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Vít, Michal, *The EU's Impact on Identity Formation in East-Central Europe between 2004 and 2013. Perceptions of the Nation and Europe in Political Parties of the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia.* Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2020, 249pp., €29.90 p/b.

Book review

What were the consequences for the political developments seen amongst Central East European (CEE) countries following European integration? How might we understand the relationship between the European political space and the varying tendencies of political developments on a national level? What are the consequential implications for national identity formation? These questions lay at the foreground of Vít's book, which explores the concept of Europeanisation through the dynamic relationship of national identity and political parties. It is a thorough examination of how national identity and socialisation influence the activities of political parties in the European Union's (EU) political arena. Across academic literature, the CEE region has been widely researched in terms of EU integration, the complex political and economic dynamics of integration at play are not understood in frames of struggle, but instead as a complex transformation of political and social functioning of states and society, a position that Vít sustains in his volume. Its focussed timeframe of the decade between 2004 and 2013 constructively lends itself in understanding how the driving value based political forces of the European Union, along with each CEE country's construction of national identity, has impacted policy shaping in political parties.

The book focuses on three countries in CEE; Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia. These offer themselves as strongly dynamic case studies due to their similar experience in post-communist integration into the EU and into Western European democratic communities. This integration of Western European norms was not only of an economic nature but also one that transformed each nation's internal political and social habits. Vít thus explores how the project of the EU influenced each three countries' establishment of independent national development. Although seemingly dissimilar, the chosen countries display correlating themes amongst political party manifestos in regards to their adoption of concerns surrounding national identity. The implementation of a social constructivist research framework that analyses national identity amongst political party manifestos lent itself for

exploring both its domestic and international influences on national identity. As well as this, Vít accounts for additional contextual factors in this volume such as forces of migration, globalisation, increasing interdependence on the EU and the decreasing role of the nation-state, whilst also highlighting the salience of nation state boundaries in these CEE countries. Overall, Vít's study approaches the dynamic and multi-faceted perception of national identity throughout the CEE countries' first decade of EU membership. During this time, each CEE country held general elections whereby political parties produced election manifestos. Drawing on these manifestos, Vít describes how EU integration created the potential for a clash between national identity and a new European identity. This helped to further the volume's overall aims of understanding how the behaviour and dynamics of national identity within political parties in liberal democracies is influenced by the European environment.

With a robust foreword by Andrea Pető, which emphasises the significance of Vít's research questions, the volume is efficiently organised into five distinct parts. It provides a wealth of theoretical background and context on the role of political parties, the concept of Europeanisation, and perspectives on democratisation and its systems, in order to understand these elements in the European political space. The volume introduces the trans-national context and understands its influence in terms of the new-fangled space it allows for national political parties to integrate and participate in EU politics. It then explores the consequences for individual states, and each nation state's responses to these external influences, accounting for popular backlash and policy based reactions. It goes on to define the policy of national identity and its social and political elements as long and short-term strategies which foreground the policy field. This approach allows for the exploration and understanding of the function of national identity in both domestic and external environments, which Vít understands as having a significant influence on the shaping of policy and behaviour of political parties.

Vít's methodological design approaches the academic concept of national identity as something contentious; the volume therefore introduces a research framework that analyses national identity as policy based without normative connotations, therefore responding to this complexity as an opportunity to address a methodological challenge in the field. National identity is explored within both individual parties and the European political environment, thus allowing the understanding of perceptions of national identity as exercised through policy. Vít's methodological procedure is thorough and dutiful, it lays out a comparison of quantitative and qualitative approaches and presents a research procedure that is framed by ideas and theories of ontology, constructivism and grounded theory. As an approach common in social science research, Vít's method emphasises the use of

theoretical background as a foundation for research procedure. It clearly states the foundation of the research questions with details on its operation and execution, while acknowledging its potential limitations.

The findings are explored thematically; the analysis covers parliamentary political parties that have had representation at both national and European level. Vít is helpful in providing readers with in-depth introductions to each country's party system and its position in the political axis. Alongside of this, contextual information is provided that covers each country's elections and the extensive range of values, culture, public debate and key actors that shape the political environment, in turn signposting key influences on each nation's behaviour in the EU political space. The development of policy and national identity in manifestos is presented clearly, showing trends in values and themes that span the focussed time frame. Each country is systematically presented and discussed separately from one another, in turn helping the reader's interpretation of findings. Vít carefully examines the interconnections of supra-national European policy and law with national-level policy practices. The impact of this, Vít concludes, is that states are perhaps no longer among the primary actors of the international system. His focussed findings on election manifestos contribute to a new understanding of identity cleavage in party systems. This supports the understanding of how both CEE liberal and nationalistic political parties are shaping their societies in an ever-changing European context. The volume's strengths lay in its successful broadening of existing scopes in literature on the CEE region post EU integration while offering a useful reference for evaluating policy transformations that have occurred since. Ultimately, it represents the fluid transformation in understandings of national identities when in dynamic supranational contexts, ultimately pushing us to continue developing our conceptual thinking with nuance and depth.