

# Europeanization of Green parties in Central and Eastern Europe

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## Abstract

The paper sets up a framework to understand and further research the role of European party federations as governance and Europeanization actors in Central and Eastern Europe. The specific case is the European Green Party (EGP) and the member and associated parties in the region. From preliminary findings there are discursive, programmatic and organizational changes in the parties of the region. The research can feed into the larger Europeanization literature which so far has engaged only selectively the European Party Federations. Apparently, the EGP is in a unique position. The number of contenders, with their relative small size and weak electoral performance, makes EGP a powerful actor in relation to the CEE parties. In many cases it acts as a gatekeeper of European governance.

**Keywords:** political parties, Europeanization, European party federations, European Green Party, Green politics, Central and Eastern Europe.

## 1 Introduction

The recent institutional reforms implemented following the ratification of the Reform Treaty impacted existing EU legislative and executive politics. By emphasizing the role of the European and the national parliaments, the Reform Treaty opens up a window of opportunity for advancing the influence of European parties, including EP parliamentary groups, the European Party Federations (EPFs) and the national parties. To make use of the new opportunities, EPFs – seen here as EU governance actors – have to be able to win elections at national and European levels. Strengthening their national electoral base and improving legislative representation through their observer or member parties has been the core mission of all federations, especially in relation to the parties from candidate and member countries from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The political geography of the region is very complicated. For the purpose of this paper I include the two regions, Central and Eastern Europe and South-Eastern Europe, even though there are overlaps (Romania, Bulgaria), gaps (Ukraine) and uncertainties (Slovenia, Moldova). More importantly the intention was to include countries in different stages of EU accession (pre-candidate, including those part of the neighbourhood, candidate and member countries) and distinct parties as profile and electoral performance. In the countries of the region, EU accession has influenced both the functioning of democratic regimes and the patterns of party competition. As part of a more general governance system, the European party federations functioned as actors in relation with individual parties and less as enablers of a specific environment at a national level.

Since its debut more than two decades ago, Europeanization literature has been continuously expanding to the extent that it has become an integral part of the European integration theoretical architecture [1]. Its initial focus was on the ways member states transformed their institutions and policies as result of EU level governance [2]. After the fall of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, the EU sought to include the new and often problematic democracies, and with this produced in the literature an "Enlargement" turn. The Europeanization of party systems and parties has only recently gained a more preeminent presence in the literature, the focus being on policies and institutions directly exposed to the EU influence, for example agricultural policy or central executives. Parties, formally recognised in the form of European Party Federations in the treaties, have played an indirect role in the EU; correspondingly, the EU has placed little pressure on parties. Not surprisingly, most of the accounts indicate there is a limited EU-induced impact on the structuring and functioning of party systems, at least in the old member states [3, 4].

In CEE the expectations were different, as the party systems being in state of flux after the fall of communism. Despite these expectations, much of the literature indicates that the impact has been quite low, especially compared to the impact in the old member states [5-7]. At the system level it is hard to find clear and