

WHAT KIND OF POLITICAL CLEAVAGES FOR CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE?

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Deadline for submission: December 1, 2002.

A short description of your presentation should be sent (in English or French) to: jmdewael@ulb.ac.be with the subject »conference May 2003«.

The Central and Eastern European researchers could apply for financial help for accommodation.

Since the beginning of the 90s, several political science students have focused their analysis on the political cleavage landscape in Central and Eastern Europe. The empirical and theoretical baggage of those analyses is generally examined with regard to the Stein Rokkan theory. The evaluation of the theoretical hypothesis made by the students quickly showed that more or less important subfields of political cleavage study developed. There are two main issues of discontent, a theoretical one and an empirical one.

The concept of political cleavage carries with it a certain semantic and empirical framework. It was created in order to explain the creation of parties systems in Western Europe. The original framework cannot be used directly for a different geographic and historical area. Scholars working within this area stressed that the translation of the Rokkan theory in Eastern Europe is not automatic. Thus, the students have tried to exhibit varying possibilities to modify the Rokkan pattern according to the specific contexts of those countries. It would be very interesting to study these specific semantic, empirical or theoretical divisions.

The most frequently addressed problem concerning the empirical approach of the political cleavage theory is the link between the political structure and the social and cultural divisions in Central and Eastern Europe. It is thus very difficult to understand and to explain the characteristics of political conflict in this area.

The present conference invites to a debate on the divisions in conceptualization regarding the links between political cleavages and political conflict. The aim of this assembly should be not to cancel these divisions but to open a clear debate among the main scholarly subfields.

The papers should concern two main approaches: theoretical and empirical.

The main questions are:

- Which are the characteristics of the Eastern European cleavages in comparison with the classical pattern?
- Was it a uniform translation of political cleavages in all the ex-communist area after the fall of the Wall? Are there important sub-divisions? Which are the most important divisions?
- How can history explain certain cleavages? Are the precommunist or the communist inheritances important for the current political actors?
- Can the new application of cleavage theory in Central and Eastern Europe affect or enrich the classical pattern of cleavage studies?
- Can a real translation of social conflicts in political parties be seen in Central and Eastern Europe?
- How did the Church influence the cleavage landscape in Central and Eastern Europe? Is there any difference between the orthodox and the catholic countries?
- What is the relevance of the rural/urban cleavage? How did the communist collectivization influence this issue?
- What is the relevance of an ethnic cleavage? How can it influence the general political landscape?