FILLING THE BLANKS. POLITICAL PARTIES, INTEREST GROUPS, AND REPRESENTATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

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1 Introduction

While political parties have been at the center of scholarly attention in recent decades, research on interest groups has gained traction only lately. Besides a few notable exceptions (Thomas, 2001; Witko, 2009; Allern, 2010; Allern & Bale, 2012, 2017; Otjes & Rasmussen, 2017), we lack a systematic analysis of interactions between these two actors, not to mention whether interest groups are replacing political parties in representing certain groups of citizens. For example, as Lefkofridi et al. (2014) have suggested, some groups of voters are less represented by parties than others. Furthermore, scholars have also suggested that political parties are increasingly interested in the cartelization of politics, where they are more inclined to penetrate the state than to fight for voters and members (Katz & Mair, 1995). Are interest groups at least partially able to compensate for the absence of political parties?

I investigate whether both political parties and interest groups carry the same type of representational biases or whether the latter could make up for parties' shifts towards certain types of electorate. To empirically verify this assumption, I map groups' and parties' positions on Gal-Tan and economic matters. The Gal-Tan dimension (green, alternative, libertarian *versus* traditional, authoritarian, nationalist) has become increasingly popular among scholars investigating party stances on Europeanization (Hooghe et al., 2002). Regarding economic matters, where parties are set apart by different points of view on economic redistribution, welfare, and government regulation of the economy, it allows researchers to map political parties on four ideological quadrants (left-tan, right-tan, left-gal, and right-gal) (Vachudova & Hooghe, 2009). As party competition has recently been dictated not only by the left-right division, Gal-Tan adds multidimensionality regarding the socio-cultural dimension.

I analyze six countries – three from CEE (Poland, Slovenia, and Lithuania) and three from Western Europe (Belgium, Sweden, and the Netherlands). Both regions have had diverging trajectories of party politics (Vachudova & Hooghe, 2009). The collapse of communism in the East, Europeanization, and, last but not the least, the lack of societal embeddedness, created completely different dynamics for the institutionalization of political parties and civil societies.

There are various definitions and interpretations of what an interest group is (for discussion, see Beyers et al., 2008). I follow the definition of interest groups provided by Thomas (2001, p. 7): “An interest group is an association of individuals or organizations, usually formally organized, that attempts to influence public policy”. By contrast, a political party is “any political group that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections, candidates for public office” (Sartori, 1976, p. 64).

2 Cartelization

As argued in a seminal article by Katz and Mair (1995), in contrast to previous time periods when other organizational models (elite caucus or cadre party, mass party, catch-all party) were dominant, the cartel party emerged in the late 20th century. Contrary to its predecessors, the cartel party is less interested in gaining people’s support than exploiting the resources of the state and position itself within it. Parties, as Katz and Mair have argued, function therefore as cartels, trying to limit the emergence of competition and ensure that the party in public office has the upper hand over the party on the ground and the party central office (Krašovec & Haughton, 2011).

The research on cartelization has primarily been focused on western democracies, with a few notable examples (Yishai, 1998; Szczerbiak, 2001; Sikk, 2003; van Biezen, 2003; Bolleyer, 2009). Where does it leave us with CEE countries? As Katz and Mair (2012) point out, political parties in post-communist democracies share many problems with those in old democracies, but contrary to them, they do not have the institutional advantage of having functioned for several decades. Moreover, it has been debated that parties in CEE might immediately embrace the cartel model, according to which the relationship with interest groups and, in general, civil society is loose (Szczerbiak, 2001; Sikk, 2003; Krašovec & Haughton, 2011). There have also been concerns that civil society itself is so weak and fragmented that it would not channel societal interests into organized forms (Dobbins & Riedel, 2018). Katz and Mair (2012) even argued that instead of arduously building relationships with civil society, political parties could take a shortcut, build their own organizations, and establish permanent dominance over them. They also contended that all the previous models of party competition have focused on their relationship with voters, while their relationship with the state should be treated as equally important.

First, after the Second World War, parties became less and less agents of civil society acting in the interests of their constituency and penetrating the state

on their behalf. Instead, they became agents of the state themselves (Katz & Mair, 1995, p. 18). Thus, cartel parties have become detached from their traditional constituencies even more as their dependence on state subsidies has grown substantially. Such parties penetrate and operate within the state, are highly professionalized, weakly anchored in society, and use their privileged financial positions – above political divisions – to limit the likelihood of new entities entering the system (Mair, 1997; van Biezen et al., 2012; Fraussen & Halpin, 2018).

Secondly, Katz and Mair distinguished three ideal types of a modern political party – (1) party in office (in parliament or in government), (2) party on the ground (activists and local branches), and finally (3) party's central office (party leaders). Particularly remarkable for Katz and Mair is that the party in office has dominated the other two types. They argue that “as the party in public office gains ascendancy within the party as a whole, its particular interests will be treated as being the interests of the party writ large” (Katz & Mair, 2009, p. 756).

I argue that political parties in Europe are generally drifting towards the cartel mode. As the proliferation of new parties entering the system decreases, the ideological saturation of the party scene could be reduced as well (for a discussion about party funding, see Häusermann & Geering, 2011; Casal Bértoa & Spirova, 2019). Political parties are becoming more interested in achieving electoral and financing thresholds. Therefore, they could strategically turn away from political positions that do not guarantee staying in the (cartel) system. Moreover, ties with parties' collateral organizations like trade unions or agrarian associations have been more relaxed lately. Parties used to rely on such grassroots organizations to mobilize support and gain new members. With the emergence of the *catch-all* model, political parties attempted to appeal to broader audiences. In consequence, parties took a more independent position on interest groups, trying to free themselves from constraining relationships (Katz & Mair, 1995; van Biezen et al., 2012; Allern & Bale, 2012).

3 Interest groups as a second go-to option

As a consequence, the “decline of parties” and party democracy (Dalton et al., 2011) paint a different picture for citizens. Parties may no longer be interested in representing a broad spectrum of voters and this may create gaps in representational relationship. Voters may no longer feel represented and may show anti-party sentiment as well (Poguntke, 1996). Subsequently, they could look for alternatives and turn to interest groups as another form of preference aggregation. As Borang and her colleagues have argued, interest groups do not necessarily carry the same ideological history, pre-existing voting constituencies, or organizational structures that make it difficult for political parties to reach voters above socio-economic cleavages in societies (Borang et al., 2017).

Furthermore, it has been debated elsewhere that it is actually plausible to address interest groups as “political organizations” in the same manner as political parties (Fraussen & Halpin, 2018). Heaney (2010, p. 568) has even argued that

groups and parties are “intricately and inextricably linked to one another”. Furthermore, Fraussen and Halpin hypothesized that

given the high level of similarities, not only in organizational form but also in the external challenges that they face, studying political parties and interest organizations in tandem can deliver more insights into the nature and evolution of these organizations.

(2018, p. 26)

More generally, interest organizations are seen here as entities channeling policy preferences and bringing them to the political arena in the form of agenda setting, and simultaneously also influencing policy processes, becoming intermediaries – or transmission belts – between the public and the state (Easton, 1971; Truman, 1993).

One important difference between parties and interest organizations is that the latter do not compete in elections. In order to influence policy-making processes, they need to interact with political parties, parliamentary committees, or governmental agencies. Keeping in mind this important difference, some scholars have observed many similarities between interest organizations and political parties (Fraussen & Halpin, 2018).

According to Burstein and Linton (2002, pp. 381–382), either parties or interest organizations “define public problems, propose solutions, aggregate citizen’s policy preferences, mobilize voters, make demands of elected officials, communicate information about government action to their supporters and the larger public, and make relatively coherent legislative action possible”. Allern and Bale (2012) have highlighted the role of parties and groups in aggregating the public’s interests into collective demands and seeking to influence the form and content of public policy. By contrast, Fraussen and Halpin (2018) have discussed the possibility that interest groups might have followed the same path as political parties by becoming very professionalized, managed from above and having little to do with local constituencies apart from collecting membership fees.

According to Theda Skocpol, older groups are more likely to undergo the process of professionalization and centralization. These organizations are often devoid of membership involvement and usually focused on single issues, resulting in “diminished democracy”, whereby their civic and integrative dimension is lost (Skocpol, 2003).

Organized interests – grassroots movements, various professional associations, or cause groups – allow citizens to pursue shared objectives in an institutional way (Putnam, 1995). A high density of interest organizations along regular channels of communication between citizens and interests and their governments is seen to be crucial for the emergence of liberal democracy (Putnam, 1993; Elster et al., 1998). For instance, when interest groups and the public are on the same page in terms of policy preferences, the likelihood of adoption of a jointly preferred law increases (Gilens, 2012). Groups’ activities in certain policy areas have also had a positive impact on bringing decision-makers’ attention to issues (Rasmussen

et al., 2014; Berkhout et al., 2020; Bevan & Rasmussen, 2020). In this sense, the chapter bridges research on social movement organizations (SMOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and, obviously, interest organizations. Beyers et al. (2008) bitterly remark that scholars of former groups can go to great lengths to avoid the “interest group” label, often seen as something negative, elitist, and undemocratic. However, interest groups research sees them as politically and democratically useful, and, in fact, analyzes the same phenomenon as research on SMOs or NGOs, “as [interest groups] evolve over time, incorporate multiple purposes and structural features from all three prevailing forms” (Hasenfeld & Gidron, 2005, p. 98). Finally, one could say that “NGOs” is a “hurrah” word for the “boo” word “interest group”, as Grant argues (2001).

Nonetheless, our knowledge about interest groups as a potential substitute for political parties is very scarce and limited to Western Europe and the United States. We know very little about how political parties and interest groups behave in the post-communist environment. It should be also noted here that the development of organized interests and political parties has had a different dynamics than in Western Europe (Mair, 1997; Kitschelt et al., 1999; Enyedi, 2006). The departure point for democracy was not a century-long overlapping process, but rather an unexpected collapse of communism. In consequence, the transition was three-fold, with simultaneous creation of new political, economic, and constitutional systems, and in some cases also new states (Offe & Adler, 1991; Bunce, 1995; Bohle & Greskovits, 2012; see Labanino & Dobbins in this volume). A half century of authoritarianism destroyed traditional parties, weakened classes and interests, and undermined the social trust necessary to kick-start social participation (Crawford & Lijphart, 1995). Moreover, when this particularly relates to the Gal-Tan dimension, the whole region underwent the process of Europeanization in the form of EU accession talks, which became an overriding national priority (Vachudova & Hooghe, 2009). As Hooghe et al. (2002) suggested, the Gal-Tan is more useful here in predicting stances towards EU than the standard left-right division.

4 Data sources and methodology

The countries included in this study are Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovenia. By including three “old” West European democracies with newcomers from CEE, we are able to compare how interest groups position themselves in different environments and find out whether there are any substantial differences between East and West.

Each country is different, not only in size and population, but also the state of civil society, institutional representation of its interests as well as the structure of party systems and political parties. Furthermore, we can expect the institutional nature of an interest group system to play a role here. Here, one discerns two dominant systems: neo-corporatism and pluralism (see Chapter 5 in this volume). This distinction refers to variation regarding “the extent of state autonomy, the

degree of societal organization, the variety, legitimacy and degree of interest group participation” (Eising, 2008; Fraussen & Beyers, 2016). A pluralist system is mainly fragmented and shaped by competition among interest groups for policy-makers’ attention. By contrast, in neo-corporatist settings, access is highly organized, usually granted to few privileged groups (Binderkrantz & Christiansen, 2015; Christiansen et al., 2018). As Western European countries and Slovenia have been portrayed as neo-corporatist, other CEE countries, including Poland and Lithuania, have had weak organized arrangements with a plethora of actors competing for influence (Hassel, 2008). Taking this into account, the selection of both Eastern and Western European countries differing on a range of other factors (e.g. level of corporatism, party system properties, interest group populations) makes the findings reasonably generalizable within the European context.

In order to measure ideological positions of interest groups and political parties, I use the “Gal-Tan” and economic “left-right” scale. While the economic placement is still crucial for party competition, the former allows us to capture the cultural and post-material dimension of politics (Hooghe et al., 2002; Bornschier, 2010; Rohrschneider & Whitefield, 2012). The Gal-Tan scale indicates positions involving such issues as gay marriage, abortion, the role of religion, immigration, multiculturalism, and environmentalism (Wheatley & Mendez, 2019). Furthermore, it has been shown in other studies that Gal-Tan could be very useful in predicting party positions on the above-mentioned matters. The only drawback is that the data comes from 2014 and therefore might not necessarily be up-to-date with current developments on party positions and emergence of new parties (Hanley & Sikk, 2016) (Table 12.1).

Party positions are measured based on the Chapel Hill Expert Survey 2014 (CHES). The CHES data provide expert evaluations on dozens of issues and it so far has been one of the most popular and reliable sources on party research. CHES treats Gal-Tan as stances on democratic freedoms and rights (Polk et al., 2017, p. 19). “Libertarian” or “postmaterialist” parties favor expanded personal freedoms, for example, access to abortion, active euthanasia, same-sex marriage, or greater democratic participation. “Traditional” or “authoritarian” parties often reject these ideas; they value order, tradition, and stability, and believe that the government should be a firm moral authority on social and cultural issues. Similarly, on the economic left-right scale, “parties want government to play an active role in the economy. Parties on the economic right emphasize a reduced economic role for government: privatization, lower taxes, less regulation, less government spending, and a leaner welfare state” (Polk et al, 2017, p. 18).

Subsequently, the data on interest groups come from Comparative Interest Group Survey (CIGS), a multinational project which investigates dozens of European countries.¹ Surveys were conducted in 2016 in Slovenia, Lithuania, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Poland joined the project between 2017 and 2018. For the purpose of this chapter, we use data from 4,100 interest groups from Poland, Slovenia, and Lithuania – the only three post-communist countries involved in the project – as well as three Western European democracies:

TABLE 12.1 Political parties included in the analysis

Country	Party	Vote	Seats	Family ^a
Lithuania	LSDP	18.4	26.2	Socialist
Lithuania	TS-LKD	15.1	23.4	Conservative
Lithuania	LVZS	3.9	.7	Agrarian/center
Lithuania	LLRA	5.8	5.7	Regionalist
Lithuania	TT	7.3	7.8	Conservative
Lithuania	DP	19.8	20.6	Liberal
Lithuania	LRLS	8.6	7.1	Liberal
Lithuania	DK	8.0	5	No family
Poland	SLD	8.19	5.9	Socialist
Poland	PO	39.2	45	Christian democracy
Poland	PiS	29.9	34.1	Radical right
Poland	PSL	8.4	6.1	Agrarian/center
Poland	RP	10	8.69	Liberal
Poland	KNP	1.1	0	Conservative
Poland	PR	0.2	0	Conservative
Poland	SP			Conservative
Slovenia	SDS	20.7	23.3	Christian democracy
Slovenia	SD	6	6.7	Socialist
Slovenia	SLS	4	0	Regionalist
Slovenia	NSI	5.6	5.6	Conservative
Slovenia	DeSUS	10.2	11.1	Rad right
Slovenia	SMC	34.5	40	Liberal
Slovenia	ZL	6	6.7	Conservative
Slovenia	ZaAB	4.4	4.4	Conservative
Slovenia	PS	3	0	Conservative
Netherlands	CDA	8.5	8.69	No family
Netherlands	PvdA	24.8	25.3	Socialist
Netherlands	VVD	26.6	27.3	Liberal
Netherlands	D66	8	8	Liberal
Netherlands	GL	2.3	2.7	Green
Netherlands	SGP	2.1	2	Confessional
Netherlands	SP	9.69	10	Rad left
Netherlands	CU	3.1	3.3	Confessional
Netherlands	PVV	10.1	10	Radical right
Netherlands	PvdD	1.9	1.3	Green
Netherlands	50PLUS	1.9	1.3	No family
Sweden	V	5.7	6	Rad left
Sweden	SAP	31	32.4	Socialist
Sweden	C	6.1	6.3	Agrarian/center
Sweden	FP	5.4	5.4	Liberal
Sweden	M	23.3	24.1	Conservative
Sweden	KD	4.6	4.6	Christian democracy
Sweden	MP	6.9	7.2	Green
Sweden	SD	12.9	14	Radical right
Sweden	PIRAT	0.4	0	No family
Sweden	FI	3.1	0	No family

Country	Party	Vote	Seats	Family ^a
Belgium	PS	11.7	15.3	Socialist
Belgium	SPA	8.80	8.69	Socialist
Belgium	ECOLO	3.3	4	Green
Belgium	Groen	5.3	4	Green
Belgium	MR	9.6	13.3	Liberal
Belgium	VLD	9.80	9.30	Liberal
Belgium	cdH	5	6	Christian democracy
Belgium	CD&V	11.6	12	Christian democracy
Belgium	N-VA	20.3	22	Regionalist
Belgium	FDF	1.8	1.3	Regionalist
Belgium	VB	3.7	2	Rad right
Belgium	PVDA	3.7	1.3	Rad left
Belgium	PP	1.5	0.7	Conservative

a The typology of political parties according to Chapell Hill Expert Survey, not the author of the chapter. See <https://www.chesdata.eu>.

Source: CHES 2014.

TABLE 12.2 Types of interest groups and their populations

	<i>Belgium</i>	<i>The Netherlands</i>	<i>Sweden</i>	<i>Lithuania</i>	<i>Poland</i>	<i>Slovenia</i>
Business associations (1)	0.23 (219)	0.16 (138)	0.19 (192)	0.22 (80)	0.29 (112)	0.09 (41)
Professional associations (2)	0.19 (182)	0.17 (145)	0.12 (185)	0.29 (106)	0.05 (18)	0.33 (147)
Labour (3)	0.02 (19)	0.01 (12)	0.03 (43)	0.06 (23)	0.03 (14)	0.07 (34)
Identity organizations (4)	0.15 (142)	0.22 (192)	0.07 (103)	0.14 (51)	0.10 (39)	0.14 (63)
Cause organizations (5)	0.20 (196)	0.14 (120)	0.46 (416)	0.08 (32)	0.40 (157)	0.08 (35)
Leisure associations (6)	0.14 (137)	0.13 (115)	0.09 (144)	0.08 (29)	0.03 (10)	0.22 (98)
Associations of public authorities (7)	0.04 (35)	0.16 (141)	0.02 (25)	0.05 (20)	0.05 (20)	0.02 (10)
Rest (8)	0.03 (29)	0.01 (3)	0.02 (32)	0.07 (26)	0.07 (26)	0.02 (10)
	959	866	1,111	367	397	438

Belgium, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Table 12.2 provides a typology of surveyed organizations as well as distributions across different countries.

The sampling procedures applied to gather the data differ between different countries, which is normal if we take into account difficulties in accessing the information. The response rate ranged from 27% for Poland, 36% for Slovenia, 40% for Lithuania, 38% for the Netherlands, 41% for Belgium, and 42% for Sweden.

To measure the economic left-right dimension, interviewees were asked:

Interest organizations and civil society associations have different views on the role of government in economic matters. Some want government to play an active role in the economy, e.g. through taxation, regulation, government spending, or a strong welfare state. Others prefer a reduced economic role for government, e.g. through privatization, lower taxes, less regulation, less government spending, or a leaner welfare state. On a scale from 0 to 10, where “0” means that government should play a much reduced role in the economy and “10” means that government should play a very active role in the economy, where would you position your organization on this scale?

Similar to CHES, interest groups were asked about their positions on “personal freedoms”:

Interest organizations and civil society associations have different views on personal freedoms and rights. Some support greater personal freedom, e.g. access to abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, or greater democratic participation (libertarian views). Others reject these ideas; they value order, tradition, and stability, and believe that the government should be a firm moral authority on social and cultural issues (traditional views). On a scale of 0 to 10, where “0” is “of no importance” and “10” is “of great importance”, how important would you say are social, moral, and cultural issues of this kind to your organization in its lobbying and advocacy activities?

The important difference between both survey questionnaires is the fact that while in CIGS “0” indicates that state should play a reduced role in economy, in CHES “0” means that parties want government to play an active role in the economy. To synchronize both datasets, I reversed the CHES scale to mirror the CIGS data points. This means that parties and groups placed farthest right on the horizontal axis assume that state should play a key role in the economy (see Table 12.1).

The CIGS project follows a broad definition of interest groups, where the group is an entity standing between the state and the civil society. Its aim is to aggregate and represent the interests (e.g. companies, workers), a cause (e.g. the environment, health, consumers), or some constituency (e.g. refugees, unemployed, poor) (Beyers et al., 2016). Therefore, it allowed us to catch a variety of groups: business associations, employers’ associations, citizens groups, trade unions, or third sector organizations.

Below I present a descriptive analysis of Gal-Tan and economic placements of political parties and interest groups. I am particularly interested in whether the latter could occupy spaces left by political parties, or, whether either of them follow suit and strategically place themselves. The positive aspect of such an analysis is that we can spatially map policy preferences, clearly identify patterns, and compare them between certain actors (parties, groups, and citizens). The

drawbacks we should be aware of are that two-dimensional positioning strips the analysis of the necessary context. Moreover, if used to compare different countries (or cultures) with different experiences, we never know how to understand “traditional”, “liberal”, or “active role of the state”, not to mention language-specific subtleties.

5 Results

Figure 12.1 presents the Gal-Tan and economic left-right placement of political parties according to CHES data. As we can see, there are substantial differences between countries. Obviously, in democratic regimes, political parties cannot stray too far away from public opinion and the electorate, meaning that extreme spaces are less populated. However, in the six countries of interest, there are no parties placed in left-tan spaces, with the outermost position around 7.0. Regarding CEE countries, the explanation might lie in the legacy and unpopularity of communism. When the democratic transformation began, parties – especially post-communist ones – were incentivized to abandon left-authoritarian positions and move towards Tan positions. As Vachudova and Hooghe (2009) suggest, EU accession talks and EU membership influenced party politics in such a way that eventually political parties fine-tuned their programs to EU standards. Furthermore, the process of Europeanization, marketization, and course towards neoliberalism could have prevented parties from extreme left-leaning policies (Haughton, 2014; Coman, 2017). As for Western European democracies, the supply and demand dynamics of party systems after the Second World War

FIGURE 12.1 Gal-Tan and economic left-right placement of political parties.

Source: CHES 2014.

perhaps have never materialized to establish institutional actors representing nationalist, traditional agendas melting with redistributive policies.

Thus, what gap do interest groups fill for political parties? Apart from abandoned outmost spaces in each quadrant, populating vast spaces in tan-economic left would be worthy of further investigation, particularly from a bottom-up perspective. However, it could be safely assumed that as party politics has moved to the 45 degree axis between tan-right and tan-left to presumably seek political gain and moderate voters, it does not mean that these spaces are not populated by interest organizations that are not subjected to verification in elections and are not constrained by adjusting to EU and market policies.

There are some similarities between Lithuanian and Polish political parties, where many have been located around the upper half. Moreover, there is no shortage of parties in the authoritarian half, which might be symptomatic of current events in the region, sometimes referred to as the illiberal turn or democratic backsliding (Sata & Karolewski, 2020). Moreover, only three parties are located in the right-green-alternative-libertarian quadrant.

Now, we move to self-placement of interest organizations. Similar to party positioning, Lithuania and Poland appear to have more in common with each other than with Slovenia. Even though we can see clear bias towards right-wing authoritarian politics and an almost empty left-authoritarian quadrant, it is definitely interesting that interest groups tend to be more evenly distributed than Polish and Lithuanian parties, particularly in the right-wing economic and Gal quadrant. The difference between these two countries lies in the extreme position. While in Lithuania, there are many such groups, in Poland there are only

FIGURE 12.2 Gal-Tan and economic left-right self-placement of interest groups in Lithuania.

Source: CIGS.

few. Regarding which types of groups “fill the blanks”, the case of Lithuania is quite representative. However, they are mostly trade unions, business groups, and professional associations. In Poland though, the outmost positions in the upper-right corner are filled by cause groups and business associations.

By contrast, Slovenian interest groups appear to be more left-leaning, culturally often self-placed in extreme areas, where hardly any Lithuanian and Polish groups were to be found and with sparsely populated right-authoritarian areas.

The divergence between Slovenia and other countries in the region is striking and lays ground for further research how interest organizations emerge to “satisfy” the demand for certain types of representation among citizens. It is also safe to say that Slovenian interest organizations do not compensate for political parties in the above-mentioned gap in the upper-right quadrant. Interestingly, in the Slovenian case, we have plenty of groups presenting extreme positions in the lower-left corner, which means the highest support for state’s reduced role in economic matters as well as libertarian point of view of cultural issues. In view of the neo-corporatist tradition of the Slovenian state, the further analysis should focus on whether interest groups represent a neo-liberal counter-movement. What would support this hypothesis is the type of groups – a handful of associations of professionals, business, and cause groups.

Apart from Slovenia, we see dozens of groups populating spaces left by political parties. Particularly interesting is the large number of such groups in Sweden, Belgium, and the Netherlands. The disillusionment with market politics after the Euro-crisis could be one factor. However, the shift towards the center-right

FIGURE 12.3 Gal-Tan and economic left-right self-placement of interest groups in Poland.

Source: CIGS.

FIGURE 12.4 Gal-Tan and economic left-right self-placement of interest groups in Slovenia.

Source: CIGS.

FIGURE 12.5 Gal-Tan and economic left-right self-placement of interest groups in the Netherlands.

Source: CIGS.

“traditional” space is another issue and begs for further investigation, accounting for cross-national surveys of populations as well.

In terms of what types of groups fill the spaces left by political parties, we do not see any dominating trend. In the Netherlands, these spaces are dominated

mostly by trade unions and cause groups. In Sweden business groups and some cause and identity groups spilled over to the “more active role of the state” half, but are not entirely in Tan areas. In Belgium, we have the most representative case where a myriad of different organizations occupy areas left by political parties.

FIGURE 12.6 Gal-Tan and economic left-right self-placement of interest groups in Sweden.

Source: CIGS.

FIGURE 12.7 Gal-Tan and economic left-right self-placement of interest groups in Belgium.

Source: CIGS.

6 Conclusions

The goal of this chapter was to analyze the propensity with which interest groups populate two-dimensional ideological spaces left by political parties. I used the Chapel Hill Expert Survey as well as novel data from a multinational interest group survey project to investigate six EU countries representing the east and west of the continent. The CHES data allowed us to identify the gap, which could be seen in the upper-right quadrant, suggesting a shortage of representation of voters strongly supporting an active role of the state with a traditional and nationalist cultural agenda. By analyzing the interest group survey data, I found out that in five of six countries, there are groups that could potentially compensate for the absence of political parties. This does not necessarily suggest causal inference, where voters are – firstly – aware of the existence of organizations representing their points of view. Secondly, even though they could have been aware of their existence, it does not mean that there are no other factors in play here that would make citizens reluctant to rely more on interest organizations than on political parties, even though the latter are not congruent with their beliefs.

The fundamental question – whether groups can compensate for political parties – boils down to being able to influence public policy processes and therefore satisfy needs of groups' constituencies. As the gap is somewhere between culturally right-wing (Tan) and economically redistributive policies, the impact of groups might be rather limited, but again to assess that, further research is needed.

Secondly, it is worth asking whether interest groups themselves would like to compensate for political parties. There is some evidence that groups face similar internal and external challenges, particularly involving their membership base, funding, and growing professionalization during their evolution from grass-root movements.

Interest groups appear to cover a wider range of ideological spaces than political parties. This pattern allows us to be wary of region-specific generalizations as there is very much variability in the dynamic relations between political parties and interest groups in CEE. Furthermore, interest groups follow – more or less – country-specific patterns. If we see political parties dominating certain ideological areas, the same is likely to happen with interest groups, for example the left-Gal combination in Slovenia and clear right-authoritarian bias in Poland.

Due to the greater supply of interest groups than political parties, citizens could find atypical combinations that suit them. The fundamental question – and material for further analysis – is whether citizens really look for party alternatives and whether interest organizations seek the vast support of citizens. It would be fascinating to combine the current research with a bottom-up approach and use cross-country data from the European Social Survey to thoroughly investigate the supply and demand dynamics of voters' representation. The bottom line is that in five of six countries, some interest groups are where political parties are

not. Sounding like a truism, associative democracy is vital for the health and stability of representative and democratic governments.

Note

- 1 See <http://www.cigsurvey.eu/>. As for today (mid-2020) the project includes Belgium, Lithuania, Poland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Slovenia, Italy, and Spain. Data are currently being collected for Montenegro, the Czech Republic and Portugal.

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