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Radicalism(s) in post-communism(s)

A case-study comparison between Romania and the Czech Republic (Czechoslovakia)

Master's thesis in European Studies

Supervisor: Anna Brigevidh

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I.1. Introduction

The research question dealt with in this thesis is the following: **what made it possible to have a quite successful radical left party in the Czech Republic, while in Romania this has never been the case?** And a derivative question from this one would be: **“Why can it only be a radical right in Romania?”** Because this country seems to not have been able to form any kind of radical left movement or political force. We mainly have the case of two countries with the same historical fate in the past 70 years. Both parts of Europe as a continent, situated in the central-eastern part of it, both having experienced an authoritarian-based Communist ruling for almost 40 years, both members of the European Union (EU) and of NATO in the decades following the break-up of the USSR. Given their apparently common destiny, what have been the conditions that allowed the creation of such different party orientations in these two countries? We will be looking at the historical context the countries went through, their political systems, the origins, and the development of the radical left and right parties, together with the factors contributing to the successes or failures, from the perspective of a comparative case-study analysis.

Europe, as a continent, is not (and has never been) a uniform gathering of countries and populations. Indeed, the late globalization trend has brought a more exacerbated relocation of groups of people from other countries (both internal and external) within these new, somehow fluid European borders. But for centuries, Europe has been known as the cradle of national states, that fought with each other long and exhausting wars. Even in the ‘modern’ times, the 21st century that proclaimed the European Union, this space of potentially equal countries, we could find various opinions about multi-speed Europe, or centrifugal Europe, all of these suggesting that Europe is not the same everywhere, and that there are different kinds of Europe that could more or less peacefully co-exist. All these thoughts are not just random justifications of policies or moods certain politicians were expressing at one point or another, but rather the consequences of a historical reality that has been in place for the most part of the 20th century – the division between a Western and an Eastern Europe, with the Iron Curtain delimitating the two completely opposite regions: the democratic West versus the communist East. These two areas, well-separated economically and ideologically, still have problems adapting to each other’s lifestyles and perceiving the surrounding geopolitical or social realities. After 1990, the

region east of the Iron Curtain (most of Central and Eastern Europe) entered a difficult period of transition (from a communist organization to the capitalist one), called post-communism.

Political parties had thus no easy life, to catch contour and to form themselves as democratic tools. They were born (in the post-communist region) out of the remnants of a unique, powerful Communist Party, that knew no competition with other parties. The internal mechanisms were not completely transparent or democratic, so the newer parties in the 1990s did not have the exercise of democratic ruling or the right experience in doing so, and this leads to the observation that their behaviour on the new democratic stage might be different from that of the other similar political forces from the West of Europe. In other words, what fits the West does not fit the East, and vice versa.

Political parties are decisive entities for the future of a country, for its short-, medium- and long-term policies and geostrategic orientation. These forces tend to manifest different and often opposite views, which have been conventionally measured on a scale from the (far)right to the (far)left, or the other way around. The fact that even small changes in the system could lead to big consequences in political life is very important to make us understand that analyzing the tendencies is useful in overcoming the unexpected surprise and turmoil in the political life of a nation.

In the following, we will be dealing with the question of why ideologically similar parties in the post-communist region of Europe have not arisen in a similar manner in both Romania and the Czech Republic? Why are we interested in these two countries? Mainly due to the fact that while going through the same transformations during the last century, only one of them (the Czech Republic) managed to host a pretty much successful radical left political party (the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia – CPBM), while in Romania the traces of a radical left not only did not have any important electoral success, but they have been almost non-existent on the political scene.

I.2. Chapters outline

The study will discuss the general theories of radical left and right parties because it is extremely important to understand especially the differences between the two main sides of radicalism. In the literature review, we will make the distinction between radicalism and extremism, because these notions are sometimes used interchangeably, and this is not entirely correct. Plus, radicalism can coexist with democratic societies, while extremism is a scourge for a modern society.

We will then analyze the features of radical parties, from the whole political spectrum, from left to right. We cannot pass by it without mentioning the classical ideas from the primary communist literature, as they managed to influence the behaviour of all radical left forces, including the biggest ones from central and eastern Europe, namely the Communist parties.

In another chapter, we will be dealing with radicalism in post-communist times, both in the Czech Republic, where the radical left has managed to survive the fall of communism and continued to generate some influence at the societal level. In Romania, on the other side, the left was practically somehow “confiscated” by the new party emanating from the revolution, and there was no place for a more leftist force. Now, more than 30 years later, the situation has not changed much.

Another chapter will be dedicated to the historical conditions and context in which Czechoslovakia and Romania found themselves under communist rule, as well as their historical course after the revolutions of 1989. This could help us extract the potential causes that made the radical left successful in one country and fail in the other. We will thus be trying to offer answers to the research question: **“what made it possible to have a quite successful radical left party in the Czech Republic, while in Romania this has never been the case?”** and to its derivative, **“Why it is only possible to have a radical right in Romania?”** This will leave room for some conclusive statements, at the end of the study.

I.3. Research question

This research question concerns the factors that have brought the success of a radical left party in the Czech Republic, while such a party has not been successful in Romania. Some potential factors that could be explored are the historical and political context of each country, such as the legacy of communism, the role of civil society, the influence of media, the structure of the political system, as well as the relations between the left and other political forces.

A comparative analysis of the Czech and Romanian cases could also illustrate the conditions that facilitate the success of radical left parties in post-communist societies, as well as the problems they face in building popular support and achieving political influence. The research question could also have broader implications for understanding the dynamics of political change in transitional democracies (from authoritarian communism to free-market democracy) and the place of left-wing movements in a global context.

Radical left parties are not the same everywhere, of course. It is thus beneficial to check what happens when the parties engage in processes to establish an identity and secure a position in competition with other parties. Of course, context is also important when dealing with position shifts on critical matters, but often the task to correlate the specific event with the change in position and/or policy is not easy to spot. This is also a reason for the scarcity of available scientific literature on such punctual party comparisons in different countries, the type we are trying to propose in this study. Regarding the analysis of political parties in Romania, much of what it can be found in the scientific articles looks outdated, being mentioned political parties that do not even exist anymore, among several other issues. As far as we can tell, direct comparisons between the Czech Republic and Romania have not taken place yet at the level of political parties.

Of course, extending the analysis to some other countries and other types of political vectors would have required a much more thorough approach, which is not suitable under the current limitations of time and space, and which represents a limitation of this study. At the same time, the extension of the analyzed period, though generally useful when it comes to spotting a general development trend of the political system, would have met the same opposition of time and space and would have complicated the analysis much beyond its current scope.

I.4. Justification of the study and inherent limitations

Lots have been written about both far-right (more) and far-left (less) political parties, in general. But a completely different fate of the radical left in a country-to-country setting is a rarer approach, which deserves a closer look. First, it helps not compare “apples and oranges”, as it would have been in the case of mixing right and left in East and West of Europe, or even to treat far left as generally the same in the two regions. Secondly, both Romania and the Czech Republic are members of the European Union, so their attitude is somehow monitored by the European institutions, and their activity can be framed in common working rules. Both countries had a Communist past. The economy of each, under the rule of the Communist Party, was fully centralized, with little to nothing left for private enterprise. Both countries had to overcome this centralization of production and get themselves a place in the capitalist economy, which other democratic Western states were already experienced in mastering.

Thus, this study is ready to offer an empirical approach, not just a purely theoretical one, as if the parties would operate in a vacuum and only in ideal conditions. The empirical part is needed

to better understand the multiple challenges a political party must encounter, no matter if it stands in government or in opposition.

Of course, there are some inherent limitations when dealing with specific regions, and not the whole of Europe; but some of the far-left traits encountered in these countries could partially be generalized to other radical left parties within the European space; why have been chosen these particular two countries? They have some things in common: firstly, to our knowledge, there are no comparative studies between these two countries at the level of the radical left; secondly, the countries have in common the communist past and it is interesting to see how they pursue out of it in a different manner. The idea is to analyze what made the two countries different, given their recent historic background, but also what they may still share in common.

II. Radicalism-extremism. What do we understand by these? Literature review

Radical refers to the intent to transform or replace the fundamental principles of a society or political system, often through social change, structural change, revolution, or radical reform, and the process of adapting radical views is called radicalisation¹. The etymology goes back to Latin, where “radix” means “root”, and whatever it covered during the centuries, it has kept the meaning of “changing from the root”, which implies a profound and complete change of structure or status quo. Radicals can be both people with a taste for significant reforms, in a democratic way, but also revolutionaries who are considered by history among the most bloody-thirst dictators. What can people be protesting against? There is a whole array of topics, ranging from anti-capitalist and anti-imperialism policies or attitudes (in the case of radical left), to anti-immigration and xenophobic mindsets (in the case of radical right). Some scholars² warn us about the distinctions between radicalism and extremism; some of the elements may be useful for explaining the distinctions between our political parties later in the study. While it is true that both forms can find themselves at the edge of democratic societies and not the favourite solutions in the modern world, radicalism tend to use violence more pragmatically, towards specific targets, while extremism considers this a justified tool to impose its will on the others³. Extremism in its nature is anti-democratic, seeking to abolish the rule of law, and

¹ Pugh, M. (2009). *What is Radical Politics Today?* Palgrave MacMillan

² Boetticher, A. (2017). “Towards Academic Consensus Definitions of Radicalism and Extremism”, in *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 73-77

³ *Idem*, p. 75

is intolerant towards any other ideologies⁴. While the extremists contest the notion of universal human rights and the correlated institutions, the radicals have sought, in different historical moments, to give rights to the most underprivileged in society⁵. Radicalism does not seek to kill all ideas and different opinions within a society, while extremism is extreme in both the goals and the ways to reach for those goals⁶. While if in small numbers and ineffective for change, the radicals will isolate themselves from society and continue as a niche culture, while extremists will always keep up an aggressive stance⁷. The morality of radicalism tends to be universal, while for extremism it is only valid to its members⁸. Another important aspect in our analysis, “the concept of extremism is closely linked to authoritarian dictatorships and totalitarianism” [...], radicalism has been more egalitarian and less elitist while extremists are supremacists opposed to the sovereignty of common people⁹. Also, radicalism is historically linked more to the reasoning and the idea of human progress, while on the contrary, extremism is perceived as a religious, fanatic, irrational system of belief¹⁰. This analysis clearly shows that in a region such as the European Union, analyzing political parties even from a post-communist area, it is almost impossible to talk about extremism, and all the manifestations of status quo challenges are in fact signs of a radical way of thinking, which can be framed and imagined well enough inside a democratic life.

II.1. What are the features of radical parties?

II.1.1. Of right-wing

This cannot be answered without dividing the scale of the radicality, exactly like in the case of the great scale left to right. There are two types of radical parties, the radical left parties, and the radical right parties. Even if the number of parties and their characteristics are extremely varied, one can simply gather all the parties into these two distinctive, opposite groups. It can be useful in this place to talk about the differences between the two main extremes, right and left, because it is obvious that they are different, even if we can often think about the myth that says that the two get eventually to meet each other if we were to look at these in a three-dimensional, geometrical perspective.

⁴ *Ibidem*

⁵ *Ibidem*

⁶ *Ibidem*

⁷ *Ibidem*

⁸ *Idem*, 76

⁹ *Ibidem*

¹⁰ *Ibidem*

The extreme right is much better represented in the scientific literature (and also on the political stage, it seems), and has as its most important feature an exclusionist, ethno-nationalist notion of citizenship, expressed by the slogan ‘own people first’¹¹. Thus, the native individual is shown to have more value than the stranger, than the one who comes into the country and threatens the unity of the nation-state. This can be available for both persons and ideas¹². The attitude of these political forces is mostly against immigration in general, and against cultural diversity, and they are very outspoken about this. Interestingly enough, this definition does not fit very well with the radical right from Eastern Europe; there, the anti-stance is situated more toward ethnic minorities such as the Roma people, or against territorial revisionism raised by some neighbouring countries. For Mudde, there are also two other features that manifest themselves in the case of radical right parties: populism and authoritarianism. Populism is the strategy through which the party elites position themselves together with the ‘people’ against an establishment that is considered corrupt and far away from people’s real needs, while ‘authoritarianism implies stressing themes like law and order and traditional values’¹³. Of course, authoritarianism is not a unique feature of the radical right, because also the Communist states (that were rather far-left, according to the main scale) were very authoritarian (with the meaning of dictatorial, but not limited to that) and the traditional family values were easily comparable with the strictness of the today’s Conservative parties. Nevertheless, if it is true that populism is a ‘matter of degree’¹⁴, and that there is no ‘either-or’ logic¹⁵, the same goes for authoritarianism: there are different measures for one’s love of law and order, going from the maximal Communist surveillance to the softer, often invisible security of nowadays. What some scholars have discovered in the less-studied region of post-communist Eastern Europe is that some radical right parties from there, like in Poland or Hungary, can expose more radical positions than some of their Western counterparts¹⁶. Surprisingly again, a similar party is hard to be found in Romania after the disappearance of the ‘Greater Romania’ party, which has been practically kept alive by its charismatic leader, until his death.

¹¹ Betz, H.-G. (1994). *Radical Right-wing Populism in Western Europe*. New York: St. Martin’s Press; Rydgren, J. (2005a). “Is extreme right-wing populism contagious? Explaining the emergence of a new party family”, in *European Journal of Political Research*, 44(3), 413-437.

¹² Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press.

¹³ Muis, J, Immerzeel T (2017). “Causes and consequences of the rise of populist radical parties and movements in Europe”, in *Current Sociology Review*, Vol. 65(6), 909-930, 911

¹⁴ Pauwels Teun (2011) “Measuring Populism: A Quantitative Text Analysis of Party Literature in Belgium”, in *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 21:1, 97-119

¹⁵ Mudde, C. (2007). *Op. cit.*

¹⁶ Inglehart, Ronald F. and Norris, Pippa (2016). *Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash*. HKS Working Paper No. RWP16-026

It is undeniable that, for a radical party to exist, there is a need for an electorate to support it. In Romania, the best result of a radical (right) party after 1989 was to qualify in the ‘final’ of the presidential elections, in 2000, while in the same year, the party obtained second place in the parliament as well. What happened during those years, from 2000 to 2004-2008, where did all (radical) votes go, given the fact that there was no other similar party on the whole political stage? Probably this can explain be explained the decrease in the turnout at the general or presidential elections, with too many people feeling not represented by anyone, up to the point they gave up participation. At the same time, studies including Eastern European countries¹⁷ still do not offer a satisfactory explanation about why people have ever voted for radical parties since in Romania there was never a big topic related to immigration, or law and order, these themes belonging in a much more measure to the Western political discourse; one explanation for this could be connected to the economic immigration, and this phenomenon targeted more the richer countries in the West. It is possible to speculate that between 2004 and 2019 (the date of birth of the new potential radical right party – AUR: The Alliance for the Union of Romanians) the demand for such type of party was very low in Romania, and therefore there was no supply either. If one thinks about the conditions that made possible the re-creation of such a party, in late 2019, one hardly gets any clues, except for a total disinterest and mistrust of people toward their elected and established politicians. The party, not even one year after its constituency, managed to score 9.1% in the general elections, getting 33 seats in parliament (Parties and Elections in Europe). Newer opinion polls estimate its ‘value’ at between 20 and 25% at the next general elections, in 2024.¹⁸ This is already a very high number for Romania, where such a score could guarantee the second place.

There are scholars who proved that radical parties benefit from news coverage¹⁹. While it can be true that media channels offer the possibility of being more visible, at the same time media controlled by the establishment would do whatever it takes to strangle the good news about the opponents; nevertheless, bad publicity is still (useful) publicity, since it still means visibility. Besides, people mistrusting the establishment will automatically express doubts about news coming from sources close to the current establishment. This way, news coverage is a double-

¹⁷ Allen, T. J. (2017). “All in the party family? Comparing far right voters in Western and Post-Communist Europe”, in *Party Politics*, 23(3), 274–285.

¹⁸ PressHub (2023). Cat are de fapt AUR in sondaje, retrieved at: presshub.ro/cat-are-de-fapt-aur-in-sondaje-o-informatie-ascunsa-publicului-265511/

¹⁹ Vliegthart, Rens & Boomgaarden, Hajo & van Spanje, Joost. (2012). “Anti-Immigrant Party Support and Media Visibility: A Cross-Party, OverTime Perspective”, in *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion & Parties*, 22, 1-44. 10.1080/17457289.2012.693933.

edged weapon when used against a real or alleged radical party, an observation supported also by other scholars²⁰.

It is the same with the prosecution of radical movements or party members, or the cordon sanitaire, as studied by Akkerman et al., 2016²¹. It is not clear if the popular support is getting undermined by such extreme measures, or if not, on the contrary, the people rally around the leader.

Muis and Immerzeel (2017) argue that besides external factors, there are also internal factors to be considered in the success of the radical right parties. One of them is the role of ideology, which is to find the ‘winning’ combination between the exclusionist, authoritarian positions, and the liberal, pro-market ones²². But the reality of this assessment does not entirely work for Romania since there the alleged new radical party seems to have a less pro-market attitude and incline more to the central role of the state in managing the country’s natural resources, for example, according to the party program.²³

As for the charismatic personality, even though scholars seem to disregard its benefices²⁴, this can help the party to achieve some support, at least for a limited time, but often enough to secure some good scores or places in parliaments. It is common, for example in Romania, that the most charismatic leader of a party to run for the presidential elections, only to help people better remember the party he or she represents. This is what happened with the Romanian party “Greater Romania” in the 2000s, with its charismatic C.V. Tudor. After the death of its leader, in 2015, the party almost ceased to exist.

As long as a radical party does not give up democratic values and the rule of law, it should not be boycotted or threatened with various interdictions, because it does not delve into the extremist side. Therefore, even if some scholars observe that this kind of parties appeal more to passion than to rationality²⁵, this per se is not something that is inherently wrong and illegal, but more often a weapon (of the weaker) to fight against the strong political establishment. Of

²⁰ Jasper Muis (2015). “The Rise and Demise of the Dutch Extreme Right: Discursive Opportunities and Support for the Center Democrats in the 1990s”, in *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*; 20 (1): 41–60. doi: <https://doi.org/10.17813/maiq.20.1.f211773qm103w030>

²¹ Akkerman Tjitske, de Lange Sarah L., Rooduijn Matthijs (eds.) (2016). *Radical right-wing populist parties in Western Europe. Into the mainstream?* Routledge, London and New York

²² Muis J, Immerzeel T (2017). *Op. cit.*, 916

²³ Party program of AUR, retrieved at: partidulaur.ro/program/

²⁴ Eatwell R. (2005). “Charisma and the Revival of the European Extreme Right”, in J. Rydgren (Ed.), *Movements of Exclusion: Radical Right-Wing Populism in the Western World*, Nova Science Publishers.

²⁵ Mouffe Chantal (2005). *On the political*, Routledge

course, it is easy to be accused of populism, but not only the radical parties are populist, especially in places like Eastern Europe, where usually peoples' votes can be 'bought' with quite a little. Mainstream parties and radical parties can play the same game of electoral promises, or even some 'gifts' before the elections (like raising the pensions, or the money allowances for children), not to speak about the more trivial and unfortunately sad experiences from the day of elections, where some people can receive bottles of oil, sugar, or flour from parties' members or supporters, in order to influence their votes. Even the very mainstream parties have been accused of such populist actions, so it is not fair to 'award' populist tags only to radical parties. In countries where people do not yet have a high standard of living, it is highly probable that many other parties would incline to populist acts because doing otherwise would make them lose some important votes. As van Kessel observes²⁶, if some shares of the electorate are lost, even reverting later to the same agenda as the populists might not fill all the holes.

Cas Mudde (2007) considers that nativism and nationalism together offer a minimal definition for a radical right party. For a maximal definition, authoritarianism and populism can be added to the picture, together with other elements such as exclusionism, militaristic state, etc.²⁷. The idea is that it might not be enough to tag a political party simply as a radical one but to introduce it in a classification based on a lot of other factors and variables. Things can get even more complicated when making the distinction between populist radical parties and non-populist radical parties. Anyway, the example that the author uses in the case of Romania is already old, with the populist party mentioned there almost being disappeared nowadays. Actually, I would say that the book does not entirely succeed in showing the relevant distinction between the populist and non-populist radical parties. There are many parties that can swiftly change the categories and even the whole political behaviour even from year to year, not to mention if they prepare to be in office as part of a government coalition or to remain in the opposition (with potentially more leverage to get extreme and attack the establishment), as it has been explained before.

In an article from December 2016, Matthjis Rooduijn notes that mainstream established parties tend to lately take more oppressive measures themselves, because they value more security over rights²⁸. In the same tone, even back in 2012, he discovered that mainstream parties adopt

²⁶ Van Kessel Stijn (2015). *Populist parties in Europe: Agents of discontent?*, Springer

²⁷ Mudde Cas (2007). *Op. cit.*

²⁸ Rooduijn Matthjis (2016). "World View. Simply studying populism is no longer enough", in *Nature*, vol. 540, 317

more and more populist attitudes and that the populist message is even more widespread than it was thought before. As we have shown before, it even happens in the case of mainstream parties from areas where the distribution of wealth is more inegalitarian. This confirms once again the power of attraction of the populist message²⁹.

Some authors tend to see a discrepancy between the themes invoked by radical right parties in Western Europe compared to those from Eastern Europe, which is of high interest to us since the two countries we are analyzing are from two geographically different regions of Europe – Czech is more Central-European, while Romania East-European. These authors point out that in the West there are more concerns about the identity of the ethnic majority versus the immigration rates and multiculturalism challenges, while in the East getting imposed quotas of refugees tends to remind about multiple historic humiliations when decisions had been dictated from outside³⁰. Therefore, the inner struggle of the electorate in Romania is directed more toward those imposing it (like, for example, the EU Commission), and toward those accepting it, often unconditionally (like the Government of Romania), rather than against immigrants themselves, or people belonging to a different cultural background. This has been also seen recently, in the crisis of Ukrainian refugees, where Romanian people heartily welcomed the foreigners without further ado, even before being certain if they would receive any compensation from the government for doing so. This is why we tend to agree with the scholars saying that the West and the East are divided over topics such as immigration, nativism, or nationalism. Nationalism in Romania tends to be related more to territorial integrity and the fear of losing such territories (the case with the Hungarian minority in Transylvania who time and again declare its wish for ‘cultural autonomy’ and is every time rejected by Bucharest; or the case of not recognizing Kosovo as an independent entity, due to the same fears). Romanian nationalism does not manifest itself otherwise, in a more active way, not even concerning Romanian territories (for example, Northern Bukovina) that have become parts of other neighbouring countries.

From the point of view of the current thesis, it is not necessary to delve more into the whole debate populists-extremists, because usually radical left parties can be considered populist in their electoral promises, often seen as ideals without clear financing sources in practice. Also,

²⁹ Rooduijn Matthjis (2014). “The Mesmerizing Message: The Diffusion of Populism in Public Debates in Western European Media”, in *Political Studies*, Vol. 62, 726-744 (741)

³⁰ Bonikowski Bart et al. (2018). “Populism and nationalism in a comparative perspective: a scholarly exchange”, in *Nations and Nationalism*, 1-24

this alone cannot explain the big discrepancy between the success of the radical left in the Czech Republic and its almost complete failure in Romania.

Akkerman and Rooduijn (2015) found that ostracized parties (those who are hindered from participating in the government or holding public offices) do not necessarily either radicalize or moderated their positions in the last decades. They tend to be flexible and often shift the focus of their agenda. Anyway, the non-ostracized parties, contrary to the expectations, did not manage to moderate their positions³¹. Also, they found that differences in position between ostracized and non-ostracized parties have gotten closer over time. But no strategy, be it that of inclusion and cooperation, or ostracism did not induce de-radicalization, according to the authors³². We cannot really test that in Romania's case, since the alleged precursor of AUR – the party Greater Romania – was not really in the office during its existence. But nonetheless, throughout its history, it has never changed the attitude towards the party of the Hungarian ethnics, which the party leader did not even consider to be a party, often saying that it is only an illegal, non-statutory group of interests that undermine the Romanian state³³. It is worth remembering that PRM (Greater Romania), in its short European existence, has been an associated member of different radical or extremist parties around Europe. In the 2009 European elections, the party managed to score 8.65%, which allowed it to get 3 seats in the European parliament. Despite the Europeanization, the party has preserved the same hard line against Hungarians and also its Antisemitic posture; the name speaks for itself: 'Greater Romania' represents the dream of annexing all the territories where Romanians are living, even if those belong already to other states.

Who likes to vote for such parties, that would rather destabilize the status quo than secure a much-needed societal stability? According to some scholars, we should be keeping in mind that there are more the distrusting, cynical, and tough-minded those who are more prone to fall prey to the anti-establishment messages coming from radical parties³⁴. The so-called losers of globalization (people who did not find special advantages in the current establishment), together with people disappointed with the mainstream parties, who want to finally see a

³¹ Akkerman T, Rooduijn M (2014). "Pariahs or Partners? Inclusion and Exclusion of Radical Right Parties and the Effects on their Policy Positions", in *Political Studies*, Volume 63 Issue 5, 1140-1157 (1153)

³² *Idem*, 1154

³³ Ziare.com (2012). Vadim Tudor: Nu vom colabora cu PDL si UDMR, retrieved at: ziare.com/corneliu-vadim-tudor/prm/vadim-tudor-nu-vom-colabor-a-cu-pdl-si-udmr-1152709

³⁴ Bakker B et al. (2020). "The Populist Appeal: Personality and Anti-establishment Communication", in *The Southern Political Science Association*, preprint, 1-106 (2)

change, no matter how dangerous this change could be to both individuals and society. Opinion polls institutes suggest that people with less education are more prone to vote for populist or other radical parties, who can “buy” their vote with little³⁵. The same institutions showed that rural areas vote more for the social democrats, while city areas with the liberals; this is due to an inclination of the rural area for preserving traditional values of life, and because such a conservative party usually lacks in Romania; or, if it exists, it is paradoxically not very well received in the rural areas, being usually formed by business people, many of them educated abroad. At the same time, it would be understandable for such people to vote for a radical left party but – surprise again! – there is no such party in Romania. After the dissolution of the Communist Party in the last 1989, the denomination ‘communist’ has been seen as a shame and even though a radical left party is not necessarily a communist one, the other parties have not been eager to assume the ‘heavy inheritance’ and distanced themselves completely from the left wing, no matter how useful an equilibrium is necessary on the right-wing scale and for the well-being of the electors. This is why the rural people have been eventually left only with the social democrats (meanwhile turned into a center-left party), who far from being the ideal conservatives, looked more moderated than the capitalist businessmen from the right side, and are easier convinced to promote more social equality.

When it comes to analyzing the discourse’s content, Rooduijn (2011) proposes a mix of classical (human) and computer-based methods, because both have strong and weak points, if taken separately³⁶. However, given the fact that in the current study, we will be dealing with two non-English speaking countries, the power of the software to identify good linguistic key points and highlights would not be as developed as if the texts (or discourses) had been originally in English. Therefore, I have chosen the human method of identifying content as belonging to a radical right or to a radical left approach, that is my personal discernment and appreciation of the context from which to grasp the main positions of the parties involved in

³⁵ Wall-Street.ro (2018). Exclusiv cu Dan Barna, USR: Raul cel mai mare? Am inceput sa acceptam sa fim condusi de infractori, retrieved at: www.wall-street.ro/articol/Politic/235889/exclusiv-cu-dan-barna-usr-raul-cel-mai-mare-am-inceput-sa-acceptam-sa-fim-condusi-de-infractori.html; Hotnews.ro (2016). Sunt ajutoarele alimentare acordate in plina campanie de primarii care si candideaza mita electorala? Cum raspund Autoritatea Electorala Permanenta si Biroul Electoral Central, retrieved at: www.hotnews.ro/stiri-alegeri_locale_2016_craiova-21014931-sunt-ajutoarele-alimentare-acordate-plina-campanie-primarii-care-candideaza-mita-electorala-cum-raspund-autoritatea-electorala-permanenta-biroul-electoral-central.htm

³⁶ Rooduijn Matthijs & Pauwels Teun (2011). “Measuring Populism: Comparing Two Methods of Content Analysis”, in *West European Politics*, 34:6, 1272-1283

the analysis. We will be dealing with materials translated from original Czech (with help from software) and from Romanian (by myself).

II.1.2. Of left-wing

To better understand the origins of Communist radicalism, we will be looking at what the first theorists of the Communist movement thought about society at that moment and how to further spread Communist ideas.

The Communist Manifesto, written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, was first published in 1848. It is a political pamphlet that lays out the principles and goals of communism as a social and economic system. The Manifesto argues that history is shaped by class struggles between the bourgeoisie, the wealthy and powerful ruling class, and the proletariat, the working class that is exploited by the bourgeoisie.

Marx and Engels argue that the capitalist system is inherently unjust, creating deep inequalities between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. They propose that the only way to overcome these inequalities is to abolish private property and establish a society without classes in which the workers would own and control the means of production. They believe that this would ensure a more equal and just society in which there is no top-down exploitation by the upper class.

The Communist Manifesto has had a profound impact on political and economic thought, and it remains a key text in the history of communism and socialist theory. Its ideas have inspired numerous revolutionary movements and continue to shape debates about the role of government and the distribution of wealth in contemporary society.³⁷

"The Principles of Communism" is a short work written by Friedrich Engels in 1847. It was intended as a brief introduction to the ideas of communism for those who were interested in learning more about the theory.

Engels begins by defining communism as a social system in which the means of production are collectively owned and controlled by the people. He argues that private property is the root

³⁷ Marx Karl; Engels Friedrich (1848). "The Communist Manifesto", retrieved at: www.marxists.org/admin/books/manifesto/Manifesto.pdf

of all inequality and exploitation in society, and that communism is the only system that can create a truly equal society.

Engels then describes the history of class struggle and the development of capitalism. He argues that capitalism creates an ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor, and that it is characterized by the exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class.

In the communist system, Engels argues, the working class will control the means of production and will be free from the exploitation of the capitalist class. There will be no need for money, as goods and services will be produced and distributed according to need rather than profit.

Engels also addresses some common criticisms of communism. He argues that communism is not a threat to individual freedom, as the abolition of private property will actually increase individual freedom and eliminate the alienation that comes with working under capitalism. He also argues that communism is not a utopian ideal, but rather a scientifically grounded theory that is based on an analysis of historical and social conditions.

In the final section of the text, Engels outlines the basic principles of communism. He argues that the goals of communism are the elimination of private property, the abolition of the wage system, and the establishment of a society capable of meeting the needs of all people. He also emphasizes the importance of international cooperation and the need for the working class to unite across national boundaries.³⁸

"Socialism: Utopian and Scientific" is a work written by Friedrich Engels in 1880. It provides an overview of the historical development of socialist thought and argues that socialism is not a utopian ideal but rather a scientific theory.

Engels begins by discussing the development of socialist thought prior to the 19th century. He argues that early socialist thinkers were "utopian" in their approach, as they envisioned a perfect society based on abstract ideals rather than concrete analysis of social and economic conditions. These utopian socialists believed that a perfect society could be achieved through moral persuasion and education, rather than through a fundamental restructuring of society.

³⁸ Engels Friedrich (1847). "The Principles of Communism", retrieved at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/principles-communism.pdf>

Engels then discusses the emergence of scientific socialism in the mid-19th century. Scientific socialism, he argues, is based on a materialist analysis of history and society. It recognizes that social and economic conditions are shaped by material factors such as production and distribution, rather than by abstract moral principles.

Engels emphasizes the key principles of scientific socialism. He argues that the capitalist system is characterized by the exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class, and that the only way to overcome this exploitation is to abolish private property and establish a system in which the means of production are owned and controlled by the people.

Engels also discusses the role of the state in socialist society. He believes that the state is a product of class society, and that in a socialist society the state will eventually wither away as class distinctions are eliminated. This process will be facilitated by the establishment of a "dictatorship of the proletariat," in which the working class takes control of the state and uses it to suppress the former ruling class.

Finally, Engels discusses the relationship between scientific socialism and other forms of socialism. He argues that scientific socialism is not opposed to other forms of socialist thought, but rather builds on them and provides a more rigorous and scientific analysis of the historical and economic conditions that shape society.

Overall, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific" provides an overview of the development of socialist thought and argues that socialism is not a utopian ideal but a scientifically grounded theory.³⁹

"The Reform or Revolution" is a political treatise written by Rosa Luxemburg in 1899, which outlines her argument against reformism and in favor of revolutionary socialism.

Luxemburg begins by criticizing the idea that gradual reforms within the capitalist system can lead to socialism. She argues that this idea is based on a flawed understanding of the nature of capitalism, which is inherently exploitative and oppressive. She argues that reforms within the capitalist system can only provide temporary relief for workers and do not fundamentally challenge the power of the ruling class.

³⁹ Engels Friedrich (1880). "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific", retrieved at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/soc-utop/index.htm>

Instead, Luxemburg argues that the only way to achieve socialism is through a revolutionary struggle that overthrows the capitalist system. She argues that this struggle must be led by the working class and that the ultimate goal should be the establishment of a socialist society in which the means of production are collectively owned and controlled.

Luxemburg also criticizes the idea that socialism can be achieved through the ballot box or through parliamentary means. She argues that the ruling class will never willingly give up their power and that the state is a tool of class oppression that cannot be used to achieve socialist ends. Instead, Luxemburg argues that the working class must use revolutionary means, including strikes, mass protests, and ultimately armed struggle, to overthrow the capitalist system.

Finally, Luxemburg discusses the importance of international solidarity among workers in the struggle for socialism. She argues that capitalism is a global system and logically, the struggle against it must also be global. She calls for the establishment of an international socialist movement that will cooperate to overthrow the capitalist system and establish a socialist society.

Overall, "The Reform or Revolution" is a critique of reformism and a call to action for revolutionary socialism. Luxemburg argues that gradual reforms within the capitalist system are not enough to achieve socialism and that the only way to truly challenge the power of the ruling class is through a revolutionary struggle.⁴⁰

"State and Revolution" is a political treatise written by Vladimir Lenin in 1917, in the midst of the Russian Revolution. The work outlines Lenin's vision for the role of the state in a socialist society and provides a critique of traditional socialist and Marxist views on the state.

Lenin begins by arguing that the state is a tool of class oppression, designed to maintain the power of the ruling class. He states that in a socialist society, the state must be fundamentally transformed in order to serve the interests of the working class. He envisions a state that is based on the principle of "all power to the Soviets," or worker and peasant councils, rather than on a centralized government.

⁴⁰ Luxemburg Rosa (1899). "Reform or Revolution", retrieved at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/>

Lenin also argues that the traditional Marxist view of the state, as outlined by Karl Marx in "The Communist Manifesto," is outdated and insufficient. Marx believed that the state would wither away in a socialist society, but Lenin argues that this is not possible without a revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie. He also argues that the concept of a "transitional state" is necessary in the period between the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of a fully socialist society.

Lenin then discusses the role of the proletariat in the establishment of a socialist state. He argues that the proletariat must be organized into a highly disciplined and centralized political party, which will serve as the vanguard of the revolution. This party must be led by professional revolutionaries who are dedicated to the cause of socialism.

Overall, "State and Revolution" outlines Lenin's vision for the role of the state in a socialist society and provides a critique of traditional Marxist views on the state. The work is an important text in the history of socialist thought and provides insights into the political and ideological debates of the Russian Revolution.⁴¹

The literature dedicated to radical left parties is otherwise sensibly scarcer. For the main focus of this thesis, it is important to differentiate the position of the radical left on the left to the right scale. Of course, the radical left is more to the left of the Green and social-democratic movements. Some definitory traits of such parties would consist in the rejection of many capitalist practices, depending on how radical a left party is (from rejecting consumerism to attacking private property or the idea of profit). They are anti-elites and promote a different type of economy, with a major resource redistribution from the ones who have more to the ones who have less, and in doing so they manifest anticapitalistic feelings, much more than anti-democratic ones⁴².

Luke March (2011) proposes the following definition: "RLP's are *radical* first in that they reject the underlying socio-economic structure of contemporary capitalism and its values and practices (ranging, depending on party, from rejection of consumerism and neo-liberalism to outright opposition to private property and capitalistic profit incentives). Second, they advocate alternative economic and power structures involving a major redistribution of resources from

⁴¹ Lenin V. I. (1917). *The State and Revolution: The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution*, retrieved at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/>

⁴² Venizelos, G. (2020). "Left-wing populism? In Europe? Yes, please!", in *Eur Polit Sci* **19**, 687–689. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-020-00244-3>

existing political elites. RLPs are *left* first in their identification of economic inequality as a basis of existing political and social arrangements and their espousal of collective economic and social rights as their principal agenda)⁴³. In his book, March has found no Romanian radical left party to analyze, and this shows that the country has detached quite a lot from its Communist past, speaking strictly from this point of view.

We have terminological issues when it comes to radical left parties as well. Radicalism often echoes extremism, according to some scholars, and this has increased the sensitivity after 9/11 when radicalism and extremism used interchangeably have gained a newer semantic association with terrorism. According to Mudde (2007), we could judge extremism as being anti-democratic per se, while radicalism is anti-liberal democratic only, which makes it easier to perceive these radical parties not as a threat to the democratic life, but only a threat to the (neo)-liberal establishment they want to change⁴⁴.

Communism has not been outlawed in Romania. But nowadays there is not even one single parliamentary force to the left of the current social-democratic party. So, when analyzing such parties, one must definitely keep into account the communist past of the countries in Eastern Europe, which has brought with it an almost complete public mistrust in such leftist political attitudes. Regarding this issue, Charamboulos and Lamprianou (2015) state that radical left parties experience more political distrust than social-democratic parties. These have worked on shaping their new ideology to fit less the left, and more the center, as it felt shameful and non-profitable to represent ‘the past’⁴⁵.

In France, for example, Raynaud (2006), while analyzing the presidential elections from 2002, observes that the failure of the leftist (social democratic) candidate Lionel Jospin to reach the second tour was largely caused by the existence of other smaller forces, but more to the left and more radical, that managed to take many votes from Jospin⁴⁶. In Romania, such a scenario is not realistic since all parties positioned themselves as closer to the center as possible, probably with the main idea to get the most out of the two sides, and with the hope of convincing a larger share of the electorate.

⁴³ March Luke (2011). *Radical Left Parties in Europe*. Routledge, 8-9

⁴⁴ Mudde Cas (2007). *Op. cit.*

⁴⁵ Charalambous G, Lamprianou I (2015). “The (non) particularities of West European radical left party supporters: comparing left party families”, in *European Political Science Review*, 1-26, doi:10.1017/S1755773915000429

⁴⁶ Raynaud Philippe (2006). “Quelle République?”, in *Le Debat* 2006/4 (no. 141), 62-69

The 1990s developed the thesis of F. Fukuyama with its end of history, judging that there is a sole winner, the neo-liberal democracy, having no opponent in the crumbling ideology that made the powerful Soviet Union history. Despite the actual criticism of nowadays⁴⁷, this theory still remains largely valid, at least as long as the once fiercely competing ideological left-right scale turned out to be more blurry, with many of the former Communist parties in Eastern Europe rebranding themselves and swiftly moving rightwards on the scale more to the center, and more to a pro-European view, in order to keep up with times and not to be seen just as relics of the past.

Werner Krause (2020) analyses the impact of radical left parties' policy positions on their electoral support, arguing that the electoral supply side must be taken into account and that it matters both the voters' preference and the parties' offerings. He somehow contradicts previous findings that the parties promoting radical policies stances perform better in the elections, arguing that policy shifts on one axis can affect when used in another dimension, such as party competition. Of course, parties in competition are very different from a party judged alone, in a given policy, because the strategies depend to a large extent on the competing party's movements and strategies. Another finding consists of the idea that voters do not just blindly vote according to their preferences, but they can change these perceptions according to the shifts in party's positions, with this rule being observed more in the case of challenger (non-mainstream) parties⁴⁸. This could be possible to explain through fidelity to the party, and it is true that established, mainstream parties have their 'loyalists', who would vote for that party because it is a family tradition to do so or because that person has always voted for the same party, a bit like the real football supporters, who stand united around the team even if that one has a catastrophic season. In the case of radical parties, even if they also have their share of 'fanatics', they could prove more vigilant or sensitive to the party's swift shifts (especially if they suspect a deviation from the anti-establishment discourse or closeness to the mainstream). This way, radical parties not only can get new support easier but unfortunately for them, it takes just a little to lose them again because their electorate is more fluid to change. We can see this phenomenon in Romania's general elections. No matter how good or bad the

⁴⁷ Georghiou Costa (2014). "Unexpected convergence: the Huntington/Fukuyama debate", in *Acta Academica*, 46(2): 35-52

⁴⁸ Krause Werner (2020). "Appearing moderate or radical? Radical left party success and the two-dimensional political space", in *West European Politics*, 43:7, 1365-1387, DOI: [10.1080/01402382.2019.1672019](https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2019.1672019)

‘historical’, well-established parties perform, in government or in opposition, they will always benefit from the electorate they cannot lose: the social democrats, long time the first party in the country, never went under 20%, even in bitter times. The liberals prove even more stability, always oscillating between 18% and 25% (no big gains or losses over time). At the same time, newer parties, with no strong roots in history, can go from 8% to 25% in one electoral cycle, only to fall again to 8% or worse in the next one, because it is more pragmatism and less loyalty and attachment regarding their electorate, so this one is more fluid as well.

A study by Wang and Keith (2020) found that radical left parties have ‘greener’ environmental policies than many right-wing or social-democrat parties, but compared to the Greens they are much more moderate on ecological issues, because they mainly pinpoint the social dimensions of environmental issues, while for the Greens environment is usually the top priority. Also, the study shows that radical left parties are heterogeneous in terms of adopting new political issues⁴⁹. Interestingly again, Green parties have never had any success in Romania after 1989; they never got any seats in the parliament. The explanation comes from the fact that there were always more urgent problems to solve: integrating into the new type of economy after the fall of communism, raising the living standard, etc. Public opinion had other stringent concerns than fighting for the environment, and this attitude has remained pretty much unchanged ever since.

Charalambous (2015) tends to think that the socio-demographic characteristics are negligible compared to the ideological attitudes, so understanding the support for the leftist parties passes beyond the traditional cleavage-based theories, which are more interested in structural aspects⁵⁰.

Scholars believe to have found the necessary ingredients of both radical ideologies: nativism (radical right) and anti-capitalist socialism (radical left). These two ideologically different families differ clearly in the socio-cultural field, much more than in the socioeconomic one (a hypothesis that would be also tested in the present paper). It also seems that the two sides have similar views about European integration, not completely Eurosceptic as it had been thought.

⁴⁹ Congcong Wang & Dan Keith (2020). “The greening of European radical left parties: red and green politics”, in *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 28:4, 494-513, DOI: [10.1080/14782804.2020.1792280](https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2020.1792280)

⁵⁰ Charalambous G, Lamprianou I (2015). *Op. cit.*

Gomez et al. (2015)⁵¹ seem to have come to the same considerations as Fagerholm, and do not forget to mention the dependence of these “niche” parties on their voters, who can easily get dissatisfied if their favorite party changes the discourse.

Fagerholm (2016) analyses how the radical left parties from western Europe have reacted to the fall of the communist regimes. The author states that while the social democratic parties turned more to the center after the fall of communism, the former communist parties themselves were not so eager to switch their stance and go centric. This is indeed right for the very few years after the fall of communism, but judging the phenomenon from a more long-term perspective we can see that sooner or later most of them managed to turn into social-democratic and even more to the center, and this is the reason why we cannot come up with a Romanian radical left party in this paper. Fagerholm considers that environmental issues are being added to the agenda of radical left parties. But overall, he argues, radical left parties, even though sensitive to including new ideas and policies, still enjoy using many of the classic, old leftist themes. He also believes that the fall of communism has been a turning point in the development of these parties; in fact, it is not difficult to see that this historical event has been a tremendous moment even for the (radical) right parties, who almost right away lost some of their most fiercely ideological adversaries, and they too had to reshape their policies and/or priorities⁵².

Katsourides (2016) analyses the behaviour of radical left parties when they get to the government⁵³. Still, this does not apply to the present thesis, since none of the parties we explore in the thesis has ever been in the situation of governing (neither by itself nor in coalitions).

Jan Rovny (2015) claims that it is possible to establish some sort of generalizable theories despite the diversity of party competition in Eastern Europe, a theoretical model that could be tested in practice to predict the votes for the parties. In general, he expects that more religious

⁵¹ Gomez Raul, Morales Laura & Ramiro Luis (2015). “Varieties of Radicalism: Examining the Diversity of Radical Left Parties and Voters in Western Europe”, in *West European Politics*, DOI: 10.1080/01402382.2015.1064245

⁵² Fagerholm Andreas (2016). “What is left for the radical left? A comparative examination of the policies of radical left parties in western Europe before and after 1989”, in *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/14782804.2016.1148592

⁵³ Katsourides Y. (2016). *Radical Left Parties in Government. The Cases of Syriza and Akel*, Palgrave Macmillan

areas reduce the support for the leftist parties⁵⁴, but this in practice (at least in Romania) has never been the case, with the only leftist party – PSD (the social democrats), with its previous denominations, usually grabbing many votes especially in the more rural and religiously areas of the country, unlike the right-wing who has been usually voted more, at least until now, by the more educated people in the cities. This is indeed an interesting paradox since religious people would be expected to remember the persecution of the church during Communism, and therefore to associate left-wing parties with their past, which at the end of the day it looks like it does not happen. People in such poorer regions, as shown before, are more likely to vote for someone who offers immediate relief in the form of different material incentives. The vote is not seen as a 4-year long-term project, but more like a short-sighted affair. After that, it is hard to keep those elected accountable for their actions or decisions, but the same goes for people who balanced all the options and voted with complete knowledge of the party or candidates, so people tend to look at what they can easily get before it is too late to get anything at all.

Focusing on the reasons for the success of the radical left parties (RLP) across Europe, March and Rommerskirchen argue that the success is strongly linked with factors such as poor economic conditions, high Euroscepticism at the societal level, and a legacy of past RLP success. It has also been found a linkage between anti-EU and anti-globalization sentiment, so the support for RLP is higher in those places where globalization is perceived to have caused socioeconomic troubles⁵⁵. Their finding also shows that it is quite hard to have a radical left breakthrough in places where there is no existing tradition of the radical left⁵⁶, that is where such a party either does not exist or has experienced very poor results until the present-day. The same author (March) analyzes how the ideological stances, the supporters and the electoral performances, link with social movements and reactions to the 2008 economic crisis. While acknowledging that there is a stabilized and consolidated actor that challenges the mainstream social democratic parties, the radical left still has to overcome the historical stigma (especially in Eastern Europa) and come up with more attractive electoral packages (and, we would add, become more credible, overpassing some cheap populist measures), while at the same time is facing the ‘threat’ of other competing political forces, like the Greens, the radical right, or

⁵⁴ Rovny, J. (2015). “Party Competition Structure in Eastern Europe: Aggregate Uniformity versus Idiosyncratic Diversity?”, in *East European Politics and Societies*, 29(1), 40-60(50). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325414567535>

⁵⁵ March, L., & Rommerskirchen, C. (2015). “Out of left field? Explaining the variable electoral success of European radical left parties”, in *Party Politics*, 21(1), 1-24(15). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068812462929>

⁵⁶ *Idem*, 16

even non-parties protest movements⁵⁷. Another interesting point is that, with the aging of the natural real communist party activists, the younger and less communist members have a problem dissociating themselves from the average social-democratic stances⁵⁸, which usually hurts the smaller parties more (in this case, the radical left parties). Also, for the electorate is getting harder to grasp the party's real political orientation.

There are scholars who discussed the topic of populist left parties, and what chance these have to continue to be relevant after a big crisis is over. As we know, periods of hardships and economic struggles are a blooming time for such parties that offer a platform to the discontent voices from society, taking advantage of their radicalism and willingness to change the way politics work. But what happens after the turbulent period remains only a historical memory, and its immediate consequences are pondered by governmental measures, and people see their revenues going back to more acceptable levels? Do they still keep a bond with the radical and populist left party? Damiani (2020) argues that, in contrast to the radical right parties, the nowadays leftist movements have a hard time keeping loyal electors⁵⁹. This is, in his view, why the left has chosen the approach of presenting itself as anti-elitist, a community against global capitalism, to stronger somehow the ties between people and to confer them a single, united purpose (purposefully portrayed like the global revolution during the proletarian times). However, Damiani thinks that radical left movements of today are highly different from the Marxist-Leninist, revolutionary parties of the past, which were fighting for a change of status quo in a more bloody and violent manner. By comparison, the current ones look almost like “pro-system” options⁶⁰. The author cites a multitude of examples in support of this theory, that prove the lack of revolutionary ambitions of these forces in the present. They now tend to be a part of the democratic game, they only want to change the democratic mechanisms, but they are not willing to overthrow democracy in a radical fashion. It is said that both the far right and far left are promoting neoliberal economic measures, and this is what the radical left populists are against of, but without offering viable alternatives⁶¹. They are, however, not completely void of the potential to contest and challenge the order, but this will be done within the democratic framework. All the revisions of the rules seem to be democratic enough, not causing much turbulence to the well-established political system. This is why all parties, no matter how

⁵⁷ March Luke (2012). “Problems and perspectives of contemporary European radical left parties: Chasing a lost world or still a world to win?”, in *International Critical Thought*, 2:3, 314-339 (314)

⁵⁸ *Idem*, 337

⁵⁹ Damiani Marco (2020). *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe*, Routledge

⁶⁰ *Idem*, 171

⁶¹ *Idem*, 172

radical they are, seem to have adopted the same, for example, economic platforms. Anyway, this might be regarded as an accomplishment for the radical left parties, who are thus not considered anymore an anomaly that has to be banned from the political stage (as it happened with the Romanian Communist Party in the 1920s). But the main problem these parties have, according to this scholar, is the lack of bond with the people, beyond pure short-term interests. Unlike the far right, which uses patriotic discourse to transcend the classes and offer a strong relation of “earth and blood”⁶² based among others on ethnicity, the far left is more diluted in what concerns the social contract. Also, the fact that globalization has brought with it many problems gives room rather to parties from the radical right, that can induce protectionism and border control against immigrants, something that the radical left would hardly ever do, given its ideology.

III.1. Post-communist and (left-wing) radicalism in the Czech Republic

As we mentioned before, the parties in the post-communist period had to reinvent themselves, find new orientations and ideologies, and learn party competition in the new democratic environment. Coming out from a 50-year tradition of the unique and powerful Communist Party, we realize this has been far from an easy task. It is somehow understandable that parties in Central and Eastern Europe would differ from their Western counterparts. Not only non-Communist parties had to get a new life, to be re-born under new circumstances, but also the Communist ones had to be rebuilt under a new star.

Proof is the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (CPBM), which was founded in March 1990, soon enough after the November 1989 Velvet Revolution, which put an end to communist rule. Even though other parties have tried to avoid the Communist denominator, CPBM did not fear it, and far from being one of the main parties on the Czech political scene, it had managed to consistently participate in all parliamentary elections so far, with variable but until recently two-digit results, such as 1998 – 11%, 2002 – 18,5%, 2006 – 12,8%, 2010 – 11,3%, 2013 – 14,9%, only to drop below the 10% in 2017 – 7,8% and in 2021 – 3,6% (Parties and elections in Europe). We can see from here that the party is not really doing fine lately, and this reality brings the need to increase the visibility of the party’s messages or tone, in

⁶² *Idem*, 174

order to get new supporters. In the first general elections after Czechoslovakia split up between the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the CPBM came up in second place (under the leadership of Jiri Svoboda), with 14,05%, at a turnout of 85%⁶³. For a party openly called a communist one, to obtain almost 1 million votes soon enough after the country supposedly happily get rid of the communist rule is something surprising, and it is valuable to find out an explanation for this phenomenon. In the 1996 elections, the party lost the second place to the Czech Social Democrat Party and got 10,33% of the votes (76,3% turnout), but it still represents a very good result, especially if we look at the campaign spending, for which CPBM had a very small budget, compared to its opponents⁶⁴.

By comparison, the party is nowadays a small, almost insignificant one, which after the last elections has no more seats in the Czech parliament, with practically no leverage in the country's politics. This should be a good time to reform and change, and this is why having a woman leader, born in 1981, could help in reshaping the party's activity.

In the elections of 1992, no less than 8 parties managed to get into the parliament, so these post-communist countries had already shown people's desire for a pluralist society. In the 1996 elections, the number had dropped to 6, showing that the top political forces had managed to raise the stakes and the main parties have consolidated their results. What a communist-rooted party had to do, first of all, was to democratize internally (which they somehow knew how to do, because communist parties had all some sorts of internal rules and hierarchies, not completely different from the democratic ones, but in which the 'supreme leader' had a word to say), that is to allow party members to indiscriminately run for various leadership positions. The party succeeded in maintaining an explicitly communist and anti-capitalistic identity⁶⁵, while modernizing itself by adhering to ecology, anti-war, and gender issues. Someone stated that "it is one of the most successful and well supported radical left groupings in the EU 25"⁶⁶. The goal was the transformation into a modern party, without betraying or abandoning the ideals of the past. Sean Hanley, an expert on this party, states that the party comes up with an eclectic but flexible ideology, which consists in the dominance of the state over the market,

⁶³ Parties and elections in Europe, retrieved at: www.parties-and-elections.eu

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*

⁶⁵ Hudson, K. (2012). "Communism Renewed and Supported: The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (the Czech Republic)", in *The New European Left*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137265111_8

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*

resistance to foreign influences, resistance to capitalism, combined with the refusal of accession to NATO and skepticism towards the EU. The same opinion is shared by Luke March, who describes CPBM as a ‘reform’ communist party⁶⁷, with the same idea of adopting other policies than the ‘conservative’ communist parties. Of course, the party, from its position, did not manage to stop both the NATO and the EU accession, which took place in 1999 and 2004, respectively. This implies that nowadays such themes are less actual for the political context because it is hard to believe that small states like the Czech Republic (but also Romania) would ever dare to challenge their membership in these global structures. Nonetheless, it is something that should not be totally overlooked, especially in times of economic and military crises. At the same time, in spite of its initial reluctance to Europe and Euroscepticism, CPBM is active and participates in many European structures⁶⁸. But while being modern to a certain extent, the party is also known for its strong defense of the communist past, in which way it manifests much more than other Communist parties from other countries⁶⁹ (Idem), acknowledging that the communist period has been one of great development of Czechoslovakia, with overall more pluses than minuses⁷⁰. The party was somehow close, in its beginning, to giving up the communist orientation and going for a more social-democratic one, but it seems that only a minority of its members wished to break up with the communist line. Interestingly, a party referendum took place in 1992, with the idea of changing the ‘communist’ word from the party’s name, but over 75% of the members voted to keep it⁷¹.

The main problem the party encountered was the enlargement of its supporters’ basis. This is why the party has always managed to get a good share, but it did not pass a certain threshold. In exchange, the social democrats have been able to address to a larger population, not being restrained by any (direct) communist or too leftist a measure. As Hanley observes, ‘its support was considerable more narrow strongly skewed towards older and retired voters, residents of rural areas and small towns, groups such as the police and army and localities with historic traditions of Communist voting’⁷². Despite this, the support, even fluctuant, has not reached so low levels as in most recent times.

⁶⁷ *Idem*, 133

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*

⁷⁰ *Idem*, 134

⁷¹ *Ibidem*

⁷² *Idem*, 136

One can pose the question of the reluctance of other parties to form a government coalition or at least go into partnership with a party with the orientation of CPBM. Is it ‘safe’ enough to take good decisions for the country? Does it have a normal, not extreme political discourse? As mentioned before, the general atmosphere at the beginning of the 1990s was distrust in anything that had to do previously with communist rule (Bohumin resolution in 1995, in the Czech Republic, for example). This kind of rule – written or unwritten – has persisted ever since, and a clear illustration of it took place in 2002 when the social democrats won 70 of the seats and CPBM 41, having in total the absolute majority in a parliament with 200 seats. Regardless of this success that could have provided an absolute leftist majority and the possibility of implementing lots of leftist measures without too much opposition, the leader of the social democrats at that time preferred to go into the government with the support of center-right parties⁷³, which subsequently changed the government program as well.

But the fact that the party was not considered abnormal, at least by its supporters, is proved by the public opinion polls by the end of the 1990s, when the CPBM managed at some point to even be in the lead. Experts, such as Jan Kulik, estimated that this in itself should not represent a resurgence of the communist period or the wish of the people to go back to those times, but it was rather a signal that things do not go well economically in the society, especially in those regions of Bohemia and Moravia, where CPBM originated from, and people were disillusioned by the shortcomings of Vaclav Klaus’s right-wing governments⁷⁴.

Politicians seem to always remind about the Bohumin resolution to avoid partnerships with the Communists, in spite of the increasing national support for these. It comes in handy as an excuse to avoid cooperation with CPBM. In a way, social democrats will always fear a loss of public support if they increase cooperation with CPBM since this would be perceived as too radical by their more moderate supporters. At the same time, it is always good to keep the door half-open, in case one later needs support from a like-minded party. At the same time, CPBM thinks that it would lose its own support by participating in a national government where it could not fulfill its party program, and this is why it prefers to tolerate social-democratic minority governments⁷⁵.

⁷³ *Idem*, 136

⁷⁴ *Idem*, 137

⁷⁵ *Idem*, 140

The beginning of the 21st century meant a reconfirmation of CPBM as one of the main parties in the country. They helped Vaclav Klaus to become state president. There was also more cooperation with the social democrats; on the other side, the civic democrats (the main force of the right) have always rejected any cooperation with CPBM whatsoever, considering this party a vestige of the communist times. Regarding the EU, CPBM was the only party in the Czech Republic to prefer voting the rejection of the membership. Nonetheless, experts observed that the Eurosceptic stance was not as strong as similar parties from Greece or Portugal⁷⁶ and that the party also identified the advantages of the EU membership, with some of its members declaring they would vote in favor of the membership. The social dimension of the EU has been decisive in convincing a number of politicians to give more credit to the EU. In 2004, in the European elections, the party managed to get 6 places out of 24, ending up in second place.

The general elections of 2006 were very complicated because of the very balanced final results between the left wing and the right wing. The left wing (social democrats and communists) took 100 out of 200, the right wing (civic democrats and Christian democrats) 94, while 6 seats headed for the Greens. This generated months of uncertainty until a right-green government has been formed, with votes from social democrats, when necessary. But the real political issue of those years has been the discussion about the installation of a US radar base on Czech soil, not far from Prague, to which most of the public opinion was opposing. The governing coalition proved unstable because the Greens could have easily opposed in such sensitive matters. One year later, in 2008, regional elections have been a success for the social democrats and the communists. Still, not all social democrats were happy to cooperate with the communists; their attitude was historically motivated: given the fact that the social-democratic party itself had roots in the pre-war (so also a pre-communist) period⁷⁷, it results from this that the party is not related to a communist past, and it was not born from the ashes of the unique party, unlike the CPBM, and it would be preferable not to form coalitions with such unreformed communist parties. It is therefore this feeling of superiority that tends to characterize the relationship between the two leftist parties.

⁷⁶ *Idem*, 141

⁷⁷ *Idem*, 143; Rizova Tatiana (2012). "Communist Successor Party Adaptation in Candidate-Centered Systems: the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia and the Czech Social Democratic Party in the Czech Republic", in *Journal of Politics and Law*, Vol. 5 No. 2, 145-161 (149)

Contrary to the high expectations for a strong left following the 2010 parliamentary elections, these have not proved successful, especially for the big players. While the communists managed to retain more or less their position, the social democrats have surprisingly lost many seats, together with the right and centric parties. That period of economic crisis and uncertainty at the EU level proved to be a pathway for some new right-wing parties to get onto the scene (more populist and radical than the existing ones). Social democrats lost many votes because of backing the adoption of the Euro, while their supporters were, for the most, anti-Euro⁷⁸. CPBM proposed a program for the welfare of ordinary citizens, including regulation on water and energy prices, reduction of VTA, and increase in the minimum wage, something that looked partially populist, given so many promises. In a way, this looks more attractive than the usually austerity-prone right-wing parties. The analysis of Kate Hudson ends up in 2012, many election cycles ago. She predicted a sort of an 'inner fight' between the social democrats and the communist, while the country was to pursue the path of increased austerity, which would in some sort, pave the way for a future of more support for the left⁷⁹. We will now have a look at the situation after 2012, based on the election results.

Without exaggerating, we can say that the elections from 2013, 2017, and 2021 have brought the left movement in the Czech Republic closer to its end. The people seem to have been so happy with the centric and right-wing parties, that any wish for the left is quickly vanishing. New parties like ANO 2011, the Pirate Party, and others have managed to sensibly climb up the ladder and grasp many votes that the left gradually lost altogether. Not only the communists but even the more popular social democrats lost almost everything. If in 2013 they still held 50 seats, and CPBM 33, far behind for a potential government coalition, in 2017 the fall is more obvious, reaching scores like 7,8% and 7,3%, each of them getting only 15 seats. At the latest elections, the downfall was total, after both failed to achieve the minimum threshold of 5%.⁸⁰ To see such a complete collapse of the left is somehow unusual and it would require a more thorough investigation of the causes of this harsh failure. Contrary to what experts mentioned above believed would happen, the reality showed that people in the Czech Republic have managed to endure and successfully overcome the austerity measures and to make the left movement, at least for now, irrelevant.

⁷⁸ Hudson K (2012). *Op. cit.*, 144

⁷⁹ *Idem*, 146

⁸⁰ Parties and Elections in Europe, retrieved at: www.parties-and-elections.eu

In an article from 2012, Tatiana Rizova argues that “communist successor parties’ performance in the electoral arena is contingent on their adaptation to the electoral rules that guide inter-party competition in their political systems”⁸¹. She proposes three hypotheses, the third one being the most relevant to our research, namely what she calls CSPs (communist successor parties) “whose leaders appeal to a broad segment of the electorate are more likely to moderate their party program than parties whose leaders turn their attention to their members and activists”⁸². The logic here lies in the way that there is a fine line that is hard to cross: people who vote get easily upset if a party comes up with a measure they do not support. The upset can be so high that several people abandon the party that suggested the measure. While if a party leader only looks at its members or activists, they are prone to come up with many ideas, some very daring but also potentially misunderstood at the public opinion level.

The Communist Party imposed all the rules after 1948. Other parties could not freely exist, but it is true that the people with social democrat views were considered closer to the communist mind frame, so they were “invited” to join the National Front, in a recognition of the similar nature of the two parties. Still, these invitations often had obligatory character, and those refusing could have seen their careers ruined or their lives destroyed. Under such circumstances, it was not easy for the social democrats to show their voters in the 1990s that they have not really planned the economic catastrophes or the violations of human rights in the communist period⁸³, or as Rizova puts it, “the social democrats could have been accused of complicity with the communist dictatorship, yet they managed to convince voters that their party was the victim rather than the perpetrator of repressive acts.”⁸⁴

Rizova argues that the internal democratization of the CPBM in the 1990s was almost an illusion since the party headquarters in Prague had full control over the strict guidelines established by the Central Committee, and only the candidates who met those guidelines had been internally elected to compete. No one could appeal to the decisions taken by this committee⁸⁵.

It is quite surprising that such leftist parties managed to storm the top positions for such a long time, knowing that the electorate was not much enthusiastic about this ideology. For instance,

⁸¹ Rizova Tatiana (2012). *Op. cit.*, 145

⁸² *Idem*, 146

⁸³ *Idem*, 150

⁸⁴ *Idem*, 152

⁸⁵ *Idem*, 150

a survey from the 1990s discovered that only 29% of the respondents believed in communist ideals, with merely 15% saying that they still believe in them⁸⁶. Rizova believes that the CPBM's commitment to change in the 1990s was half-hearted⁸⁷. As mentioned before, some leaders even praised the achievements of the past.

While never participating in government coalitions, CPBM has kept a potential for blackmail, as many coalitions had to resort to votes from this party in order to get through their programs or people in key positions⁸⁸. Nonetheless, while never managing the same success as the reformed ex-communist parties (rebranded into social democrats) from other neighboring countries, it managed to remain the most important orthodox, un-reformed communist party, achieving better results than the similar parties in the neighboring countries, that did not even manage to get passed the threshold of 4-5% required to get seats in parliaments.

CPBM offers a very interesting case study of a party that kept the ideals of a sunset era and offered that platform in times of reform and a 'new age'. It managed to score extremely well, especially between 1990 and 2006, in spite of many people wanting by that time to get rid of the communist heritage and move further. If the explanation for keeping the orthodox platform is a simple one – the victory of the orthodox communist wing of the party in the internal elections (reluctant to reforms and platform change), the fascination exerted by CPBM in such times is undoubtedly a topic for further research.

Back in 2004, Hough acknowledges the difficulty of placing a diversity of parties into categories⁸⁹. He and Handl call such parties “reticent reformers”⁹⁰. Different scholars have different names for it: traditional mass party (Klima), anti-system party (Fiala), semi-loyal opposition party (Ishiyama), sub-cultural party (Hanley)⁹¹. The strategy of the party was to brand itself as the only authentic leftist party. The party can be blamed for disregarding the enlargement of its electoral support. The youngsters have not been targeted enough, so the latest bad results were a natural consequence of going too conservative regarding the communist principles, little known to the young generations. A split in the party has been

⁸⁶ *Idem*, 154

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*

⁸⁸ *Idem*, 157

⁸⁹ Hough Dan, Handl Vladimir (2004). “The post-communist left and the European Union. The Czech Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) and the German Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS)”, in *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 37, 319-339 (321)

⁹⁰ *Idem*, 324

⁹¹ *Ibidem*

observed with the occasion of the NATO Treaty ratification, where some party members vote in favour because they saw NATO as an instrument of collective security, and not as a neo-imperialistic tool, like some others considered. But NATO, in a way, undermines the strategic autonomy of the EU, which sees itself as dependent on (mostly) the American military. There have been accusations, from the CPBM, of ‘further Americanization of the European continent’ and ‘further militarization’ of the EU⁹². This proves an uneasy relationship with NATO, while the relationship with the EU is clearer, CPBM praising a more nuanced and independent European foreign policy.

Again, it was hard for the experts in 2004 to predict the fall of such a party, which was expected to work more with such parties like the German PDS, and to consolidate a more Eurosceptic turn in Europe. If this was true for some years, it did come with the cost of political isolation in the Czech Republic, where ultimately the party did not successfully survive. The never-ending and not entirely settled fight inside the party between the traditional communists and the reformists did result in the weakness of the party in the long run.

In one more recent article, Bankov confirms the usefulness of possessing the organizational inheritance from the communist predecessors, comprehensive party network, and large membership⁹³. Their legacy as a mass party from communist times should help the party’s transition to a catch-all profile, which is necessary nowadays more than ever, given the volatility of their electoral basis.

III.2. Some elements of the party program

In the following, we will have a look at the main measures the party proposes when running in the elections. In the party program, there are some statements that all point out to more involvement of the state in the economy, for the benefit of the Czech citizens. As in any case of a leftist party program, it looks very populist, without specifying the sources that could be used to achieve such economic wonders. For example, basic goods should not become luxury goods and be taxed at 0% VAT. Besides free education and health care, free city public transportation must be made available for all⁹⁴. They propose to lower the retirement age or introduce the four-day working week. Five weeks of paid vacation. A decent minimum wage

⁹² *Ibidem*, 328

⁹³ Bankov Petar (2020). “Czech Stalemate? The Role of Party Organization for the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia since 2010”, in *European Review*, 1-16 (15), doi:10.1017/S1062798720000265

⁹⁴ CPBM, program, retrieved at: www.kscm.cz/program

(about 845 Euro), automatically indexed with the inflation rate. The wages should reach the European level, not only the prices. Energy and food self-sufficiency must be reached, and public enterprises must operate in these fields. Progressive taxation is another domain that belongs to economic measures, and it is a big debate in Romania too. It refers to the multinational companies that operate in the country paying very low taxes to the hosting state, while their profit goes back to the country of origin. This way the hosting state is unable to finance more healthcare, education, and public transport for its citizens. CPBM estimates that about 1 billion euros are lost for the Czech economy every year. On a more radical, if not extreme tone, CPBM is in favor of a referendum on the withdrawal of the Czech Republic from the European Union. Of course, around this point it is clear that the citizens would not support much such a measure, but at least this proposal operates as a test of democracy because not many countries have chosen to ask their citizens about such topics, whether to join or leave the EU. Also, related to green energy policies, energy should be produced in Czech power plants, and delivered directly to households, without intermediaries who raise the price or from the stock market where the price gets out of state control.

Another point of the program that is close to extremism lies in the measure to demand war reparations from Germany, for World War 2. Such demands are usually not met with much benevolence in the world of treaties under international law and institutions, whatever the past. It is however interesting to note down in this context that the current Romanian president has agreed to forgive the historical debts the Germans had to the Romanian state from the same World War 2. Another point on the list, indirectly related to the economy, is the unwillingness of the CPBM to engage in wars or the defense industry, but rather to promote peace and thus reject foreign military bases on Czech soil, increases in the cost of armaments or allocating more of the GDP for the military, as required by NATO. Regarding NATO, CPBM demands the withdrawal of the Czech Republic from NATO, seemingly without any referendum or other form of popular consultation. What we have seen from this program is the ambition of CPMB to offer a real leftist alternative in Czech politics. For this, it goes much beyond the more moderated social democrat program, which cannot think of such drastic measures as leaving the EU or NATO without ample consequences of dividing their electoral support. At the same time, at least the Eurosceptic and the NATO skeptic parts of the electorate are thus covered in the Czech Republic, unlike in Romania, which seemingly has no parties to cover all the popular discontent vis-à-vis these external institutions.

IV.1. Post-communism and (right-wing) radicalism in Romania

In post-communist Romania, the party system had to also be rebuilt in a pluralistic fashion after the fall of the Communist regime, in December 1989. In the period between the two World Wars, there usually has been a balance between the liberals and the conservatives, in what has been called a rotative government, under the strict supervision of the King, unwilling to give too much power to one side or another. There were also other, smaller parties alongside these two, like the Agrarians or, just like in the case of the Czech Republic, some social democrats. The Communist Party has been officially disbanded and banned in 1921. But after the switching of sides in World War 2, the Soviets imposed favorable governments, and lately, after some seemingly rigged elections, they imposed the victory of the Communist Party (that had known a variety of names during its existence), which had gradually become the unique party. The problem in Romania has been the same as in the Czech Republic, namely, how to build a political party system when the tradition of democratic competition between parties had been lost. Not surprisingly, at the first free elections in 1990, the people had to choose between an unbelievable number of parties (over 90, literally established overnight), because suddenly everybody was allowed to build a political party, starting with only 251 members⁹⁵. Of course, the supply was overwhelming compared to the demand, and soon after the political system managed to stabilize, with some big parties that regularly passed the threshold of 5% in the next years. Interestingly, the social democrats, who were the big winners in the elections held between 1990 and 1996, could not proclaim themselves as heirs of the social democrats from the interwar period, as long as the chief of the party, who also became President of Romania, was an important figure in the Communist structures too. In Romania, the lustration law has not been applied for a very long period, and even to this day there is not clear who gets under its incidence.

Unlike in the Czech Republic, where the party that dominated for many years has been the Civic Democrats, a right-wing party, in Romania the stage has been dominated by the social democrats. The result was a slowing down of reforms in the neo-liberal style, and more of a continuation of the social state guaranteed by the communists: free education, free healthcare, and social assistance to large categories of the population. Of course, because of this, Romania was left behind in the modernization of society and in integration with the West, and maybe

⁹⁵ Digi24.ro (2015). "1990, anul 0". Nouazeci de partide au aparut in doar cateva luni, retrieved at: www.digi24.ro/special/campanii-digi24/1990-anul-0/1990-anul-0-nouazeci-de-partide-au-aparut-in-doar-cateva-luni-351518

this is one of the reasons for its later join with the European Union, in 2007, while the Czech Republic and the other central European, post-communist states managed to join the EU in 2004. Being more to the east also deprived somehow the country of the strategic interest that was shown to other regions.

In the 1996 elections, the great moment for the right wing had finally arrived, because the CDR coalition (Romanian Democratic Convention) managed to overtake the social democrats. Nowadays it would not look like an extremely convincing result (only 4% margins between the top places), but by that time it was praised by everyone who wanted to give a blow to the “communists”. Nonetheless, the winning coalition was such an amalgam of different parties and ideologies, that it was hard to properly govern the country. Adding the privatizations expected and welcomed by the EU, and the reforms that were the guarantees for getting access to the European family, it turned out that the government coalition was so fragile and so easily boycotted by the opposition, that the period is mostly to be remembered by the weakest and most hesitant ever, with different impactful strikes (for example, teachers’), fighting between police forces and miners, political instability and a disastrous communication gap between the people and the elected ones. It is no surprise that, in such conditions, the coalition barely resisted reaching the next elections, in 2000; even more significant, its former leader, the President of the state between 1996 and 2000, did not announce his candidature for a new mandate. Romanians have been extremely unhappy with his position of letting the NATO army use Romanian soil to launch a bombing campaign over the territory of Serbia. With a country in chaos, the elections in 2000 brought back in the front run the social democrats, who convincingly won 36,6% of the votes (65,3% turnout, dropping from 76,0% in 1996). To see the actual defeat of the government coalition, we can have a look at some scores: the agrarians, that were part of the big winner coalition in 1996, now dropped out of the parliament, same as the democrats. The liberals, also part of that coalition, only got 6,9%. Only the traditional party of the ethnic Hungarian minority managed to preserve the score close to that of the previous electoral cycle (6,8%, compared to 6,6%). To no surprise in the above-mentioned circumstances, the only other political force that managed a big leap forward was the right-wing radical party “Greater Romania” (that jumped from 4,5% to 19,5%).⁹⁶ The presidential fight put face to face the leader of the social democrats, former president Ion Iliescu, and the leader of the radical party, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, who used the narrative of fraud and rigged

⁹⁶ Parties and Elections in Europe, retrieved at: www.parties-and-elections.eu

elections, pretending that his party had scored much higher, but the 'mafia' stopped him together with his effort to cleanse the country⁹⁷.

In any case, the moment of the 2000 parliamentary elections represents the highest score a radical party did achieve in the modern elections in Romania. The radicals took advantage of the inefficient government measures, many forced or hurried privatizations that offered no alternative to workers, resulting in high inflation and a dramatic decrease in the standard of living. Also, uncertainty about the future sent many people to take the thorny road of exile, a phenomenon that currently still poses a big danger to Romanian society.

In an article from the 1990s, shortly after the Romanian revolution, Vladimir Tismaneanu points out the challenges for political pluralism to arise. While acknowledging that a multitude of democratic voices has appeared on the stage, he blames the lack of visibility of these on the governmental monopoly on television, while the distribution of independent printed media is also under government control, which makes it harder to reach the countryside or the remote urban areas⁹⁸. He also states that the extremist media (the one belonging to the radical right party "Greater Romania") induces ideas of nostalgia for the ancient regime and, as we have seen, there were many people willing to vote for that party in the first years after the revolution, showing either that some were really nostalgic, or that the new state management was not completely successful yet. As other threats to the newly-formed and still fragile democracy, Tismaneanu also identifies the low level of civic culture, the fragility of the new institutions, the provisional nature of the political parties and their ideological preferences, the persistence of nostalgia for the collectivistic times, the growing dissatisfaction with the effects of half-hearted reforms, the endurance of Communist mentalities in the public life, and also the non-willingness to discuss issues from the Communist past⁹⁹, a matter that has been seemingly better-taken care of in the Czech Republic, by the CPBM. The first reforms were shy and there was always this fight between the conservative bureaucrats who feared that political freedom will bring with it a faster opening of the secret police files that would wildly condemn the

⁹⁷ Video, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/corneliu.vadim.tudor/videos/%C3%AEn-anul-2000-a-%C3%AEnceput-faza-final%C4%83-a-distrugerii-rom%C3%A2niei/699029076784508/>; Tudor Corneliu Vadim (2001). *Discursuri*, Editura Fundatiei Romania Mare

⁹⁸ Tismaneanu Vladimir (1993). "The Quasi-Revolution and its Discontents: Emerging Political Pluralism in Post-Ceausescu Romania", in *East European Politics and Societies*, Volume 7, No. 2, 309-348 (345)

⁹⁹ *Idem*, 346

practices of the Communist regime¹⁰⁰ and this way make disappear any trace of people's sympathy for it.

It is interesting that, because the first party after the Romanian revolution (NSF: National Salvation Front) proclaimed itself a leftist party, and took the stage with fervor, not as it was the case with other countries from central and eastern Europe, where completely anti-communist movements were formed, it practically took away the possibility for some other leftist force to appear on the stage. Also, the fact that this party has always been hesitant and reluctant to make big reforms has helped to avoid to a very large extent the inner splits and dissents.

IV.2. The origins and the results of the elections for “Greater Romania”

Why Romania is known for its radical right tendencies while having no radical left after the fall of communist rule can well be explained by one thing: the presence on the Romanian territory of an important (in number, but also as spreading) Hungarian ethnic minority. Throughout history, the territory of Transylvania and who was the first to have founded modern statal formations in this area has been a subject of hot debate between Romanians and Hungarians, each using a narrative that best suited their own view on the matter. It is not the place to develop it here, but it is important to understand that the presence of a minority in a national territory can be used to throw the blame, alter perceptions, and find scapegoats when necessary. In these circumstances, it is not difficult for a party to use hate rhetoric in order to inflate the spirits, only to be able to exploit the situation in the elections. At the beginning of the 1990s, the Hungarian minority, pretty much silenced together with the Romanians under the Communist iron fist, gives signs of restlessness, wishing more rights for its community. In March 1990, a strange conflict erupted in the city of Targu-Mures, which took three days and ended up with street fights between Romanians and Hungarians, claiming 5 deaths and 278 wounded in total¹⁰¹. Nowadays it would not look so devastating, but in those years, people feared the worst, such as the beginning of a civil war. Things calmed down after 3 days though. The Greater Romania Party was formed in December 1991, with the aim of making use of the nationalist feelings of the Romanian people, to counter and confront the Hungarian minority.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*

¹⁰¹ The interethnic conflict in Targu Mures (19-21 March 1990), retrieved at: www.unitischimbam.ro/conflictul-interetnic-de-la-targu-mures/

He was led by Corneliu Vadim Tudor, a charismatic writer, populist, and anti-Hungarian, until his death in 2015, with the dissolution of the party coming closely after.

The first parliamentary elections the party ran in were the ones from 1992. They got 6 out of 143 seats in the Senate and 16 seats (out of 341) in the Deputies Chamber, scoring a median of 3,87% in both chambers. It only got 6th place. One must note the high turnout in the first few elections after 1989, this time with 76% of the voters. In the presidential election organized at the same time, the party did not register a candidate.

The next elections that took place in 1996 do not offer much change to the Great Romania Party. It got 8 seats in the Senate and 19 in the Deputies Chamber, so it only won 5 extra seats compared to the previous elections, with a pretty similar score. The difference is that this time, the party president runs in the presidential elections, but he only got 5th place, with 4.72% of the votes¹⁰².

The party's momentum took place in 2000. PRM got around 20% of the votes, winning 37 and respectively 84 seats, eventually becoming the second-largest party in the country. In the presidential race, the party's leader, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, managed to qualify in the final battle with Ion Iliescu (the first president of the country after the 1989 revolution), which he lost with 33,17% versus 66,83%, managing nonetheless to gather more than 3.300.000 voters. Important people from the party, such as the then mayor of Cluj, Gheorghe Funar, had promised that if Corneliu Vadim Tudor became president, UDMR (Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania) would have been outlawed in twenty-four hours¹⁰³. Of course, it was not only due to resentment towards the Hungarians. But the Hungarian ethnic-based party, UDMR took part in the troubled governments between 1997 and 2000, and it was easy to get it under attack, same as the other members of the coalition, which got some of the worst historical results. So, the center-left and the radical right managed to be the sole winners, even though a government coalition between them was impossible during the times the country was actively preparing for the NATO and EU accession. Though, PRM tried its luck for a coalition with the winning party, threatened that the PDSR would assume a grave responsibility "if it allies itself with

¹⁰² Parties and Elections in Europe, retrieved at: www.parties-and-elections.eu

¹⁰³ Bozoki Andras, Ishiyama John (2002). *The Communist Successor Parties of Central and Eastern Europe*, Routledge, 382

political forces that have repeatedly proved their incompetence and inclination toward treason”¹⁰⁴. After this peak, the party begins its decline, and its importance will decrease.

When talking about PRM, some scholars appreciate that “these parties claimed to be rooted in the extreme left, but espoused a brand of brazen nationalism and xenophobic politics usually associated with the extreme right”¹⁰⁵. The “theme of Romanian resistance to “foreign forces” is one of the mainstays of PRM rhetoric. Tudor insists that Romania has been “humiliated” and turned into a “colony” by traitors and gangsters serving foreign interests, who were forcing the country to “endlessly mime a so-called democracy, copied in a parrot-like manner from the West”¹⁰⁶.

The party eventually adopted a more European stance, underlining the need for Romania to integrate in the bigger economy, because “a small country like Romania has no other choice”¹⁰⁷. Still, the leader <<advocated European integration as a means of protection to “successfully oppose the danger of enforced Americanization and the loss of identity.”>>¹⁰⁸.

Interestingly, there are scholars that think that the nationalist rhetoric of the Greater Party leader resounds more like the rhetoric employed by the Ceausescu regime. Yet, PRM has nothing to do with Communism, being a far-right party. Still, he shared with the center-left one the anti-globalist views, the contempt for capitalism, and hostility towards liberalism¹⁰⁹. The two parties are almost made from the same roots. We can go as far as saying that the two parties - PDSR (Party of Social Democracy in Romania) and PRM - share the same side of the political spectrum¹¹⁰. Moreover, even PDSR would get the tag of “extremist”, if we understand by that the willingness to use violence for political ends¹¹¹.

We may conclude that, even more than anti-Hungarian, the party was definitely an anti-systemic one, and managed to get votes exactly when the people were most discontented with the political offer. In this respect, it is clearly a radical party. The fact that it was considered

¹⁰⁴ RFE/RL Newline, November 30, 2000, retrieved at: www.rferl.org/a/1142292.html

¹⁰⁵ Bozoki Andras, Ishiyama John (2002). *Op. cit.*, 373

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*

¹⁰⁷ *Idem*, 381

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*

¹⁰⁹ *Idem*, 394

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*

radical right stems more from its intransigent position towards the Hungarian minority than in the party politics, which we will take a look at in the following.

IV.3. Some elements of political platform

In the conception of the Greater Romania Party, the development of the national economy will be based on the Romanian People's own effort, correlated with the existing material and human potential, attracting foreign capital without harming the national interests, independence and sovereignty of Romania. The transition to the market economy will be ensured with the lowest possible social costs, without the shocks that currently affect the productive categories of society.

The above paragraph shows the unwillingness of the party to perform big reforms, like the ones desired by the liberal parties, in a time when many feared losing their old-time jobs in the fever of privatization of the big industry. The state reserves the right to use the macroeconomic planning strategy to ensure the perspectives of harmonious development and national defense – this one, again a reference to the planned economy of the Communist times.

In terms of concrete measures or ways to reach them, PRM is even vaguer than the CPBM, without promising certain incomes and gifts. It illustrates itself more like an agrarian party, preoccupied with giving the peasants their dignity, to socially support people from rural areas more and to reduce income inequities between rural and urban areas. The party is also manifestedly anti-corruption and against the political incompetence and amateurism it already spotted in its adversaries. Also, the party cares about providing free education and free access to the health system (which indeed managed to be the backbone of the Romanian social state). The party also planned to create big national projects to help the old people, those with many kids, especially from the rural areas, and the jobless. There were also specified many good deals for war veterans.¹¹²

Nothing out of the platform sounds extremist. The only attack, discreet nonetheless, lies in stipulating that university studies should be performed in the national language – thus restricting access to speakers of Hungarian. Apart from this, there is no radical tone in this party platform. Indeed, judging by this document alone, one could hardly argue that we are

¹¹² The platform of Greater Romania party, retrieved at: www.revistaromaniamare.ro/platforma-program-a-partidului-romania-mare

facing a radical right party. Which shows again the difficulty of allocating such tags in a more and more blurry right-left scale.

V. Turning points in influencing the social perception of radicalism(s) in Romania and the Czech Republic

In the following, we will be looking at the historical conditions that turned Romania and Czechoslovakia into countries under communist rule for almost half a century, as well as the significant historical moments when they seem to get closer to or further away from each other. This will facilitate our understanding of why the communist party may have had a longer life in Czechoslovakia than in Romania.

A. Imposing of the Communist rule: winning elections versus stealing elections

It is worth remembering that during World War 2, Czechoslovakia and Romania fought on opposite sides. Romania was a longtime ally of Nazi Germany, after having first signed a nonaggression pact in 1939, and then joined the Axis powers in 1940. It actively fought against the Soviet Union on the Eastern front, reaching places so far beyond the country's territories, like Odesa or Stalingrad. This could not have pleased the Soviets, despite the later internal coup d'état orchestrated by the King (possibly with Soviet help) that caused switching sides after the 23rd of August 1945. After that moment, the Soviet armies were free to pass through Romanian territories and attack the Germans. Therefore, at the peace treaties after the war, Romania was not recognized among the winning parties and had to pay its debts to the Soviet Union. This is why it was in the Soviet Union's interest to keep Romania in its sphere of influence and to control it via a pro-Russian government. The first elections after the war were held on November 19, 1946. The Communist Party, banned in the 1920s, has been legalized again in 1944, after switching sides in the war. The elections were supervised by the Allied Control Commission, which oversaw the fairness of the elections and the transition to a democratic regime in Romania. Earlier that year it was adopted a new constitution that stipulated a parliamentary system with a bicameral legislature. The Communist Party had close ties with the Soviet Union, was well-organized and well-funded, and had made important gains in the local elections previously held. It ran on a platform of social justice, equity, anti-fascist,

gathering the voices that had to suffer the most under the regime of Marshal Ion Antonescu and his pro-German views.

The competing parties in these elections were the National Democratic Party, the National Peasant Party, and the Social Democrat Party. All of them were less radical than the Communists and were proposing democracy and market-oriented economic policies. Eventually, the elections ended up with a victory with over 80% of the votes for the Communists but were extremely contested by almost all parties involved, and accusations of rigged elections and even reversed results were heard. Eventually, nothing changed, so the Communist Party's leader, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, became prime minister, and with him started the 46-year-long communist rule in Romania.¹¹³

In Czechoslovakia, the situation prior to the implementation of communist rule was rather different. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC) came to power in 1945, at the end of World War II. The Soviet Army had occupied the country, and the Czechoslovak government had signed the Moscow Declaration, which engaged in creating a government with a strong representation of the CPC. Several reasons have made this thing possible. First, the Soviet Union was a major ally of Czechoslovakia during the war and played an important role in the liberation of the country from German occupation. The Red Army also helped with organizing branches of the Communist Party in the liberated areas. Also, many people were quite unhappy with the traditional political parties, which were already discredited given their hesitance in dealing with the fate of the country prior to the German invasion. The pre-war Czechoslovak government was weak and divided, and its fall only facilitated the German occupation of the country. At the same time, the German leadership was a brutal regime, that suppressed all political opposition of any kind. As a result, people were very much upset with the traditional parties and were open to the idea of a new and more radical government.

The CPC was well-organized and disciplined. Unlike the one in Romania, which had suffered a long ban and had to undergo its activities in illegality, the Czechoslovak one, first established

¹¹³ Bottoni, S. (2010). "Reassessing the Communist Takeover in Romania: Violence, Institutional Continuity, and Ethnic Conflict Management", in *East European Politics and Societies*, 24(1), 59–89. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325409354355>; Kevin Adamson (2007), "Discourses of Violence and the Ideological Strategies of the Romanian Communist Party 1944-1953," in *East European Politics and Societies* 21: 559-587

in 1921, even had the same leader between 1929 and 1953, in the person of Klement Gottwald. This way we can say that it was better prepared for seizing the power. It had established ties with labor unions and other social organizations. The first elections after the war were held on the 26th and 27th of May 1945, and there the Czechoslovak National Social Party became the largest party (62 out of 300 seats in the National Assembly), but a coalition government with the Communists was formed. One year later on the same dates, another round of elections was held, this time with the Communists emerging as the largest party, with 114 out of 300 seats. This marked the beginning of the long communist rule over the country.

Once in power, the Communist Party began to consolidate its control over the country. It established a one-party state and began to implement a program of economic and social reform. Land reform was implemented, and the state took control of large industries, banks, and other key sectors of the economy. The government also established a system of central planning and began to prioritize heavy industry over consumer goods. In Romania, similar measures were taken, the model for both being the Soviet Union.¹¹⁴

There is still debate on whether the elections in both countries have been rigged or if the irregularities really influenced the final results in a significant way. There have been cases in both countries where the electors were intimidated, the results manipulated, ballot stuffing, etc. Even though, at the date, there is no definitive evidence they were rigged. Of course, this depends also on where to look for it. As an example, a channel belonging to the official Romanian radio broadcaster simply says it on their webpage, in 2016: “70 years since the rigged elections of 1946”. For the author of the article, the explanation for the Communist win was in fact the reversing of the results of the Peasants’ Party and the Liberal Party, supposedly 78%, that was presented as the result of the Communists¹¹⁵.

On the other hand, it was clear that the Communist party in the two countries did not have the same level of influence. Lockhart says: “The elections of May 1946 confirmed the ascendancy of the Communists, who were returned as the largest party in the state, but without a majority over the three other parties”¹¹⁶. At the same time, scholars such as Young and Kent consider

¹¹⁴ McDermott Kevin (2015). *Communist Czechoslovakia, 1945-1989: A Political and Social History*, Macmillan Publishers Limited

¹¹⁵ Romania International Radio, 70 years since the rigged elections of 1946, retrieved at: www.rii.ro/en_gb/70_years_since_the_rigged_elections_of_1946-2555994

¹¹⁶ Lockhart Robert Bruce (1948). “The Czechoslovak Revolution”, in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 632-644 (634)

that the elections in 1946 were okay in Czechoslovakia, but not in Romania: “As 1946 began, the Polish elections were postponed while elections in Czechoslovakia proved favourable to the communists who gained 38% of the vote. On the other hand, the elections in Romania in November 1946 were rigged”¹¹⁷. Or, in another place, where it is being said about the non-communist members of the government who were “removed by fraudulent elections in November that year”¹¹⁸.

But Czechoslovakia seems to be different again. We find out that prior to 1947 “Stalin was happy to let the Czechoslovaks develop their own socialist model in their own time”¹¹⁹. But the fear was later that Czechoslovakia would rally with the Western block against the Soviet dominance and interests, and so a coup took place in February 1948, to appoint a fully Communist government under the leadership of Klement Gottwald; interestingly enough, it is not yet clear if this was based on an idea of Stalin or at the initiative of the Czechoslovak communists¹²⁰, but nonetheless, the fact that things smoothly went into the ‘right’ direction clearly shows the power the party had already achieved in Czechoslovakia. We can conclude, out of this first point, that Czechoslovak society was more prepared and much more sympathetic to experience Communist rule than Romania was.

B. The moment of 1968. Towards a liberalization in both countries?

After communism came to power as the main, or better said unique ideology, the two countries developed a common program in all domains, from economic and social to the most private individual sphere, based on their model, the Soviet Union. In both countries, the process of collectivization took place in the 1950s. This meant the abolishing of privately-owned farmland and the organizing of all workers into large, publicly-owned collectives. There were some differences in the way this one was handled in the two countries.

Firstly, in Czechoslovakia, the collectivization process was less brutal and violent than in Romania. The Communist Party in Czechoslovakia tried to avoid the use of excessive force and relied more on persuasion and propaganda to promote the idea of collectivization as a way to increase agricultural productivity and improve the lives of peasants. While there were still instances of repression and violence, the scale and intensity of the violence were much less

¹¹⁷ Young John, Kent John (2013). *International Relations since 1945*, Oxford University Press, 48

¹¹⁸ *Idem*, 49

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem*

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*

than in Romania. There are then voices who state that collectivization was not a complete failure even in Romania, but that depended a lot on the region cause for some it worked well, while for others it was a disaster¹²¹. The same scholar thinks that collectivization had become a necessity by the time it was pursued, and it was much better like this than to continue the incertitude of those years¹²².

Then, the process of collectivization in Czechoslovakia was implemented more gradually and less forcibly than in Romania. The Communist Party in Czechoslovakia allowed a certain degree of flexibility in the process of collectivization, and small-scale private farming continued to exist alongside collective farms. The government also provided incentives and subsidies to encourage peasants to join collective farms voluntarily¹²³.

Finally, the process of collectivization in Czechoslovakia was more successful in terms of increasing agricultural productivity than in Romania. The Czechoslovakian government invested heavily in improving the infrastructure of the collective farms, such as building roads, irrigation systems, and modernizing equipment. As a result, the productivity of the collective farms increased, and the country became a net exporter of agricultural products¹²⁴.

The collectivization process started in the early 1950s in Romania and in the late 1950s in Czechoslovakia and went smoother in the latter, but the consequences of it are not easy to be compared in both countries. It caused a disruption in the traditional way of providing goods and products, to which societies had to adapt. Also, there were many who fiercely oppose the measures, and usually, they were seen as traitors, and the reply from the authorities was proportionally violent.

Apart from this relevant ideological process, which was a big challenge to the new communist societies, these first two decades of communist rule came with new events on both countries' political scenes. Probably the most wildly known and important was the de-Stalinization. Joseph Stalin, the powerful leader of the Soviet Union, died in March 1953. Following his death, the Soviet Union's satellites relaxed the political terror, going so far that the release of many political prisoners was possible. It also provided the opportunity for the countries under

¹²¹ Chirot, D. (1978). "Social Change in Communist Romania", in *Social Forces*, 57(2), 457–499.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/2577678>, (483)

¹²² *Idem*, 478

¹²³ Pernes Jiri (2016). "Kolektivizace zemedelstvi v Ceskoslovensku v letech 1948-1960", in *Forum Historiae* roč. 10, č. 1, s. 5-34 . ISSN 1337-6861.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*

Soviet control to pursue a more autonomous foreign policy. Another key moment was the death of the Romanian party leader, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, who prompted the ascent of Nicolae Ceausescu to the top position. Though for many this came as a surprise, Ceausescu was already in charge of much control of the party, also given the weakened health of Gheorghiu-Dej, and was himself responsible for the organizational part. Though the cult of personality was more poignant in the later years, Ceausescu was already familiar with the propaganda machine and prepared to become the “embodiment” of the Romanian state and people.¹²⁵

But there was still a moment when the two countries got closer to each other, and looked like their future would be somehow common as to their independence from the Soviet power. The year 1968 was of great importance for both countries, and it was prompted by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, in August 1968. What happened that an invasion of a friendly state had to be carried out by the member states of the Warsaw Pact? The event that triggered the harsh Soviet response entered history with the name of Prague Spring. This represented a period of political liberalization and reform in Czechoslovakia that began in January 1968 and lasted until August of that year. It was initiated by the newly elected First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Alexander Dubcek, who sought to create "socialism with a human face" by introducing reforms that would allow greater political and civil liberties, freedom of the press, and a more independent judiciary. Anyway, the Soviets feared that this would undermine the Communist leaderships of all countries in the East of Europe, and ultimately weaken their influence in the region. Dubcek was called to Moscow and removed from power, in favor of a hardliner, Gustav Husak. He rolled back many of the reforms and purged reformist elements from the Communist Party. But this event has shown that people tend to embrace values that were negated to them, such as more political freedom, liberty of expression and creation, and democracy. On the other side, crushing such a movement so heavily and increased repression in the years to come led to a rise in the dissident movements. Why did we say that the two countries shared some common future back then? Ceausescu, still fresh in function at that date (in his first mandate, as we would call it today), in a famous speech, dared to oppose the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the countries of the Warsaw Pact. He, in a way, described a priori what was later known as the Brezhnev doctrine. He argued that the invasion had violated international law and the sovereignty of a socialist state. He pointed out that the use of force was unnecessary and counterproductive, and that such issues could be

¹²⁵ Roske Octavian (2011). *Romania 1945-1989. Enciclopedia regimului comunist, vol. 1, A-E, Represiunea*, Editura Institutul National Pentru Studiul Totalitarismului

rather solved by dialogue and negotiations. He then warned that the invasion would have a negative impact on the unity of the socialist countries, creating a motif and a precedent for future interventions. He then asked for all foreign troops to be withdrawn from Czechoslovakia (a direct reference to the Soviet ones), with immediate termination of conflict. Then, he emphasized the importance of respecting the right of every socialist country to pursue its own path of development, based on the specific conditions and aspirations of its people. Finally, Ceaușescu called for the establishment of a new system of relations among the socialist countries, based on mutual respect, cooperation, and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. This represented maybe the moment of the highest approval of Ceausescu at the mass level because it was one of the very few times this otherwise hardcore Stalinist managed to play the role of an activist for human rights and freedoms.¹²⁶

Ceausescu made many efforts in order to ensure himself a respected place at an international level, convincing the Western leaders, especially after the moment of 1968, that he was in fact frequentable and a true opponent of the Soviet Union. While he ultimately opposed especially the transparency and the wind of change characteristics of the late period of the Soviet Union, the fact that he was also against the invasion of Czechoslovakia helped him create a good image both at home and abroad. He criticized the policies taken by his predecessor, Gheorghe-Gheorghiu-Dej, the same as Khrushchev criticized Stalin after he acceded to power. The number of political prisoners went lower, and the retaliation of Securitate, the powerful tool for the surveillance of citizens was much more subtle than open violence. Ceausescu cared to present himself as a moderate leader who is more in favor of the Western type of reforms rather than those of the Communist bloc. By distancing himself from the Soviet Union on some occasions (the 1968 moment being of first importance), he was ready to show that Romania was on its own path, and maybe even more open to Western influences, so the country could have been potentially attracted to the Western sphere of influence. Then, Ceausescu made sure to toy with Romanian nationalism, with its historical and cultural importance, reminding the West of the strategic importance of the country and its role in defeating Nazi Germany in World War II. The cult of personality also helped in the development of a positive image of Ceausescu in the Western world, because he portrayed himself as the leader of the people, a fatherly figure who always fights for the good of the nation and for its development. Then, another point of his strategy was to frequently host foreign leaders and show them the country and its various

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*

accomplishments. This is how he made sure to build and preserve a good international image up until the 1980s, when the economic situation got dire in the whole country, when it had become difficult to maintain the appearance of a good leader when one had long queues for almost any product, and the shops were rather empty. But overall, the first years of Ceausescu as leader of Romania, even the first decade, is considered among the best years of the socialist Romania.

C. The 1977 earthquake (only in Romania)

The 1977 earthquake in Romania was a catastrophic seismic event that struck the country on March 4, 1977. It was the strongest earthquake to hit Romania in the 20th century, measuring 7.5 on the Richter scale. The earthquake was centered in the eastern part of the country, near the city of Vrancea, but its effects were felt across much of Romania, as well as in neighboring countries such as Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. The most affected city of Romania was the capital, Bucharest, where the vast majority of victims were registered (almost 1,500 deaths). Bucharest was filled with buildings from the interwar period, so more than 30 years old by the time of the earthquake, many of them having gone through the big seism of 1940 as well. Unfortunately, 32,900 buildings around the country have been destroyed or damaged, with 35,000 families having no shelter during a still-cold period of spring. Nicolae Ceausescu was on an official visit to Nigeria, which he interrupted and returned to the country. A state of emergency has been declared, but the authorities have been criticized for failing to prepare for such a natural disaster, in spite of warnings coming from the scientists about the highly seismic activity in the Vrancea area. Also, it has been said that rescue efforts were lacking resources and coordination, while the authorities were more occupied with keeping the image of controlling the situation rather than providing the necessary goods and relief to people. This contributed to the fall in popularity of the communist regime, at about a decade after the successful image blow at the moment of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

With no official report available about the damages in the aftermath of the earthquake, it is estimated that the cost of the disaster surpassed two billion US dollars, which means a huge impact on the national economy. The earthquake served Ceausescu and the Communist Party as a pretext for what has been called systematization. This was a large-scale urban planning program, which consisted of demolishing existing neighborhoods, including historical buildings, and replacing them with apartment blocks, administrative buildings, and public spaces. The goal was in theory to modernize the cities and to create new ones, by bringing

people from rural areas to live in the city, often against their will, and to participate in the industrialization of the country. Of course, the program has been seen as a symbol of the repressive nature of the Communist regime¹²⁷. These events (the management of the situation caused by the earthquake and the systematization) can both explain the distance taken by the people after 1990, and the lack of success for the radical left after the revolution.

D. Charter 77 (only in Czechoslovakia)

While Romania was experiencing the consequences of the devastating earthquake, in Czechoslovakia a group of intellectuals, writers, artists, and academics launched a civic initiative and a human rights declaration, called Charter 1977. Again, almost one decade after the suppression of the Prague Spring, this document reiterates the fight against the suppression of civil liberties. This was more of a symbolic moment because the signatories of the charter made it sure not to seem like organizing an opposition movement, which it would have been against the law. Still, the government's reaction was harsh. The original document was confiscated (though it continued to spread in copies), some were put into jail, and they were viewed as traitors and renegades, along with many other epithets designating the lack of patriotic conduct.

What did this Charter manage to accomplish? Of course, it was not expected a real change in the regime's behaviour, but it represented a warning that Czechoslovakia did not respect its obligations under the international treaties, together with making people realize the potential of their rights on paper, and of denying them in practice¹²⁸. According to one of its masterminds, philosophy Professor Patocka, the charter attached great importance to the moral purpose. But this moral purpose eventually translated also into political significance; a new spirit of activism arose, and a connection to Prague Spring came to the minds¹²⁹. The Charter has not been prosecuted as a movement due to its immense international popularity, which hindered the authorities. Still, many of its signatories were arrested and interrogated, with the purpose of intimidating them and making them give up the charter's ideals. Ten years later, in 1987, J. Ruml recalls the words of Professor Patocka, close before his death: "People today

¹²⁷ Bucica Cristina. "Legitimizing power in capital cities. Bucharest – continuity through radical change?", retrieved at: web.archive.org/web/20051028180259/http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/kokkalis/GSW5/bucica.pdf

¹²⁸ Skilling Gordon (1978). "Socialism and Human Rights: Charter 77 and the Prague Spring", in *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, Volume 20, No. 2, 157-176 (173)

¹²⁹ *Idem*, 174

again realise that there are things worth suffering for. The things for which we may have to suffer are the ones worth living for”¹³⁰.

But still, could such a moment of a real challenge to the Communist regime explain the popularity of the radical left later, when it actually seemed that such an initiative undermined the foundations of the socialist system itself? Could we see in such a success of the radical left despite all stepwise conditions in a seemingly very liberal-spirited country a big disappointment of the citizens in relation to the mainstream parties? The fact that many people could feel nostalgic after the communist rule might also show that not everything went badly for them? Paradoxically, one possible explanation for the rise of the radical left in the Czech Republic is not related only to nostalgic feelings, but to the rapid development the country has known in the 1990s. Contrary to the Romanian experience, where the first governments were pretty much reluctant to start the big privatization process and to undertake radical reforms (they feared the people would get discontent and would revolt against the leadership, which was already hinted by the miners’ revolts in the early 1990 and 1991), the Czech Republic launched into a fast modernization of the country towards the market economy, that led to more rapid economic growth, but also to more perceived social and economic inequality, especially in more rural areas and touching older generations (those who could remember the happy days of having a stable job and income for years, in the socialist centralized system, and avoided the new capitalistic periods of high unemployment and job market uncertainties).

Another potential factor for the rise of the radical left was the failure of mainstream political parties to effectively address the issues mentioned above. The Czech Republic, exactly like all the other countries from the region, had to adapt to a completely new economic system, in which some people managed to get more benefits than others by resorting to a plethora of methods varying from legal to illegal, passing through the grey, not yet legislated areas. Thus, during this uneasy transition, countries have been plagued by corruption scandals and political turmoil, which have eroded public trust in mainstream politicians and parties. People have become more disillusioned, and in such a state of spirit, it is easy to follow more radical paths. Now, a good question is why necessarily the path was more to the radical left, in the case of the Czech Republic, and this is why we felt it useful to cover the main features of the radical right parties. After all, some inclination of society towards the radical left might be also explained by the desire to take a bigger distance from the radical right and its ways of dealing

¹³⁰ Ruml Jiri (1987). “Ten Years of Charter 77”, in *Index on Censorship* 1/87, 9-12 (12)

with important challenges at the societal level. Here the example of Romania can come in handy: having to deal with a significant Hungarian minority, Romania is more tempted to have this minority involved as a political subject, from time to time as a scapegoat. Or, such a minority better fits the targeting schemes of a radical right, more nationalist party, that would unleash the debate about lost territories or too many rights already given to the minority to the detriment of the majority. They would put many of the country's failures on the back of the minority, accusing it of undermining the national economy or other mischievous political games. On the contrary, the radical left would have to somehow rely its discourse on creating an alliance between the minority and the majority with the goal of fighting a common enemy, for example, the global capitalism. In the Czech Republic, the topic of minorities does not represent a big political debate. The minorities, other than Moravians, are almost insignificant in numbers¹³¹, whereas in Romania the Hungarian minority is much better represented, with over 1 million members according to the latest 2021 census, and has areas where it is majoritarian, even in quite big cities such as Miercurea Ciuc (Csikszereda), with 81,75% Hungarian ethnics. The political life is dominated there by the Hungarian ethnics' political party, which gave the city's major, plus 15 of the 19 seats in the local council (with other 3 seats obtained by another ethnic party, and only one to a so-called Romanian party, the Liberals) which has registered a steady participation in many governments in Romania after 1990, and now benefits from an interrupted participation since 2014¹³². This is why in Romania it is far easier for a radical right party to try to sow discord between the Romanians and the Hungarians, and most of this is done by always reminding the majority that the minority is intending to undermine the country's territorial integrity by the means of regional autonomy. This more or less real danger is of course multiplied in the radical right discourse, that brings into attention 'imminent threats' to the 'sacred' national land.

It is of course very hard to prove a direct link between the consequences of natural phenomena like earthquakes and political movements that disregarded the communist system and could not in themselves constitute any guarantees for a rise in the society's will to pursue such a system again, after 1990. In a country where a need for reinstating such a charter appeared, it was clear that the system does not provide citizens with all the normal living conditions or development opportunities. It only shows that between the two, Czechoslovakia had some

¹³¹ Ethnic Groups in the Czech Republic, retrieved at: www.worldatlas.com/articles/ethnic-groups-in-the-czech-republic.html

¹³² Enciclopedia României, retrieved at: enciclopediaromaniei.ro/wiki/Index:Guvernele_Romaniei

advantage over Romania, in terms of freedom of expression or at least to manifest something like a dissidence from within the country. In Romania, Securitate, the secret police, had a high reputation for pursuing the individuals who were said to manifest hostility to the regime or discontent regarding political or economic life. This contributed to a much tenser climate than in Czechoslovakia overall the whole Communist period, and the peak has been reached during the revolutions in both countries.

E. The Velvet Revolution versus The Bloody Revolution

The main difference between the two revolutions that managed to overthrow the old regime in both countries lies in the extremely violent character of the Romanian revolution, which ended with the condemnation and the execution of Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife, Elena.

In Czechoslovakia, the transition of power was non-violent and occurred at the end of a period of massive protests (17 to 28 November 1989). The demonstrations against the one-party rule were first mainly held by students and known dissidents. The results were the end of the command economy (same as in Romania) and the conversion from the unique party rule to the parliamentary system, with a multitude of different political forces and the subsequent democratic play of alliances.

How did it all begin? In Czechoslovakia, the police attacked a student demonstration in Prague, on 17th November. The event generated lots of other demonstrations, that turned into anti-communist ones. The numbers grew from 200,000 to 500,000 people from one day to another. Surprisingly enough, only one week later, on the 24th of November, the whole party leadership announced its resignation. November 27th, a two-hour general strike of all citizens was held. All other governments from the Warsaw Pact were having the same problems, so the use of force or calling an international coalition to invade the country like in 1968 was out of the question. In these circumstances, the Communist Party proceed into giving up power and end the one-party leadership, on the 28th of November. On December 10, President Husak, the man who was in power ever since the 'normalisation' after 1968 (this is how the Communist leadership called the period after the repressing of the Prague Spring), appointed the first non-communist government after the Second World War, and then resigned. The new leaders were names with very important symbolic meanings: Alexander Dubcek, who was the president at the time of initiating the 1968 Prague Spring, and Vaclav Havel, the writer and long-time dissident. The free elections were held in June 1990.

On the other side, the Romanian Revolution, also called the Christmas Revolution, was shorter, but more brutal and with many victims, over 1,500 deaths. We will shortly present its timeline, according to the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity¹³³: The main events took place between the 16th and 25th of December 1989. It all started in Timisoara, with the police attempts to evict the Reformed Referend Laszlo Tokes, to which those from his parish opposed. Even though the police temporarily retreated, in order not to escalate the situation, Ceausescu ordered the Militia (the name used to designate police forces at that time) and Securitate to continue with the eviction of the priest. Anyway, the priest enjoyed the support of over 4,000 people, who shouted anti-communist slogans. These were repressed by water cannon jets and tear gas, and even the tanks opened fire. While Nicolae Ceausescu went for a state visit to Iran, the situation in the country got inflated, with calls for a general strike in many cities of Transylvania. The Romanian Democratic Front was constituted in Timisoara, and held talks with Prime Minister Dascalescu, requiring the liberation of those arrested during demonstrations, the resignation of Ceausescu and a free press. Coming back from Iran, Ceausescu condemned the events in Timisoara, calling them provocations, and blaming other countries for interference in internal affairs. On the 21st of December 1989, the Romanian Democratic Front leaders read, in front of a crowd of 100,000 people, the Proclamation, in which they ask for a democratization of the country, and for banning the people supporting the Communist regime from ever getting new political functions. Meanwhile in Bucharest, “hoping to win the popular approval of his policy and regime, Nicolae Ceausescu organized a public rally with the participation of tens of thousands of people. He addresses the crowds, promising increases in salaries, pensions, social aid, and state allowances for children”¹³⁴. But at some point, during his speech, the crowd starts booing, and things ran out of control. Next day, on 22nd December, the protests continued. The Minister of National Defence, Vasile Milea, refused to fulfil Ceausescu’s order, to shoot the demonstrators and the crowds gathered at the square, and instead committed suicide. A state of emergency was declared via public broadcasters, but soon their headquarters are conquered by demonstrators. The Army and the Milia forces side with the revolutionaries and refused to shoot upon them. At noon, in a trap set by Securitate, the presidential couple fled the building of the Central Committee of the

¹³³ European Network Remembrance and Solidarity, retrieved at: enrs.eu/article/the-romanian-revolution

¹³⁴ *Ibidem*

Communist Party by helicopter, but it is soon deposited in a military unit in Targoviste, a town at about 80 kilometres from Bucharest.

In a very quick trial, the Ceausescus are accused of genocide, undermining the state and the economy, and diversionist acts, condemned to firing squad and executed on December 25th, 1989, on Christmas Day. On 27th of December, the National Salvation Front Council to the Country (CFSN), the new institution in charge of running the country, after its plenary meeting, designated the Ion Iliescu as President of the country as Dumitru Mazilu as vice-president¹³⁵. On 20 May 1990, the first free elections after the fall of the Communist regime took place in the country.

We can be certain that the memory of the Communist past can be different whether it ends in a bloodbath or in a velvet revolution. People could have a feeling of easiness that the system was eventually ‘cooperative’ enough to step down in a civilized manner, without producing further victims. While the Romanian blood spill only intensified the hate the people were already feeling toward the Communist dictatorship, so they were not eager to continue having the same fate after the 1990s. This is where the idea of Communism in itself probably got so compromised in Romania, that not even now, after more than three decades since those events, a socialist/communist project encounters full opposition and distrust.

F. The amiable ‘divorce’ between the Czech Republic and Slovakia versus ethnical hate

This is an event that took place in 1993, and it could only influence the fate of the Communist movement in former Czechoslovakia. The separation occurred amiably and remains one of the happiest examples of state separation that history, unlike some others such as Sudan nowadays, that experience civil wars and high degrees of violence.

Czechoslovakia was first formed in 1918, in the aftermath of the first world war. The disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire led to the merging of the historical provinces of Bohemia and Moravia, with Slovakia. The idea of a union was logical, especially with the purpose to resist the assault of bigger and more powerful neighbours, like the Romanian

¹³⁵ The Romanian Revolution, retrieved at: enrs.eu/article/the-romanian-revolution

historical provinces were always trying to do against either the Ottomans, the Russians, or the Habsburgs. The new united state did not have an easy life, being invaded by Nazi Germany in the preliminaries of the Second World War, and then taken over by the Soviets and their authoritarian Communism. After the Soviet Union eventually fell apart in 1991, the Czechs and the Slovaks decided that it would be better to separate and live in two independent states.

The process of separation began in 1992, when the Czech and Slovak parliaments passed a federal law allowing for the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. A federal election was held in June 1992, and the results showed a clear divide between the Czech and Slovak electorates. The Civic Democratic Party (ODS), led by Vaclav Klaus, won a landslide victory in the Czech lands, while the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), led by Vladimir Meciar, won in Slovakia. Unlike the first, who wished to maintain a strong federation, Meciar was not willing to cooperate for the same goal, which was easy to guess by the name of his party. The Federal Assembly voted for the dissolution of Czechoslovakia on November 25, which got effective from January 1, 1993¹³⁶. Since then, the former federation split into two independent states: the Czech Republic and Slovakia. But what did this peaceful separation process mean for the radical left?

After any such separation, one must take into account a rather huge transformation of a country's political landscape. Parties that used to get more votes in a certain region will be unable to get them any longer because that jurisdiction would be inaccessible, and the compensation would not always prove sufficient. The Communists would have gotten a good share of votes from the Slovakian side too. It is estimated that in 1992, at the last elections before the splitting up of the country, CPBM got in the future Slovakian territories a score roughly equal to that from the Czech regions, namely around 14%, which allowed it to be the top second party in Czechoslovakia and secured the important number of seats in the parliament. While after the divorce, what we could consider a homologous Slovakian party – The Communist Party of Slovakia, only managed to obtain a mere 2,79% in the 1994 general elections, with no seats in the parliament. At the same elections, a less radical, center-left coalition – Common Choice – managed to get 10,18% and 18 seats in the Slovak parliament, a result they were still not happy about. But we consider this a clear sign that, once the CPBM

¹³⁶ Kahanec, Martin and others (2014). "Slovakia and the Czech Republic: Inequalities and Convergences After the Velvet Divorce", in Brian Nolan and others (eds), *Changing Inequalities and Societal Impacts in Rich Countries: Thirty Countries' Experiences*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199687428.003.0024>, accessed 11 May 2023.

was not available for a Slovak vote anymore, another radical left force did not meet the expectations of the Slovak voters. At the same time, the lack of Slovak voters became obvious too at the first Czech general elections after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, despite these taking place in 1996, three years after the actual split, which gave more time to parties to better prepare for the elections: CPBM lost a good share of their votes from 1992¹³⁷.

Interestingly enough, the right-wing party winning the elections both in 1992 and 1996 – The Civic Democratic Party – did not seem much touched by this phenomenon of country separations and loss of potential electors, given the fact that it registered the same score, around 29%, in both elections. We can conclude from here that the radical left has not had any electoral benefit from the countries' separation.

It is worth noting that initially, at its constituency in 1990, from the ashes of the dying Czechoslovak Communist Party, CPMB, given its name, did not seem to address to other regions, apart from Bohemia and Moravia, which are the historical regions of Czechia and together they represent around 93% of the total area and around 80% of the population of the Czech Republic. In spite of this apparently restrictive territorial nature (that did not include Slovakia), the party reached some share of the Slovakian electorate until the separation of the countries. “Ideologically the Czechs looked to have a coherent party system, but a natural alliance of left-wing parties was not natural in the post-communist context”¹³⁸. Exactly like in Romania's case, where until recently it had existed a clear separation between right and left and a lack of willingness to cooperate.

VI. Conclusion. General contribution of the research

Throughout this study, we have been trying to answer, in a more or less apparent way, the research question(s) mentioned in the introduction. Namely, we were interested in why it was possible to have a continuous radical left only in the Czech Republic, even after the fall of Communism, while in Romania there was never the case, and it is almost impossible to think that a party containing the name “communist” to survive the elections in case it would have been allowed to run. We have tried to discern the reasons that could cause success in one country and the failure in another one. We have designed for that a case study comparison,

¹³⁷ Parties and elections in Europe, retrieved at: www.parties-and-elections.eu

¹³⁸ Millard, F. (2004). “Political Parties and Party Systems”, in *Elections, Parties and Representation in Post-Communist Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230000865_6, 129-155 (147-48)

where we highlighted some important historical events after 1945, and how each of the countries dealt with the situation. We started immediately after the Second World War, with the atmosphere after the first after-war elections. There are reasons to believe that the Communists of the back-then Czechoslovakia could have won the elections without the necessity of getting them rigged; this was more probable to happen in Romania, where the Communist Party had been already banned in the inter-wars period.

But if Communism was more popular among the Czechoslovaks, it came the moment of the Prague Spring, a truly special type of democratization within the Communist rule, which was stopped by an invasion led by the Soviet Union, an invasion to which Romania, through its newly elected leader, Nicolae Ceausescu, did not participate. Thanks to this moment, Communism seemed to have gained more sympathy in Romania too, as a general perception.

Another key year is 1977, with two events that matter for us: the deadly earthquake from Romania, and the Charter '77 in Czechoslovakia. The earthquake was not very well handled by the Romanian authorities, so there are reasons to believe that Communism dropped in popularity at the societal level. In Prague, the Charter '77 was a progressive document that the authorities seek to repress, but it paved the way to more democracy and more concern for human rights in the country.

The next important moment we have chosen was the anti-communist revolutions from 1989. The specific difference between Romania and Czechoslovakia lies in the fact that Romania accomplished freedom only after a massive bloodbath that left many dead and wounded, while in Czechoslovakia there were no victims, the Communist leaders resigning due to the increased pressure from the street protesters. This might have left a much better memory in the minds of the Czechoslovaks, who could have thought that Communism could well be given a chance if it continues to respect the rules of the democratic game. In Romania, the revolution discredited the idea of a functional Communism for a very long time to come.

The last important chosen moment in the history of the two countries was represented by the peaceful divorce between the Czech Republic and Slovakia, at a time when in Romania there was already the danger of a rise of the radical right, that would take advantage of the ethnic tensions with the Hungarian minority to promote a discourse of hate.

Of course, these are not exhaustive explanations for an increased sympathy for the radical left in the Czech Republic, compared to Romania. But there are nonetheless potential explanations from a plethora of other possibilities, that could maybe show better conditions for the radical left to persist in the Czech Republic even after the fall of Communism.

As for the distinctions between radical and extremist parties, we have concluded that radicalism is still congruent with the rules of democratic life, while extremism is very much an anomaly at the level of a political system, a malfunction that needs to be addressed as quickly as possible. While radicalism might be useful in questioning the established rules and updating them to newer realities, extremism is a danger in its chaotic violence that wants to overthrow the existing order in its entirety.

Throughout the study, we have also looked at the election results in the post-communist period in the Czech Republic and in Romania, to see the increase and the decrease of some radical forces, illustrative for our topic.

We have to also keep in mind some more general conclusions, such as: Europe is still not an uniform continent, and the Iron Curtain contributed to a separate meaning and different features of political parties in general in the West and East, regardless of their apparent similarities. The post-communist transition period was difficult for political parties in the region, with parties in the 1990s lacking the necessary experience in democratic ruling, and their behaviour on the democratic stage being different from that of parties in Western Europe; the countries that we have chosen were once under the influence of the Soviet Union, but nowadays both share the same destiny, as members of the EU and NATO; we cannot stress enough the importance of political parties as decisive entities for a country's future, and that even small changes in the system could lead to big consequences in political life.

The general contribution of this research lies in highlighting the potential causes of why in two quite similar countries (under the same Soviet influence for the same number of decades, with the same present fate), the radical left has developed in entirely different ways. To our knowledge, the literature is lacking a direct case-study comparison between the two countries on this topic.

The general contribution of the research is to analyze and compare the reasons behind the persistence of a continuous radical left in the Czech Republic, while in Romania, it is almost

impossible for a party containing the name "communist" to survive in elections. The research has looked into historical events in both countries, such as the aftermath of World War II, the Prague Spring, the earthquake in Romania, the anti-communist revolutions in 1989, and the peaceful divorce between the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The study has also differentiated between radical and extremist parties, highlighting that radicalism can be useful in questioning established rules and updating them to newer realities, while extremism is a danger to the political system. The research has also examined the election results in the post-communist period in both countries, providing illustrative examples for the topic. Overall, the research has contributed to understanding the factors that influence the success or failure of radical left parties in post-communist societies.

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