free Democrats (YFD) who received 18% of the seats in the national parliament. The former governing party (HDF) received a mere 10% of the seats in the parliament.

7. For a discussion and profile of HSP voters in the 1994 election, see Andras Kovacs (Kovacs, 1996), “Did the Losers really win? Analysis of Electoral Behavior in Hungary in 1994”, *Social Science Research*. Vol. 63, No. 2, Summer 1996 and Andras Kovacs (Kovacs, 1995), “Two Lectures on the Electoral Victory of the Hungarian Socialists”, *Constellations*. Vol. 2, No. 2, 1995.

austerity program in 1995 with the aim of receiving a special “stand-by” three-year loan from the IMF as a reward for its efforts at budget cuts, social state reduction and control of inflation during 1995. Instead, the IMF simply praised the HSP austerity efforts but demanded further cuts in social security and more rapid privatization (Szilagyi, 1995, p. 64). Bokros and Horn continued their commitment to austerity programs and announced further attempts at budget deficit reduction in January 1996, finally winning the IMF loan by February 1996.

Faced with these conflicting imperatives and constituencies, the HSP has been left without much room to manoeuvre since 1994. The formulation of policy has required appeasing four groups: the HSP voters; the conflicting factions within the party; the HSP’s liberal coalition partner Alliance of Free Democrats (AFD); and the economic imperatives imposed by international bodies such as the IMF and the EU. Because of this balancing act, Attila Ágh wrote of the HSP in 1995, “The party runs the risk of disintegration... This scenario of disintegration would mechanically repeat the fate of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (HDF) in the former parliamentary cycle.” Ágh adds, “In a crisis ridden society, external social pressure upon a governing party may be too great and may destroy the whole party” (Ágh, 1995, p. 502). Taken together, the HSP’s “ultimate survival problem” (Schein, 1992, p. 53) has shifted away from the coercive rule of a single-party state to the delicate balancing of constituencies as a governing party in an electorally competitive political system.

The implosion of the East German and Hungarian ruling communist organizations’ once stable environments, and the emergence of new political settings, shifted their “ultimate survival problem” away from the task of coercive state rule. Communism’s collapse left each party, however, facing different tasks. On the one hand, the PDS confronted the challenge of being a permanently marginal party in an established political setting. On the other hand, the HSP, after surviving its self-negotiated demise, faced the challenge of being a governing democratically elected party with conflicting constituencies and imperatives. In sum, the critical juncture of communism’s collapse left the former ruling communist parties facing divergent organizational challenges in the post-communist era.

Paths of Adaptation: the PDS and HSP

In response to the different challenges posed by communism’s collapse and post-communism, the new leaders of both the PDS and HSP were forced to re-conceive of their organizations’ roles in society. How does one study this process of adaptation? Most studies of ideas and ideology in political parties use the notions of “party ideology” or “party appeals”. These approaches superficially focus on purely tactical party programs or the ranking on an overly abstract ideological scale by a panel of “experts” (Kitschelt, 1994, p. 139; Budge *et al.*, 1987). My conception of a political party’s *strategic vision* distances itself from these approaches in two ways⁸. In contrast to most conceptions of political party ideology, a political party’s strategic vision is “operationalizable” in the sense that it links an abstract set of ideas to the more concrete everyday problems confronted by the organization (George, 1969, p. 191). In addition, my conception of strategic vision utilizes content analysis techniques on a wide array of party statements rather than just party programs to identify possibly multiple threads of concern or

8. My conception of strategic vision and the methodology of analyzing content themes is borrowed from the concept of an “operational code” originally articulated by Nathan Leites (1951, 1953) but further developed by Alexander George (1969); Holsti (1977); Walker (1990, 1995).

content themes within each organization⁹. This approach allows for both a more nuanced grasp of the multiple threads of concern within political parties as well as insight into each organization's "shared conception of political strategy" (Leites, 1953, p. 15). The following account seeks to disaggregate the main content themes of the strategic visions of the PDS and HSP between 1990 and 1996 by examining both primary and secondary documents to provide insight into the differences that exist between these two organizations¹⁰.

East Germany

With the shift of the central task of the East German ex-communist party away from the coercive governing of a communist state, party leaders were forced to re-conceive of their organization's role in politics. In examining the PDS' public statements, three general, distinct and at times contradictory content themes of the PDS' strategic vision emerge: The first, most strongly articulated by the middle-aged generation of party elites who assumed party leadership in December 1989, has sought to use the party as a means to "redefine" and to "save" socialism. The second content theme, which gained a central place in the PDS' strategic vision by 1994, was the idea that East German "interests" were being ignored by mainstream West German parties. This conception reflects a widespread East German dissatisfaction with the process of German unification. It also asserts that the PDS stands as the most authentic representative of East Germany as a region and distinct culture. The third and final theme has been gaining favor since 1992. It is articulated by a younger group with less access to the higher party organs. This content theme is one that rejects formal politics as "contaminating" and argues for "extra-parliamentary" grass-roots resistance to the *status quo* by protest and community organizing.

"The Renewal of Socialism"

The first attempt to define a coherent new strategic vision for the dying communist party of East Germany emerged immediately as the GDR collapsed. With a simple realization that had evaded the older SED elite until the bitter end, the new elite finally recognized as Andre Brie did in 1989, that "socialism is discredited" (Brie, 1996, p. 153). A circle of party academics emerged in the Fall of 1989 to shape the debate within the party. Grounded in a critical intellectual tradition that had developed among some middle-aged members of the *nomenklatura* in the mid 1980s (centered around Berlin's Humboldt University), the new party leaders did not entirely reject the socialist project. Instead, as an organization "infused with value", the party leadership sought to redefine and to "renew socialism" (Brie, 1996, p. 153).

In 1990, party chairman Gregor Gysi wrote, "The (Marxist) vision was discredited as a result of the practice of real existing socialism, but the idea ... is eternal" (Gysi, 1990, p. 9). The first party program of January 1990 states, "Administrative-centralized socialism has shoved the

9. I shall outline each content theme as an ideal type: The multiple conceptions (or content themes) within each party are by no means mutually exclusive. Not all party leaders in each party adhere to one particular view to the exclusion of the others. In fact, in most cases, party leaders of each party may recognize more than one of the presented ideas about the proper role for the party. Furthermore, not each of these themes necessarily have equal weight either within the party or outside the party.

10. My study of the PDS is based on an analysis of a wide selection of official party publications, party campaign materials, parliamentary speeches by party officials, parliamentary debates, interviews of party officials, books published by leading party officials and debates at annual party conventions. My analysis of the HSP's strategic vision is based on a survey of the current secondary literature on the Hungarian Socialist Parties in both English and German. The gathering of data was carried out between September 1995 and July 1996 in Berlin, Germany, as well as during the Spring of 1997 at Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University.

greatest humanistic idea in the history of mankind, the idea of socialism, into the dirt” (Partei Demokratischen Sozialismus, 1990). At the fourth party congress in 1994, Hans Modrow and Gregor Gysi proposed a five-point statement that asserts, “The negative features of the DDR and SED were by no means socialist. Rather they were distinctly anti-socialist” (Official Statement of the 4th Party Congress, *Disput*, 1995). Aside from advocating the “value system of socialism”, the renewal of socialism also entails two further specific features that are made clear in a content analysis of the PDS’s 1993 party program: the embrace of the GDR’s specific social welfare policies and the rejection of the GDR’s political authoritarianism and economic dogmatism¹¹. The reform-oriented leaders of the PDS self-consciously select from specific features of socialism to redefine and “renew” socialism.

To “renew socialism”, party leaders have also attempted to distance themselves from their Soviet-influenced origins in order to return to an idealized “authentic” pre-Soviet Marxist past. In an interview in June of 1996, Gregor Gysi claimed that the greatest success of the PDS since 1989 has been what he views as the PDS’ “anti-Stalinist course of socialist renewal” (telephone interview with Gregor Gysi, 1996). In his autobiography, Andre Brie writes “It would be a good beginning if at the (next) party congress it could be said that we stand once again under the banner of Rosa Luxemburg” (Brie, 1996, p. 153). This attempt at an ideological return to the pre-Soviet past is most apparent in the 1990 party program, where leftist-socialist heroes of the pre-war past are listed as the inspiration of the party. One example of how the pre-Soviet socialist past has been utilized by the PDS can be found in the PDS parliamentary group’s (*Bundestagsgruppe*) 1996 parliamentary work (Partei Demokratischen Sozialismus, 1996). In March 1996, the PDS parliamentary group submitted several proposals to the German parliament to push for the disbanding of NATO, the elimination of required military service, and a ban on the German export of arms. The entire campaign was pursued with a distinctly pre-war socialist-pacifist flavor with frequent references to the early 20th-century German socialist-pacifist Kurt Tucholsky. The upper echelon of the PDS party leadership has thus self-consciously attempted to construct a new vision for the former ruling communist party of East Germany by selectively drawing from some elements of the GDR past and casting out others, as well as resurrecting a pre-war tradition of German Marxism. The “renewal of socialism” stands as a central element of the PDS’ leadership strategic vision.

“Representative of East German Interests”

The second content theme that has emerged alongside the notion of a “renewed socialism” has been the articulation and defense of East German “interests”. After the immediate euphoria of German unification began to turn sour in early 1991, a high level of popular frustration and dissatisfaction with the entire process of German unification arose in East Germany. Dubbed

11. Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus (Partei Demokratischen Sozialismus, 1993), *Programm*. February 1993. In a content analysis of the most recent party program (1993), I discovered that of the 36 sentences dedicated to discussion of the communist past, specific policy outcomes that occurred under the communist regime (e.g. elimination of unemployment, comprehensive health insurance) are portrayed in an almost completely positive manner (77.8% of all statements about specific policies in the GDR). In contrast, the political system of the GDR (e.g. the lack of a real electoral system, the lack of a separation of powers between political institutions) are portrayed in a completely negative manner (100%). The portrayal of the other two features of the communist regime, the economic system and the normative system, are marked by a general ambivalence. Certain aspects of the normative system of the communist past are clearly rejected while other aspects are embraced (the concern for social justice and social equality). Likewise, certain aspects of the economic system are portrayed in a negative manner (“the fetish of an absolute opposition between plan and market”), but the party program also asserts that the economic collapse of East Germany was due to “external” forces and not the inherent weakness of the East German economy. In sum, the PDS party program adopts a delicate balance between completely rejecting the communist past and embracing it.

by one analyst as the syndrome of “post-unification dissatisfaction”, many East Germans felt that they faced unique socio-economic, cultural and political challenges that West German politicians failed to grasp (Wiesenthal, 1996). In attempting to define the role of the ex-communist party in post-unification German society, PDS party leaders have increasingly identified their party as the true guardians of Eastern interests, in what one former party leader calls the “East–West cleavage” in German society (M. Brie, 1995, p. 13).

Most current studies on the PDS focus solely on its role as the representative of East German interests¹². However, a closer examination of PDS party statements and documents going back to 1989 reveals that the self-identification of PDS party leaders as the representatives of East German interests emerged only as recently as 1994 as a dominant and coherent content theme. In the three party programs of the PDS prior to 1994 (in 1989, 1990 and 1993), there is absolutely no mention of the PDS as the “representative” of specific East German interests. In fact, the unique socio-economic, cultural and political interests of East Germans vis-à-vis West Germans are also hardly mentioned. This is not to say that voters have not identified the PDS as their “voice” in the united Germany. However, until 1994, the PDS party elite focused its attention on the notion of an abstract “renewed socialism”, failing to articulate a vision of itself as the representative of Eastern interests.

By March 1994, however, with the federal elections eight months away, PDS leaders suddenly turned their party into the guardians of Eastern interests¹³. In his highly publicized election year “Ingolstädter Manifesto”, Gregor Gysi proposed the addition of a third federal parliamentary body alongside the German parliament and senate that would represent only East German interests (Gysi, 1994, p. 8). The PDS’ 1994 election program addresses for the first time in a party program the unique interests shared by East Germans (Partei Demokratischen Sozialismus, 1994, p. 29). The section, entitled “The Destruction Strategy of East Germany”, outlines the issues of concern that one year later would move to the center of attention of party elites. The program demands an end to the unfair “annexation” of East Germany by West Germany and asserts that the privatization efforts of the *Treuhandanstalt* (the West German privatization organization) have destroyed East German industry, culture and agriculture. Finally, the program demands an end to “the legal and social exclusion of hundreds of thousands of East Germans” who have been “purged” as a result of their connections to the GDR regime.

Thus by 1994, as many East Germans began to conceive of the process of unification and integration more as a process of annexation and subjugation, the PDS leadership found a new role and purpose for the party. In response to the increasing debate about the West German “colonization”, or “*Kohl-inization*” of East Germany, the PDS leadership had created a new and effective strategic vision for itself that was based on the notion of the PDS as a regional party.

12. For one example, see Laurence McFalls, “Political culture, partisan strategies and the PDS: prospects for an East German party”. *German Politics and Society*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1995, p. 50.

13. It should be noted, that the PDS’ adoption of its role as the defender of eastern interests had its roots in a “grass-roots” organization called “the committee for social justice”, which was founded in 1992 by an East German CDU politician, Peter Diestel, and PDS chairman Gregor Gysi. The committee for social justice was viewed by its founders as a testing ground for the idea of an “eastern political party”. By 1994 the organization’s membership had fallen dramatically, and it had lost any political relevance. Many of the ideas and proposals developed in this organization during 1992 and 1993, however, were co-opted by the PDS in its turn to “eastern interests” in 1994. For further discussion, see Juergen Lang, Patrick Moreau, Viola Neu, *Auferstanden aus Ruinen?*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 1995, p. 83.

“Party as Social Movement”

In addition to the task of “renewing” socialism and the task of representing East German “interests” in the united Germany, a third vision of the role of the former communist party of East Germany has emerged, articulated by younger party activists. It is a vision that questions the assumption that the PDS must even be an organization that competes in electoral politics. Instead, according to the advocates of this vision, the PDS ought to be viewed and utilized as a “grass-roots social movement” (Bisky, 1995, p. 95). Unlike the other two content themes, this third vision of the party places more emphasis on the means of political action rather than its goals. As a sort of late-blooming East German “New Left”, formal politics is viewed as contaminating and grass-roots activism is viewed as the most effective form of political action.

The articulation of the “party as social movement” content theme is found in statements of young party leaders associated with the loosely organized grass-roots *Arbeitsgemeinschaften* such as the 200 member “AG Young Comrades” (*Junge Genossen*) and the “Anarchist Platform” (*Anarchistische Plattform*). In her statement “Germany Five Years Before the End of the Millennium”, the 24-year-old former PDS Executive Board member, Sarah Wagenknecht writes, “Grass-roots democracy is the fundamental principle of the PDS” (Wagenknecht *et al.*, 1995, p. 239). Likewise, 23-year-old PDS Executive Council member Angela Marquardt asserts, “The loyalties and obligations required by participating in government result in extremely limited possibilities for extra-parliamentary resistance” (Marquardt, 1995, p. 243). Rejecting the entire task of electoral office-seeking, this vision argues rather for “extra-parliamentary opposition and resistance” to alter the structures of society¹⁴.

What exactly is “extra-parliamentary” opposition? In the founding statement of the Anarchist Platform, the notion of “extra-parliamentary action” is specified as the active and frequent participation in public demonstrations to protest “military expansionism” and “right-wing radicalism” (Lang *et al.*, 1995, pp. 77–78). In addition, youth groups associated with the PDS (*AG Autonome Gruppe*) asserted their “grass-roots” opposition in the occupation of still unclaimed and un-privatized apartments in East Berlin in the early 1990s. As the Privatization Agency of the Federal government (the *Treuhandanstalt*) carried out the process of restitution, many youth groups loosely associated with the PDS articulated their “opposition to the status quo” by taking part in confrontations with police, protesting their removal from the previously unclaimed apartments. More recently, in 1995, the PDS’ grass-roots youth movements pressured local Berlin PDS officials to make election promises to create an “alternative” parliament to serve as a means of access for youth groups to local PDS political leaders (Partei Demokratischen Sozialismus, 1995a). In a political party that is dominated by older members, the younger party activists, are a pivotal feature of the PDS’ strategic attempt to give itself a youthful and fresh image that contrasts with its grey, communist past. While not dominant, the content theme of “party as social movement” is central to the PDS’ strategic vision.

The PDS party leadership has thus adopted multiple roles since 1989: the renewal of socialism, the representation of East German interests, and the party as social movement. Taken together, these three content themes represent a notion of opposition which is the defining characteristic of the party’s vision for its role in society: as a “renewed” socialist party, the party stands in opposition to capitalism, as an “East German” regional party, it is in opposition

14. The centerpiece of the PDS’ campaign for the 1995 local Berlin elections and appearing throughout all their campaign brochures, flyers and posters were the slogans: “Concrete Opposition” (*konkrete Opposition*), “Resistance” (*Widerstand*) and “Change begins with Opposition” (*Änderung beginnt mit Opposition*) (Hoover Institution Archives, 1997).

to West Germany, and, finally, as a social movement party it stands in general opposition to the *status quo*. All three features are conditioned by the party's marginal role in the unique setting of a fully established and consolidated German political system.

Hungary

A review of the current English and German literature on the Hungarian Socialist Party reveals that three different content themes have constituted the HSP's strategic vision since October 1989. The first content theme, which is currently not dominant in the party, argues for a vaguely defined "democratic socialist party" with ties to the Marxist past. This vision dominated the party until the first elections of March 1990, but has remained marginal ever since. The second and third content themes, by contrast, are currently dominant within the party leadership. The second (emerging while the party was in opposition between 1990 and 1994) argues for a traditional "European" social democratic party that represents the "unrepresented" working class voters harmed by economic transition. Since the HSP's successful 1994 election, this vision has come under challenge as a third content theme has emerged in the actions and statements of party leaders: the party as an organization of technocrats, experts, professionals and pragmatists. Taken together, all three content themes constitute a strategic vision for HSP party and government leaders that allows the party, as a governing party, to walk on a narrow tightrope between being the social democratic "protector" of the social welfare state as well as being its "technocratic" and "pragmatic" dismantler. I shall outline each of these three content themes of the strategic vision of the HSP in turn, showing the extent to which the HSP leadership differs from that of the PDS in their conception of their parties' role in society.

"Party with Roots in Marxism"

The first content theme, originally articulated by party leaders under Pozsgay and Nyers before the March 1990 election, was a notion of a party "with roots in Marxism establishing a synthesis of socialist and communist basic values" (HSP 1990 Party Program; Racz, 1993, p. 650). In a party communiqué from the first party congress in October 1989 called "the Program of the Present", the party leadership stated that the renamed Hungarian Socialist Party (HSP) was a party committed to (i) democratic socialism, (ii) protection of private property in a mixed economy and (iii) free competition of political parties (1989 Party Congress Statement, Machos, 1996, p. 14). In preparation for the first elections in March 1990, the HSP portrayed itself as party of "reformed communists" and "democratic socialists". Like the PDS, the HSP's initial attempt to redefine socialism included distancing itself from a hard-line communist past. In a 1989 party program, for example, the HSP claims, as do many PDS statements, that state socialism had not discredited socialism *per se*, because "That was no socialism" (*Ibid*, p. 15). Plagued with vagueness and a lack of operational policies in the early days of 1990, however, the HSP gained a disappointing 11 percent of the vote in the March 1990 elections. By May 1990, this attempt to construct a Marxist "democratic socialist" party out of the former ruling communist party of Hungary was abandoned by the party leadership. It ought to be noted, however, that a leftist faction, using an idiom similar to that of the East German PDS, still exists within the party as an important but not dominant group. Between 1990 and 1994, for example, the leftists within the party critiqued the party leadership for being "too subservient" to the new ruling elite (Racz, 1993, p. 653). In a 1996 "Declaration of Principles", the "Leftist Platform of the HSP" adopts Marxist language to reject "the hegemonic and property owning capacities of the so-called first world" and critiques the current HSP leadership for "simply acting as the midwife for the unrestricted development of the rule of capital and the free

market” (Hungarian Socialist Party, 1996). Since May 1990, however, such views have remained marginal in the party.

“European Social Democratic Party”

Beginning at the second party congress in May 1990, held after the party’s disappointing parliamentary election, a second content theme has emerged in the party leadership. The second party congress was by all accounts a watershed event which transformed the HSP party leadership’s conception of the party’s role in society: Rezső Nyers was replaced by the more pragmatic Gyula Horn as party chairman, and a “Social Democratic Platform” emerged after the party congress in 1990 as a dominant organization within the party. In communiqués approved at the May 1990 party congress, the party membership severed its ties with Marxism and stated that the HSP was now a “social democratic party without a dogmatic commitment to Marxism”. The same communiqué further stated that the HSP saw its “political position between conservatism and liberalism” (Racz, 1993, p. 650). The party leadership aimed after its March 1990 electoral performance to become a “rallying point for the left” and emphasized that this would involve more cooperation with the trade unions as well as an active “opposition” to the newly-elected “right-wing” government. This vision, according to Agh, was advocated by party officials in their 30s and 40s who began their political careers in the multi-party system and have a “clear leftist commitment and social sensitivity” (Agh, 1995, p. 500).

During the early 1990s, the advocates of this newly self-proclaimed social democratic party increasingly viewed their party’s opposition to the HDF’s free-market reforms as a central part of its role in post-communist Hungary. In one party statement, the party leadership asserted its conception for the party as “constructive opposition and not opposition for the sake of opposition” (Racz, 1993, p. 652). At the heart of this notion were the HSP’s actions in the national parliament. With only 33 representatives in the parliament in the 1990–1994 parliamentary session, the HSP took an extremely active opposition role, aiming to represent those who would be harmed by the difficult economic transition to a free-market economy planned by the HDF-led government. Beginning in 1990, first under the weak leadership of Pozsgay and then more actively under Zoltan Gal, the parliamentary group followed a course of opposition to the government’s parliamentary efforts of economic reform. In a 1993 study of Hungarian parliamentary voting patterns and parliamentary debates between 1990 and 1992, Barnabas Racz concludes that HSP representatives increased the intensity of their opposition to the HDF-led government during that time by taking increasingly strong oppositional stances on most legislation regarding privatization, tax law modifications, worker councils, labor regulations, and the government budget (Racz, 1993, p. 657). In contrast, the HSP parliamentarians supported the HDF’s legislation in the less contentious areas of governmental reorganization and minority rights. In preparation for the 1994 parliamentary elections, the HSP continued its emphasis on its role as the “social democratic” protector of those harmed by free-marketization. In August 1993, for example, advertisements for the HSP in *Nepszabadsag* promised a rapid improvement in living standards for all segments of the population without explaining from where the funds would come (Oltay, 1994a, p. 23). In a 1994 electoral program published by the HSP leadership, the party made promises of economic growth as well as social protection for pensioners, parents, young people and the unemployed (Oltay, 1994b, p. 25). Thus, while in opposition between 1990 and 1994, the party leadership of the HSP articulated a traditional working-class “European” social democratic conception of their party.

“Party of Experts, Technocrats and Pragmatists”

Alongside the “social democratic” conception of protecting those harmed by the difficult economic transition, a third content theme—the HSP as a party of “experts”, “pragmatists” and “technocrats”—has existed within the party since 1989 but has only become dominant since the party’s electoral victory in 1994. Advocates of this third vision of the HSP are party elites such as party chairman Gyula Horn and former finance minister Laszlo Bekesi, who are in their 50s and 60s and who at the time of the regime change became “de-ideologized technocrats” interested in “professionalizing”, “modernizing”, and “westernizing” their party and country (Àgh, 1995, p. 500). The vision of the HSP as a party of technocrats and non-ideological pragmatists has its roots, according to Csilla Machos, in current party leaders’ glorified perception of their own party’s “pragmatic heritage” and technocratic past (Machos, 1996, p. 16). In a speech before the party congress in the early 1990s, Gyula Horn argued that the former ruling communist Hungarian Socialist Worker’s Party (MSzMP) was by the mid 1980s already a party that pursued a unique “technocratic” and modernizing “Hungarian Path of Socialism” (Machos, 1996, pp. 15–16). Àgh has written of the present-day HSP that “The highest value for the party itself is expertise” (Àgh, 1995, p. 500). Likewise, in the parliamentary campaign of 1994, the HSP sold itself with slogans such as “Power to the Professionals!” (Mangott, 1995, p. 6).

Since taking office in 1994, the HSP, as a governing party under the leadership of former party “apparatchiks” such as Bekesi and foreign minister Laszlo Kovacs, has pursued a course committed to the pragmatic “modernization” of Hungary through domestic policies of free-marketization and international policies advocating integration with NATO and EU. This vision, though promising effective and efficient “socio-economic crisis management”, since 1994 has come into conflict with the party’s claim to represent working-class and traditional social democratic interests. More specifically, beginning in 1994, in coalition with the Alliance of Free Democrats (AFD), the party placed outspoken proponents of market liberalization and reduction of social expenditures in important cabinet positions. The 55-year-old László Kovacs, an HSP parliamentarian and a trained economist, was appointed Foreign Minister and Laszlo Bekesi, also an economist, was appointed Finance Minister¹⁵. Immediately after being elected, Horn favored the liberal “technocratic” faction of his cabinet, structuring government decision making to give the Minister of Finance extensive power over economic policy making (Szilagyi, 1995, p. 64). He disbanded, for example, the Finance Ministry’s natural policy counter-balance, the Ministry of International Economic Relations, allowing for the Finance Ministry to have free reign over economic policy making.

In July 1994, the HSP government first endorsed a policy package which aimed to further the free-marketization of the economy. In November 1994, the government approved a radical plan proposed by economists in the AFD and HSP to privatize sectors of the energy industry. In December 1994, the parliament approved Bekesi’s economic reform package, though Bekesi resigned in early 1995 over the “politicization” of the reform process. But the technocratic “liberal” wing of the party continued to dominate the formation of policy. Prime Minister Horn appointed another free-marketeer, Lajos Bokros, as Finance Minister. Under Bokros’ leader-

15. An examination of the distribution of cabinet positions held by the HSP and their liberal coalition partners after the 1994 elections indicates an effort to balance the party’s internal factions. Deputies representing the left-wing party platform received the Ministries of Labor, Justice and Industry and Trade, while the “pragmatic” free-market oriented wing of the HSP received those ministries which would be most important for economic reform including Ministry of Finance, Agriculture, Welfare and Foreign Affairs. See *Hungarian Observer*, Hungary’s New Government, 1994, Vol. 7, No. 7, 1994, pp. 2–4.

ship, the HSP continued to implement its “technocratic” vision. In early 1995, the HSP government announced that it aimed to follow the IMF guidelines for balancing the budget, decreasing consumption and increasing taxes to win eligibility for an IMF 3-year standby loan (Szilagy, 1995, p. 64). On March 12, 1995, later to be dubbed “Black Sunday”, Finance Minister Bokros presented his stabilization package, which proposed cuts in maternity pay, childcare benefits and university education benefits (Szilagy, 1995, p. 63). The 1995 Bokros plan stands as the clearest statement of the technocratic content theme that has dominated the party since 1994.

While certain elements of the “austerity” plan were withdrawn over the next several years and Bokros eventually resigned in early 1996, the HSP leaders have continued to implement their “professional” and “expert” vision of the party to the short-term detriment of the working class voters who supported the HSP in 1994. Opinion polls in Hungary since 1995 have consistently shown that the HSP has lost a great deal of support as a result of its policies of economic liberalization. It is clear that the HSP, marked by three contradictory content themes, has followed a narrow path between being the social democratic protector of the welfare state as well its most avid dismantler. The HSP has developed a strategic vision that has allowed the party to survive the challenge of being a governing party in an era of great economic stress.

Conclusion

A central part of the post-communist survival of ex-communist parties has been the adaptation by party leaders of the purpose, goals and self-definition of their organizations. Faced with different post-communist settings and challenges, however, no single “ex-communist” party label completely describes the political ideas and political behavior of these political parties. Only by looking behind this label can the analyst discover the impact of diverse contexts on post-communist paths of change.

This paper has identified and explained two divergent trajectories of adaptation followed by ex-communist parties in East Central Europe since 1989. As the ruling parties of East Central Europe faced the immediate demise of their regimes, all of them scrambled to find different ways of saving themselves. In East Germany as the party fell from power, it found itself in a permanently marginal position, and as a result followed a strategy of *leftist-retreat*, embracing its Marxist traditions (rejecting the free-market), repudiating West German influence, and adopting the status of anti-system opposition party. Meanwhile, in Hungary, after the party found itself in government in 1994, the leadership of the HSP, aside from a marginal leftist faction, has by contrast followed a strategy of *pragmatic-reform*, attempting to distance itself from “dogmatic Marxism” and redefining the party as a “European” social democratic party of “experts” and “pragmatists”. In short, while the PDS’ strategic vision reflects its marginal position in the German political system, the HSP’s self-identification represents an attempt to manoeuvre within the constraints imposed by its status as governing party.

Are these two strategies of adaptation—*leftist-retreat* and *pragmatic-reform*—useful in understanding the post-communist fate of other ex-communist parties across East Central Europe? And what do these categories tell us about the nature of post-communist political change? A superficial glance at the post-communist fate of two other ex-communist parties (the former ruling party of the Czech Republic and the former ruling party of Poland), does reveal the possible wider applicability of this framework. As in East Germany, the successor communist party in the Czech Republic has been forced to the margins of national politics, and has likewise embraced its Marxist past and adopted anti-system and anti-western stances. By contrast, in Poland as the ex-communist party became a governing party in 1993, the party has pursued

a strategy, that like the Hungarian ex-communist party, includes positioning itself as “social democratic” pragmatic alternative and pursuing a whole series of liberal economic reforms. Both routes of adaptation explored in this paper, though resulting in different strategic outcomes, present us with a way of understanding the nature of post-communist change. In the wake of communism’s collapse, the PDS and the HSP have neither completely transformed themselves nor simply undergone a superficial cosmetic make-over. Instead, change must be understood as a process of *syncretism*. More precisely, though reaching different outcomes, both parties have attempted to combine elements from their perceived past with ingredients of their imagined future in order to survive in what is a turbulent present.

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