Entrepreneurial Parties: A Basic Conceptual Framework*

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Abstract

The paper offers a conceptual framework to investigate the phenomenon of entrepreneurial parties in the countries of East-Central Europe. The authors evaluate existing concepts related to increasing interdependence of party politics and the business sector, such as business-firm parties. These concepts are typically much too bound to a particular example of historically emerging entrepreneurial party and therefore the paper offers a more general concept of entrepreneurial party. The concept is based on five basic features: (1) the central role of the leader and his private initiative, (2) the party as a personal vehicle, (3) the crucial formative influence of a leader over the political project. Two other features are related to the social and institutional un-rootedness of the entrepreneurial party which is neither a product of (4) a promoter/sponsor organisation or social movement, nor it is an outcome of (5) a parliamentary split or emergence of a new faction.

Keywords: entrepreneurial parties; East-Central Europe; party organisation; party leadership

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1. Introduction

As Paul Lucardie (2000: 175) pertinently noted, 'newcomers are rarely given a warm welcome'. This observation is also true of the entrepreneurial parties which have been popping up in many Western as well as East-Central countries since the end of the 20th century to challenge long-term patterns of electors' alignments as well as patterns of party competition. The emergence of such parties is a consequence of social trends embedded in political partisanship, observable over recent decades in Europe. Similar to other organisations, political parties emerge and transform in response to their environment and its dynamism. Yet we do lack not only a sufficient number of empirical studies covering East-Central European cases but also general agreement upon the definition of the term entrepreneurial party. The papers collected in this special issue therefore try to shed some light on the emergence

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and performance of entrepreneurial parties in East-Central European countries. The introductory paper discusses issues of conceptualisation of entrepreneurial and business-firm parties in order to offer a minimalist working concept of an entrepreneurial party suitable for application in the East-Central European context.

In order to summarize the conceptual discussion and to establish a 'minimal' concept of an entrepreneurial party, we organized the paper as follows. First, we situate the phenomenon of entrepreneurial parties into the wider evolutionary perspective of species or types of political parties that have historically emerged in Europe, as we consider such an approach necessary in order to understand their rise.[1] Subsequently we focus on key definitions and conceptualisations, relying on selected cases as necessary.

2. Species of parties in the context of historical and social trends

When Maurice Duverger (1954), an influential figure in classical political science, described the origins of modern political partisanship in the nineteenth century, he connected the phenomenon with *cadre parties*, dominated by local notables whose sole visible organisational expression was found in parliament. Under the conditions of limited suffrage, these notables only needed to obtain the backing of a small group of supporters at the local level, which was possible through their personal contacts. At the time when Duverger published his classic work, i.e. the 1950s, the main trend was toward mass parties deeply rooted in society, and this had been the case since the late nineteenth century. Mass parties enjoyed a large membership, which was intimately linked to their daily functioning: members funded the parties, canvassed on their behalf, provided the party bureaucrats responsible for their operations, and layed out a clear ideological orientation. This type of party originally emerged to represent social groups with limited or no rights, and was usually initiated by promoter organisations, such as trade unions or churches. This broader organisational basis tended to reinforce the loyalty of the subculture surrounding the mass party. Another influential figure, Sigmund Neumann (1956) describes them differently, although no less aptly than Duverger, as *parties of social integration*.

To this day, mass parties are understood as the classic form, yet their golden era was the first half of the twentieth century, after which they receded, in line with the changes to Western Europe's social structure. The unfreezing of historical cleavages (see Lipset, Rokkan 1967) and the rise of the welfare state resulted in a transformation of Western European societies, triggering shifts in citizen's values (Inglehart 1971; 1990). Consequently, there has been a dealignment process, i.e. an erosion of the links between parties and society, accompanied by trends such as the decline in party identifications and decreasing party membership (Dalton 2000; Biezen et al. 2012).

Another important transformative factor has been the increasing use of new mass media, initially mainly television and later new social media. This has radically changed the mode of communication between politicians and voters. Some analyses have shifted the 'golden era' of mass partisanship to the first decades post-WWII, pointing out the huge

differences between the European countries in terms of mass parties' declining membership and the development of new forms of party affiliations, such as cyber-members or social media followers and friends (Scarrow 2000; 2015). However, these findings do not question the fundamental impact that social transformation has on parties and how they function.

In the 1960s, Otto Kirchheimer (1966) highlighted the adaptation of parties to the changing conditions, using the term *catch-all party*. This new type of party weakened the role of ideological appeals and links with the promoter organisations, aiming to attract voters from various segments of society. Thanks to changes in the modes of political communication, the weight of leaders' roles in parties increased dramatically. Increasing professionalization also significantly affected the functioning of party organisations, and the manner in which they addressed the electorate. This final aspect is well captured by the notion of an *electoral-professional party*, as proposed by Angelo Panebianco (1998). At the core of Panebianco's concept is recognition of the key role of professionals, i.e. consultants, PR experts, opinion pollsters, upon whose help and services politicians relied, especially for election campaigns. By contrast, the importance of both members and traditional bureaucratic party apparatus declined, as they were increasingly losing their voice as the organisations professionalised. The combination of catch-all party and an electoral-professional orientation constituted a new party type (cf. Wolinetz 2002; Krouwel 2006).

Election campaigns are not just becoming more professional; they are also becoming more expensive. Interest-group contributions to party funding is increasingly important and state subsidies are being introduced. These subsidies strengthen party dependence on the state, which not only affects party funding, but also the recruitment of representatives. The 'ever closer' links to the state can, however, increase the interdependence of the state and the parties, which can even result in party colonisation of the state. The *cartel party thesis*, as developed by Richard Katz and Peter Mair (1995), is the best-known scholarly response to these phenomena. Although the Katz and Mair thesis has been criticised as difficult to verify empirically (Koole 1996, Detterbeck 2005), the distancing of many traditional parties from society, and their attachment to the state, as well as the loss of their ability socially to integrate, and to satisfy individual voter needs, are evident.

One of the other important aspects of party change outlined has been the growing number of new political parties, which often establish their profile by protesting against existing party elites and criticising them for merging with the state. Sometimes these new parties also represent a specific interest (Tavits 2006). Many of these newcomers can be considered *entrepreneurial parties*, which are described by some authors as another species of party (see Krouwel 2006 and 2012 for summary of this debate).

3. A minimal and a maximal conceptualisation of entrepreneurial parties

Not all newly emerging political parties in Western and East-Central European party politics can be, of course, labelled as entrepreneurial parties. New political parties in general are a variegated entity, and scholarly approaches to their study have been diverse. These

approaches are often sophisticated; for instance, they can be based on examining the degree of 'newness' i.e. the extent to which many parties that declare themselves as new actually bear traces – in terms of personnel, ideology, policies, or electorates – of older parties (Barnea, Rahat 2011). Since we are not trying to cope with all sorts of new parties, here we adopt a different approach to this issue, viewing it through the lens of the evolutionary species of political parties introduced above.

Papers by authors focusing on political entrepreneurs and their parties often tend to define them divergently. André Krouwel (2006: 251) writes about 'business firm party cluster', mentioning not only the concept of entrepreneurial parties, but also the 'parties of professional politicians' (Klaus von Beyme), 'franchise organisations' (Kenneth Carty), and 'business firm party' (Jonathan Hopkin and Caterina Paolucci). This last concept is perhaps the most fully developed, and Krouwel has made further refinements to its definition. A business-firm party shares some traits with preceding evolutionary types of parties, but differs from them in other respects. Unlike a cartel party, it draws on private-sector resources; unlike a mass party it lacks a clear ideology; and neither grassroots members nor party bureaucrats wield serious influence in a business-firm party. On the one hand, these characteristics permit such parties great flexibility when they make their choices about which political issues to highlight and which strategies to pursue; on the other it makes them inherently fragile, as they are subject to fluctuating popularity among voters and reliant on the media attractiveness of the parties themselves and their leaders (cf. Carty 2004: 20–21).

The most famous prototype of a business-firm party is Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia. However, the 'model' created by Berlusconi poses some issues that fundamentally affect the construction of the concept, as the applicability of it to other cases is sometimes problematic and debatable. For instance, studies of some entrepreneurial parties in Scandinavia have revealed that local political entrepreneurs command far fewer resources and means. The electoral-professional strategy, as conceived by Angelo Panebianco, has therefore not been deployed as extensively as in Italy (Harmel, Svåsand 1993; Arter 2016). Furthermore, the environmental influences in Scandinavia also differ, and entrepreneurial parties have not become such mainstream players there as Forza Italia has in the south of the continent.

Our intention here is to offer an open and flexible conceptual framework that is applicable to the situation in Central and Eastern Europe. We believe that a good way to do so is to propose a two-level categorisation of entrepreneurial parties, consisting of both a *minimal*, i.e. a basic conceptualisation, and a *maximal*, i.e. a much more robust one.

The *maximal conceptualisation* of an entrepreneurial party essentially overlaps the notion of a business-firm party, as outlined by Hopkin and Paolucci (1999) and Krouwel (2006). Krouwel (2006) proposes two sub-types, linked either directly to a commercial company, whose structure is used for a political project, or to a new and separate organisation, constructed on the basis of business principles. To exemplify the first sub-type, he cites Forza Italia (FI), and the Spanish Union of the Democratic Centre (UCD), established by Prime Minister Adolfo Suárez, is given as an instance of the second sub-type. In both cases, the pivot of the party is the political entrepreneur who centralises power and possesses key resources. Hopkin and Paolucci (1999: 322) emphasise that this model of leadership is linked to 'personal popularity, organisational advantages, and crucially, access to unlimited professional expertise in mass communication.' Krouwel (2006: 261) pertinently notes that

the leader tends to be 'the best wrapping for popular policies.' Other key characteristics of business-firm parties are their attempts to secure easy access to the media, or even to control it directly. It is true that in terms of ties and funding, business-firm parties might receive some support from external interest groups, but these are not their main sources of income, electoral support, or channels of communication. The following table summarises the basic features of the business-firm party.

Table 1: Overview of the key characteristics of the business-firm party model	
Genetic origin	Originates from the private initiative of a political entrepreneur, whose resources – whether his own or controlled by him – are crucial for party emergence.
Organisation	A centralized structure dominated by the leader, weak or absent intra-party democracy.
	Little importance attributed to the party on the ground, i.e. members and local structures.
	The leader and his circle have the main say when selecting the party elite, who are recruited from outside of state structures.
	Great importance of professionals, typically, electoral experts and consultants; use of marketing techniques and the business (commercial) resources of the leader; party bureaucrats are irrelevant.
Media	Easy access to the media, or direct control thereof.
Ideology, electoral appeals and environment	Issues and personalities are treated as political products, ideological flexibility, voters as consumers, and an electoral market with a high level of volatility.
Source: Adopted from Hopkin and Paolucci (1999) and Krouwel (2006).	

As mentioned before, the concept of business-firm party is hardly applicable (since there are only few examples of it, one of them being Czech ANO – Kopeček 2016) and it constitutes only one of the versions of the general concept of an entrepreneurial party. As already explained, even the definition of the concept of entrepreneurial party could be approached with different levels of complexity. Our *minimal conceptualisation* synthesises those traits that can be identified, explicitly or implicitly, in most of the papers that focus on political entrepreneurs in 'old' democracies (e.g. Harmel, Svåsand 1993; Lange, Art 2011; Bolleyer, Bytzek 2013; Arter 2016; Arter, Kestilä-Kekkonen 2014). At the heart of this conceptualisation are the following: (1) *the central role of the leader and his private initiative* to launch a project of the new party. The founding father, who is also the main initiator, uses his party as a (2) *personal vehicle* to carry primarily his or her personal business and political interests (Lucardie 2000).[2] He wields a (3) *crucial formative influence* over 'his' political project, at least in the initial stages. The party is closely associated with an issue prioritised by the founder, and his message is crucial in ensuring voters and supporters identify with the party. The effect of the message can be substantially reinforced by the leader's charisma, especially in the case of a media-attractive leader who possesses the ability to use media for political agitation. An entrepreneurial party is (4) *not a 'product' of a promoter/sponsor organisation or social movement*, as had been the case with mass parties (Harmel, Svåsand 1993; Krouwel,

Lucardie 2008). Hence, such parties do not have pre-existing social rootedness and are not 'rooted newcomers' (Bolleyer, Bytzek 2013), which naturally increases their vulnerability. Finally, in terms of its origins, an entrepreneurial party is (5) *not connected with parliament*, as the cadre party was, and it is not founded by a group of MPs seceding from another party.

This minimalist conceptualisation will constitute the basic point of departure for our endeavour to analyse Central Eastern European entrepreneurial parties, their emergence, development, and – at least in some cases – institutionalisation into the existing party system.

4. Central and Eastern Europe as the Promised Land for entrepreneurial parties

The area of East-Central Europe is something of a laboratory for political change, which is quicker and more intensive there than in Western Europe. This is because a long, continual democratic tradition is lacking; indeed in some countries in the region, democracy only began in earnest in 1989 (Kitschelt et al. 1999: 19–42; Cabada et al. 2014: 11–42). Integral to this change has been the relatively frequent emergence, and in some cases lasting activities, of entrepreneurial parties.

The conditions for the emergence of this type of party in East-Central European countries have been favourable. Party-state symbiosis has been frequent, intensive and persistent (Biezen 2003; Kopecký 2006), creating fertile ground for the anti-establishment protests on which new parties can readily establish themselves. Although anti-establishment protest is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for the emergence of new entrepreneurial parties, it makes the launching of such parties definitely easier by offering a strong 'stick' to be used for blaming and shaming the establishment parties. Even more importantly: democracy based on party government has become established in the new context of political plurality, societies have become stratified, and a relatively stable cleavage structure has emerged (Hloušek, Kopeček 2008; Casal Bértoa 2014). Despite all this, parties have remained relatively weak institutionally (Tavits 2013). Access to state resources, in combination with a patronage strategy, therefore, often serves parties to compensate for their limited membership and restricted electoral and social support. The roots of institutional weakness can be sought both in the disrupted continuity affecting the long period when East-Central Europe was ruled by non-democratic regimes and in the post-1989 *Zeitgeist*, which differed entirely from the prevailing era of mass partisanship, which characterised the early decades of the twentieth century. Despite the changes that occurred in Western European societies and the values as described above, the historical cleavages largely survive there in a more robust form, providing an important source of support for traditional parties.

An important consequence of what we have described is the limited organisational capacity of parties in East-Central Europe, including those that have existed for a long time.[3] Another characteristic trait of 'new' democracies has been voter volatility, which tends to be higher than average in most Western European countries (Gallagher et al. 2012).

Overall, the party systems in East-Central Europe tend to be less stable, their 'old' parties are relatively vulnerable and *the opportunities for newcomers are much greater* than is

the case in long-established democracies, improving entrepreneurial parties' chances for success. In particular, their window of opportunity is being extended by falling public trust in existing party elites. This might lead to a radical overhaul, or even a collapse, of the party system. Whereas such instances are rare in Western Europe (one example is Italy in the first half of the 1990s), in East-Central Europe electoral earthquakes are much more common. The last wave of such earthquakes was recorded during the great recession that took place from the end of the first decade to the middle of the second decade of the twenty-first century. Its effects included not only losses by established parties and rapid gains by newcomers, but also rapid newcomer losses to even newer parties (Haughton, Deegan Krause 2015).

It is not coincidental that many of these newcomers are entrepreneurial parties. There are at least three crucial reasons why this type of party is able to benefit the most from the shaken position of established parties, at least in a short-term perspective. First, the entrepreneurs who enter the sphere of party politics have at their disposal the financial resources necessary to launch a professional political campaign and fund political marketing. Second, entrepreneurial parties deliberately ignore many traditional methods to build intra-party organisation and in so doing, their leaders can use this as another sound argument that their party is not the same as the traditional, established and (sometimes allegedly) corrupted parties. Third, voters can attach to a strong leader who has already 'proven' his qualities as a successful businessman. For all these reasons, the entrepreneurial parties are very likely to emerge even if they are not always likely to stay.

5. Content of the special issue

This special issue journal contains six case studies. Two papers are devoted to the Czech Republic and the entrepreneurial parties emerging there. Lubomír Kopeček and Vít Hloušek analyse different ways of institutionalising two Czech entrepreneurial parties: Public Affairs and ANO. A comparison of the emergence and development of these two parties serves to assess the viability of Andrej Babiš's political project. The focus of the article lies in the analysis of how the leaders were able to institutionalize the party. Tomáš Cirhan and Petr Kopecký pay attention to another important aspect explaining the different fortunes of Czech entrepreneurial parties. Their paper analyses and compares the career backgrounds and cohesion of the top politicians of these parties.

Four additional papers depict the emergence and activities of entrepreneurial parties in other East-Central European countries. Three of these papers offer comprehensive surveys of existing entrepreneurial parties in selected East-Central European countries which, together with the Baltic States, are the cases influenced the most by the phenomenon of entrepreneurial parties. Beata Kosowska-Gąstoł and Katarzyna Sobolewska-Myślik discuss the Polish case, Alenka Krašovec the case of Slovenia and Juraj Marušiak the case of the Slovak Republic, a country where the first entrepreneurial party emerged as early as 1998. The last contribution, written by Sergiu Ghergina and Sorina Soare, sheds light on the brief tenure of Dan Diaconecsu's Romanian People's Party.

Footnotes:

1. We will not analyse the situation in the USA, where this type of party has had a much longer tradition thanks to that country's different historical evolution and conditions (Schlesinger 1984; Carty 2004).
2. It is especially the stress on party as a tool to promote business interests of the founder which distinguishes the concept of entrepreneurial party from Lucardie's concept of personal vehicle party. We, backed by the political reality of (not only) East-Central Europe, stress the personal economic interests while Lucardie puts emphasis on political opportunity windows. These two aspects are however not mutually exclusive.
3. The only exception to this are some communist-party successors, which could enjoy a bonus in terms of territorial structure, cadres and, in some cases money, at the start of the new era (Grzymała-Busse 2002).

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