

Government Formation and Breakdown in Western and Central Eastern Europe[☆]

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Abstract

In this paper, we use a new dataset describing governments, political parties and institutions to make an explicit comparison between Western and Central Eastern Europe (CEE) in the investigation of three different topical issues found in the coalition literature, namely *coalition formation* (i.e. which factors affect who forms the winning coalitions), the *number of cabinet members* (i.e. what affects the number of ministers in a cabinet) and *cabinet duration* (i.e. which factors affect how long a new government lasts). Our findings indicate that, regardless of all the discussions about how Central Eastern Europe is different from Western Europe —because of the post-communist heritage or the volatility of voters in the CEE region, structural attributes such as the size and number of political parties are important determinants of coalition formation and cabinet duration patterns in both the West and the East. In fact, precisely because of the unsettled nature of CEE party politics, structural attributes tend to matter even more in the East.

Keywords: Cabinet duration, Central and Eastern Europe, coalitions, government formation, Western Europe

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1. INTRODUCTION

In spite of all the contemporary challenges to political parties, winning elections and gaining office is still a robust core of party government (Mair 2008). In this paper, we investigate the role of parliamentary institutions and party systems when political parties form and dissolve governments in both Western Europe (WE) and Central Eastern Europe (CEE).¹ We base our empirical investigation on a new dataset, *The European Representative Democracy Data Archive* (Andersson *et al.* 2012). From that dataset, we use the information on cabinets, parties and institutions for the period 1945 – 2010 for 27 European countries.² In our analysis, we break this dataset up into sub-samples for the two regions; more information on this is provided below in the section on data and measurement.

Research on WE has shown that when parties compete for government power, the number of political parties and their relative size structures the outcomes of coalition bargaining. Such factors, also sometimes referred to as *the structural attributes of the parliament, the party system and the cabinet*, have, of course, also been shown to be important in classic country studies. Bogdanor (1983:272), for example, concluded on such a basis that elections are actually about the number and size of the political parties in parliament because elections in parliamentary democracies “do not choose governments, they alter the power relations between the parties”.

Government formation in parliamentary democracies has been a main focus of coalition studies since the research field was established with the pioneering work of von Neumann and Morgenstern (1953) and Riker (1962) (see, for example, Laver and Schofield 1990 and Müller 2009).³ Over time, the scope of this literature has grown to include the termination of cabinets and the stages between formation and termination (Budge and Keman 1990). In this vein, Strøm, Müller, and Bergman (2008) discussed research on the full “life-cycle” of cabinets, from the process of formation until the government is dissolved. In their statistical analyses, Strøm *et al.* (2008) found that structural attributes explain much of the observed variation. However, these results are based on the empirical record of Western Europe. Do they hold up beyond that region?

The CEE region is no longer new ground for studies on coalition and government in democratic politics. However, as Blondel *et al.* (2007) and others have pointed out, less is still known about the role of political parties in that region than about their role in WE. In this article, we examine if the

West European observations (or empirical “truths”) about the importance of political parties hold up in the new democracies of CEE. In making direct comparisons between WE and CEE, this paper adopts a broad approach as we investigate if findings about three different topical issues along the coalition life-cycle, namely coalition formation, the number of cabinet members and cabinet duration travel from the Western countries, to Central Eastern European countries.

When analysing party government in these terms, our point of departure is a replication of three of the comparative studies that Strøm *et al.* (2008) conducted on Western Europe. Our focus and empirical research questions concern two matters that appear early in the cabinet life-cycle: bargaining over coalition formation and the number of cabinet members, as well as one research question that deals with the end of the cabinet life-cycle: the duration of cabinets. Thus, this gives us three empirical research questions. First, if there is no single majority party in parliament, when do coalitions form, as opposed to single-party minority cabinets? Second, which factors affect the number of ministers allowed into the cabinet? Third, which factors affect how long a cabinet lasts?

2. THE WEST-EAST COMPARISON OF PARTY GOVERNMENT

The literature on political parties in Central Eastern Europe offers a number of reasons as to why the role of political parties is likely to differ from their role in the West. First, it is often argued that party systems and their constituent units (the individual political parties) are less stable in CEE than in WE (Jungerstam-Mulders 2006; Tavits 2008; Bielasiak 2005; Kitschelt *et al.* 1999). When parties are weak (i.e. lack cohesion and party discipline), they are also less able to make credible commitments. When such mechanisms are not available (see Elgie and Moestrup 2008; Pop-Eleches 2007), this can result in early coalition termination and early elections.

Second, there is no dominant left-right dimension in CEE (cf. Casal Bértoa and Mair 2012: 104). In WE, not least in the Scandinavian countries and the UK, a dominant socioeconomic dimension structures party competition and patterns of coalition formation. In CEE, most countries have, over time, developed “some variety of left-right competition” (Bakke 2010: 84). Nevertheless, we can still expect that the relative weakness of the left-right

dimension, together with the frequent emergence of new political players, might lead to greater uncertainty in government formation.

Third, another characteristic feature of the CEE party systems has been the presence of “successor parties” – that is, political parties that have more or less developed out of the former Communist state parties of the previous undemocratic regimes. Kitschelt *et al.* (1999, 352ff.) and Grzymala-Busse (2001) argued that other parties of the left and centre-left may limit their willingness to enter coalitions with Communist successor parties due to historical legacies and the risk of high electoral costs. Empirically, Druckman and Roberts (2007) as well as Danzer (2008) demonstrated that successor parties are significantly less likely to participate in coalition governments. In addition, Tzelgov (2011) showed that when such successor parties are actually in the cabinet, other cabinet parties can expect vote losses, particularly during economic recession. However, paradoxically, one effect of this is that, once formed, such coalition cabinets stay in power longer than average – perhaps so as not to be doubly punished by the voters i.e. for cooperating with successor parties and for poor economic performance.

Fourth, another feature of several CEE countries is the existence of electoral alliances of two or more parties that often make it into government (Müller-Rommel *et al.* 2004). Such alliances are less stable than individual parties and they pay great transaction costs in order to present a common front (which might be necessary for survival in the next election). Golder (2006) has shown that similar pre-electoral alliances are also fairly common in WE, but differences in the frequency and fluidity (stability) of such alliances might be another reason to expect the two regions to differ.

In summary, there are good reasons to expect that the importance of political parties in CEE will differ from that of their counterparts in WE. The absence of a clear cross-national left-right dimension should make a difference, as should the more frequent formation and easy demise of political parties (Mair 2005). Furthermore, the fact that the communist successor parties have been pariahs for other parties should limit the choices that are available as potential coalition partners. While also accepting this latter line of reasoning, we leave the analysis of the direct impact of communist successor parties and electoral alliances for further research. Our present ambition is more limited. We take the work by Strøm *et al.* (2008) as our point of departure and we ask whether the general differences in terms of the institutions and party systems between the two regions are large enough to eliminate the importance of the structural attributes that have been found

to be important by Strøm *et al.* (2008) and others carrying out research on Western Europe. In doing so, we examine the impact of variables that are operationalised exactly in the same way in both regions and for all 27 countries (Andersson *et al.* 2012).

3. DATA AND MEASUREMENT

In our analyses, we examine three subsets of data from our main dataset. The first is the original dataset from the book by Strøm *et al.* (2008) updated in 2010. We refer to it here as WE-FULL. It covers Western European countries over the period 1945 (or the beginning of the present democratic regime) to 2010. The second dataset used here, WE-17, is limited to the period 1989 to 2010, to be able to make direct comparisons for precisely the same period with CEE. The last dataset used here is referred to as CEE-10 and includes 10 Central Eastern European countries from the beginning of their democratic periods through to 2010.

It should be noted that we do not have all the empirical information available on the CEE states that Strøm *et al.* (2008) had for their book on Western Europe. However, thanks to the new dataset (Andersson *et al.* 2012), most of the variables used by Strøm *et al.* (2008) are available for comparison between 27 countries. Still, some specific data on intra-coalition governance e.g. coalition agreements and cabinet resolution mechanisms, are simply not (yet) available for the 10 countries in the CEE region.⁴ This means that our results are not fully comparable on all accounts to those in Strøm *et al.* (2008). However, what we lose in comparison on a limited set of variables is compensated for by the fact that we are now able to compare the importance of most relevant factors in WE with their usefulness as explanatory variables in CEE. We can also report the coefficients and significance levels for the full dataset (WE-FULL) to facilitate comparison with the results in Strøm *et al.* (2008).

Table 1 provides a descriptive overview of our three dependent variables (cabinet formation, the number of ministers and cabinet duration), which contains data on a total of 273 cabinets for the period 1989 – 2010.⁵

We will return to these three dependent variables below, but first we present the independent variables in our focused comparison. We use the five clusters (or groups) of independent variables that were introduced by Strøm *et al.* (2008).⁶ Further information on all of the individual variables

Table 1: Coalitions, number of ministers and duration in Europe (1989 – 2010)

Country	Cabinets	Minority situations		Number of ministers	Median duration			Absolute (# of days)
	Number of cabinets	One-Party	Coalition	N	Mean	SD	Relative	
Austria	8	0	8	8	14.00	1.77	0.766	991
Belgium	10	0	10	10	15.1	0.74	0.559	303.5
Denmark	9	0	9	9	19.67	1.73	0.692	825
Finland	10	0	10	10	18.00	1.25	1	720.5
France	11	2	4	6	21.36	6.70	0.770	539.5
Germany	7	0	7	7	17.57	3.74	0.988	1386.5
Greece	10	1	2	3	20.40	2.91	0.539	785.5
Iceland	10	0	10	10	11.30	0.95	1	613
Ireland	8	0	8	8	15.00	0.00	0.598	924
Italy	13	0	13	13	26.14	3.39	0.452	358
Luxembourg	6	0	6	6	11.83	2.04	1	1772
Netherlands	9	0	9	9	14.33	1.58	0.823	1113
Norway	9	4	5	5	19.11	0.33	1	959.5
Portugal	7	3	2	5	17.57	1.51	0.994	874
Spain	6	5	0	5	17.00	1.10	0.962	1362
Sweden	7	4	3	7	22.14	0.90	1	1262.5
United Kingdom	7	0	1	1	22.57	0.53	0.833	1236
Bulgaria	8	2	1	3	16.70	1.49	0.494	611
Czech Republic	10	2	8	10	17.18	1.40	0.579	459
Estonia	12	2	10	12	14.33	0.49	0.522	665
Hungary	10	2	6	8	15.70	3.06	1	691
Latvia	19	1	18	19	15.79	1.81	0.315	307.5
Lithuania	12	0	6	6	15.92	2.54	0.627	340
Poland	16	5	11	16	20.31	2.96	0.343	410.5
Romania	17	4	11	15	19.76	1.64	0.467	440.5
Slovakia	10	1	9	10	16.90	1.53	0.668	439
Slovenia	12	0	12	12	18.08	3.68	0.802	580.5
Total	273	38	199	233	17.49	4.11	0.728	610
WE 17	147	19	107	122	18.18	4.81	0.831	874
CEE 10	126	19	92	111	16.77	3.10	0.501	426

(and each cluster) is presented in the Appendix, starting with the cluster that consists of the structural attributes variables.

Structural Attributes (STRU): Here, we bring together variables that directly deal with political parties, the parliament and the cabinet. Among these are the absolute (and the effective) number of parliamentary parties, seat share of the largest party, fragmentation of bargaining power (the Banzhaf index) and bargaining power of the largest party. These are all factors that pre-date the conclusion of cabinet formation bargaining i.e. they are independent of the bargaining outcome. We also use cabinet attributes such as type of cabinet (coalition, surplus coalition and number of cabinet parties). These attributes depend on the bargaining outcome, but we include them on the basis that the very formation of a viable coalition largely precedes the distribution of its cabinet positions and other stages down the life-cycle of a cabinet.

In a noted controversy, Strøm (1988) on the one hand and Browne *et al* (1988) on the other, discussed the extent to which factors that are defined at the start of a cabinet (such as minority vs. majority status etc.) can structure events later in the existence of a coalition. Instead, Browne *et al.* argued that the risk of dissolution should be seen as largely a consequence of stochastic events (critical events) that occur during the lifetime of the cabinet. Strøm argued in favour of the demonstrated importance of structural attributes. However, both camps also agreed on a perspective in which the relative importance of both is taken into account. In this vein, again following Strøm *et al.* (2008), we investigate the impact of structural attributes relative to other important factors that can be found in the literature on government formation and breakdown. These we group into four additional clusters.

Preferences (PREF): Here, we look at the main patterns of conflict dimensions in the party system. When Laver and Budge (1992) introduced their data from the Manifesto Research Group into the study of coalition formation, they combined cross-national data with in-depth country studies. In the research presented here, we are limited to conducting cross-national analysis. However, our expectation is that parties in the middle of the most important conflict dimension(s) in any given country i.e. the median (or central party), have a favourable position when they negotiate with their competitors (e.g. McDonald and Budge 2005; Keman 2011). In addition to the median (or central party), our measures of preferences and ideological

polarisation refer to all parliamentary parties (except for very small parties and independents), apart from our measure of cabinet preference range that only includes parties in the cabinet.

There have been attempts to compute the most important dimensions of party politics in the CEE region using data from quantitative analyses of party manifestos by the Comparative Manifestos project (CMP) (Klingemann *et al.* 2006) and questionnaire-based surveys with groups of country experts (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2007; Keman 2007; Whitefield *et al.* 2007; Benoit and Laver 2006). In this paper, we mainly use the left-right manifesto data from Klingemann *et al.* (2006) and Volkens *et al.* (2011). Nevertheless, as we noted above, the dimensionality of party politics is a complicated matter. The final verdict on the relevance of the left-right dimension in the CEE region is still undetermined.⁷ For instance, we know that in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the question of EU membership was, perhaps, the most salient issue in many CEE countries (Benoit and Laver 2006). In addition, even if one uses a left-right socioeconomic scale, the precise definition of it remains in question. Benoit and Laver (2006) suggested that, for many CEE countries, *privatisation* rather than *taxes/spending* is the most useful socioeconomic indicator. In the end, we have to make a difficult choice and, for the sake of a consistent comparison, we follow Strøm *et al.* (2008) and use party positions calculated on the basis of the general left-right scale in the CMP data. Bakke (2010: 84) also suggested that the left-right competition in the CEE countries over time has become more similar to that of Western Europe.

The CMP dataset has a better coverage than expert data i.e. it includes more parties and makes analysis over a longer period possible. However, to avoid determining results that are based on a specific measure of parties' left/right positions, we also conduct our analysis with positional information based on Chapel Hill party expert surveys (CHES) (see Bakker *et al.* 2012; Hooghe *et al.* 2010; Steenbergen and Marks 2007). For our first two dependent variables, coalitions and the number of ministers, we report the results based on both the Manifesto and the Chapel Hill data. For the more data-demanding duration analysis, we should rely on the more time-variant measure and so we use only the CMP data. This also corresponds to the research strategy chosen by Saalfeld (2008) in the Strøm *et al.* (2008) book.

Institutions (INST): In Western Europe, parliamentary institutions matter. One important variation is between countries in which a new cabinet is

required to garner explicit support from a majority in parliament (positive parliamentarism) and those in which the party leader, who emerges as prime minister, is appointed by the head of state (or, in Sweden, the speaker of the parliament) and it is up to the parliament to deny the appointment (negative parliamentarism) if the majority so wishes (Bergman 1993).⁸ There is also evidence that when a semi-presidential system is characterised by a president with an active role, this has an effect on government formation (Elgie 1999) and duration (Saalfeld 2008:354). This is important in Western Europe, particularly in France (Elgie 2002), but also in the CEE region (Elgie and Moestrup 2008; Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009; Somer-Topcu and Williams 2008). However, given our focus on government formation and duration, we do not find that the often-used criterion of an elected head of state is sufficient to identify a semi-presidential system. Instead, we use stricter criteria based on two conditions: that the president is popularly elected and that the president can have a direct influence on cabinet formation.⁹

In addition, Druckman *et al.* (2005) pointed to the importance of bicameralism. In their book, Strøm *et al.* (2008) used a broad definition and included all bicameral systems in Western Europe (including, for example, the Netherlands and the UK) as opposed to only the strong ones, such as Italy. The definition is that bicameralism exists when there are two legislative parliamentary chambers and the weaker chamber has at least a temporary suspensive veto. The logic is that the very existence of an Upper House, even if it has only a limited suspensive veto for some forms of legislation, means that the lower chamber must take it into account in coalitional politics. As we base our research on a comparison with Strøm *et al.* (2008), we define bicameralism in the CEE to include not only the strongest upper chamber (i.e. the one in Romania), but all four bicameral systems.¹⁰

We also estimate the impact of the relative size of the lower (main) chamber and the power of the prime minister to control and direct the cabinet. The latter measure is based on three indicators, with a maximum score of three (3) when the prime minister on his own can appoint [1] and dismiss [2] other cabinet ministers and when individual line-ministers can only be removed by the PM and not directly by the parliament [3]. However, because all the other institutional indicators in our dataset are of a binary nature (dummy variables), we have had to recode this measurement as a binary one to avoid collinearity (as it coincides with other indicator variables in our models) – thus, here, we use an indicator measuring whether the PM has no or weak powers [0] vs. moderate or strong powers [1] over cabinet

composition. ¹¹

Bargaining Costs (BARC): Next, we turn our attention to bargaining costs (Lupia and Strøm 2008). These are measures that try to capture the costs of “doing business” and we use them to tap into the specifics of the bargaining situation. Strøm *et al.* (2008) introduced a number of such measures e.g. the circumstances that led to the dismissal of the previous cabinet and the coalition contract (agreement) that the parties set up to ensure cooperation throughout the tenure of a coalition. Such measures are simply not yet available for CEE and, therefore, we will use another important variable: the overall duration of the bargaining process, starting from either the date on which the previous cabinet resigned or the election (depending on which came first). This serves as a proxy for the complexity and uncertainty of the bargaining process (see also De Winter and Dumont 2008).

Critical Events (CRIE): Our final set of independent variables captures the larger context that lies beyond the direct and immediate control of the politicians themselves. In our case, for each cabinet we record electoral volatility i.e. gains and losses for the parties that formed the cabinet, which indicate the extent to which the cabinet’s parties collectively experienced a recent electoral shock. This measurement can be seen as a proxy for the extent to which parties have reason to be concerned over further dramatic shifts in electoral support and consequently if they perceive that they are in a situation of strategic uncertainty (cf. Saalfeld 2008:361). In addition, we also include rates of inflation and unemployment. These are proxies for the more general context of political and economic (in)stability.

To investigate the importance of structural attributes relative to the other clusters, we use non-linear (logit) regression to analyse coalition formation (table 2), linear regression (OLS) to study the number of ministers (table 3) and proportional hazards models (Cox regression) to analyse the duration of cabinets (table 4).

Below, we present three sets of statistical models for coalition formation (table 2), three for number of ministers (table 3) and two for cabinet duration (table 4). The first set of these models (model 1 in tables 2, 3 and 4) uses the data for 1945 – 2010 for Western Europe. The second set of models (models 2 and 3) are full models, based on our five clusters and the variables that allow for a comparison with the results for the full post-World War II period

for Western Europe. The results from Strøm *et al.* (2008) are presented in the text only.

In the models that follow, given the rather small number of observations, we reduce the number of predictors to be able to evaluate near collinear predictors (models 4, 5, 6 and 7 in table 2 and models 3 and 4 in tables 3 and 4).¹² Finally, we present two models that use expert survey data (CHES), rather than manifesto data (CMP), in order to verify that our findings are not simply a consequence of the party position measurement used (models 8 and 9 in table 2 and models 6 and 7 in table 3). As mentioned above, we base the preference variables in table 4 on the manifesto data only.

4. EXPLAINING COALITIONS

In the following section we replicated Mitchell and Nyblade's (2008) findings for WE using our updated dataset (WE-FULL). One of their important findings was that structural attributes and, practically, the presence of a particularly large party tended to decrease the likelihood of a coalition formation.¹³ Our analysis of the updated dataset for Western Europe echoes this finding. In fact, both an increase in the size of the largest party and the coalition potential (bargaining power) of the largest party decrease the likelihood of a coalition between two or more parties. Also, consistent with previous research, is that an increase in the preference range between the outlier parties in parliament (parliamentary preference range) and an increased seat share for the extremist parties (polarisation) also decreases the chances of a coalition. The same goes for the presence of a strong prime minister and a bicameral parliamentary system. Variables that increase the possibility of a coalition are positive parliamentarism and semi-presidentialism. In our analysis, however, semi-presidentialism does not emerge as significant, but the sign is in the expected direction.

With only one obvious exception, the variables from the various clusters have the sign and significance that Mitchell and Nyblade (2008:226-227) reported. The main deviation comes from our re-analysis of electoral volatility. Mitchell and Nyblade (2008:226-227) found that a high level of electoral volatility led to the formation of fewer coalition cabinets. We find the opposite, in our full dataset for Western Europe, that a high level of electoral volatility also increases the chances of a coalition forming. Because of the notorious problems of determining a new party from a splinter party from a

merger etc. we note this discrepancy but largely leave it for further research. Here, we simply postulate that the updated version of the dataset has a more reliable empirical account of the volatility variable.

In our analysis of the two regions and the later period (1989 – 2010), we can see that the core findings also hold for the smaller but more contemporary samples. As can be seen in Table 2, we include all theoretical relevant predictors in models 2 and 3. However, the *seat share* and *bargain power* of the largest party and, to some extent, the *bargaining power* of the median party (as sometimes this is the largest party) are predictors that all relate to the dominance of a single, strong party and consequently are highly correlated with each other. This does constitute a problem in the analysis as the sample sizes are fairly small. Therefore, we remove the *bargaining power of the largest party* in models 4 and 5 and our measurement for bicameralism (we explain this below) in models 6 and 7. Models 8 and 9 are identical to models 2 and 3, respectively, except for that we use preference measurements based on expert data, rather than manifesto data.

Table 2: Explaining coalitions

	WE-FULL (1)	WE-17 (2)	CEE-10 (3)	WE-17 (4)	CEE-10 (5)	WE-17 (6)	CEE-10 (7)	WE-17 (8)	CEE-10 (9)	From cluster
Largest party's share	-0.16*** (0.058)	-9.13 (6.55)	-14.7*** (7.29)	-18.7*** (5.41)	-16.0** (6.89)	-11.9 (10.4)	-14.2** (7.22)	-0.23* (0.12)	-25.6 (17.0)	STRU
Bargaining powers largest party	-7.88*** (1.69)	-14.2*** (4.02)	-2.75* (1.64)			-13.8*** (4.24)	-3.18* (1.71)	-31.8*** (10.3)	-6.89** (3.26)	STRU
Parliamentary preference range (CMP)	-0.021** (0.011)	-0.041* (0.021)	-0.036 (0.038)	-0.052** (0.022)	-0.023 (0.041)	-0.044** (0.022)	-0.048 (0.039)			PREF
Polarisation (BP weighted, CMP)	0.068** (0.028)	0.0053 (0.070)	0.12 (0.12)	-0.018 (0.053)	0.12 (0.12)	-0.018 (0.067)	0.12 (0.12)			PREF
Parliamentary preference range (CHES)								1.92** (0.77)	0.73 (1.45)	PREF
Polarisation (BP weighted, CHES)								-8.73*** (3.13)	-1.22 (3.62)	PREF
Median party bargaining power	-0.012 (1.01)	3.26 (2.71)	-0.27 (2.33)	-2.30 (1.45)	-0.77 (2.13)	2.83 (2.43)	0.43 (2.33)	4.59* (2.72)	-6.80** (2.83)	PREF
Positive parliamentarism	0.031 (0.37)	0.73 (1.29)		1.86** (0.93)		2.64* (1.48)				INST
Powers of Prime Minister	1.05*** (0.38)	-4.39*** (1.37)	-0.77 (0.80)	-2.92** (1.33)	-0.66 (0.79)	-3.85*** (1.11)	-0.77 (0.76)	-5.63** (2.38)	-4.80** (2.24)	INST
Bicameralism	-1.17** (0.49)	2.46* (1.34)	-0.76 (0.72)	1.32 (1.23)	-0.92 (0.68)			0.94 (1.84)	-6.27** (2.96)	INST
Semi-Presidentialism	0.80 (0.65)	1.44 (1.19)	-0.43 (0.92)	3.20** (1.25)	0.19 (0.90)	3.54*** (1.31)	-0.81 (0.96)	2.38 (1.87)	-5.79* (3.21)	INST
Cabinet bargaining duration	0.0010 (0.0059)	0.0044 (0.039)	0.020 (0.024)	0.0024 (0.017)	0.025 (0.025)	0.0038 (0.029)	0.021 (0.026)	0.033 (0.038)	0.0070 (0.030)	BARC
Cabinet electoral volatility	0.25*** (0.043)	0.26* (0.14)	-0.0026 (0.029)	0.27** (0.13)	-0.0073 (0.028)	0.24* (0.14)	0.0038 (0.029)	0.030 (0.14)	-0.025 (0.062)	CRIE
Constant	3.17*** (0.79)	12.2*** (3.44)	8.55*** (3.02)	11.0*** (2.70)	7.50*** (2.82)	14.0*** (4.76)	8.08*** (2.99)	22.4** (9.01)	25.0*** (9.07)	
Number of observations	380	125	85	125	85	125	85	102	51	
Pseudo-Rsq (McFadden's)	0.34	0.60	0.32	0.47	0.30	0.59	0.31	0.70	0.52	
% correctly predicted	83.42	92.8	85.9	91.2	85.9	90.4	87.1	95.1	90.2	

Note: Logit estimates with standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

As can be seen in table 2, the presence of a dominant party, measured in terms of either seat share in parliament or the bargaining power of the largest party, provides an incentive for coalition avoidance and facilitates the formation of single party cabinets. The models indicate that that *bargaining power of the largest party* is significant in both regions, but not the *largest party's seat share* (in models 2 and 9). However, as mentioned above, this is an artefact of the small sample size and close to collinear predictors. Removing any of these predictors (for instance, as in models 4 and 5) makes the remaining predictor statistically and substantially significant. Thus, raw numbers (seat share) or the pivotal status of the largest party (i.e. bargaining power) tends to lead to single party cabinets in both regions. That is, in both regions, the presence of a party that is considerably larger than the others tends to decrease the likelihood that a coalition will form.

Looking at the next set of factors (cluster), “ideological preferences”, we can detect some influence of ideological fragmentation in parliament as measured by the ideological distance (parliamentary preference range) between the most distant parties on the left-right scale (models 2, 4 and 6, 8) but only in Western Europe. Thus, for Western Europe, we can conclude that the larger the policy distance between the parliamentary party furthest to the left and the party furthest to the right, the fewer coalitions are formed. For the CEE region, we cannot find any support that ideologically polarised parliaments affect coalition formation. In addition, when looking at our ideological polarisation measure, a measurement that weights the ideological left-right distance with the pivotal status of the parties as measured by bargaining power, we find only a weak indication that this matters in Western Europe. Here polarised parliaments may lead to the formation of single party governments (model 8), as it becomes difficult to form alternative majorities. If we compare the two sub-regions on the influence of the median-legislator party, a measure that also combines coalition potential with ideological preferences, the results indicate that the pivotal status of the median-legislator party has a detectable effect on coalition formation, but only in models 8 and 9 i.e. when we use data from the expert surveys from Chapel Hill.¹⁴

When it comes to the effect of institutional factors, Mitchell and Nyblade (2008) argued that, in Western Europe, some institutional types, such as “positive parliamentarism”, “bicameralism” and “semi-presidentialism”, can have a significant impact on variation in coalition formation outcome. Thus, when a cabinet has to win a parliamentary investiture vote (positive parliamentarism), or when cabinets have to ensure legislative support in a

second chamber (bicameralism) or where semi-presidentialism is taken to mean that the president can have a direct impact on government formation, there is a higher likelihood that coalitions will form. However, in our analysis, these findings are not consistent across the two regions.

Our institutional variables are binary (i.e. dummy variables) and sometimes overlap in any given country. Given the relatively small sample size, we have to remove the predictor *Bicameralism* from models 6 and 7, to be able to have an indication of the impact of *positive parliamentarism*. Doing so, we can see that positive parliamentarism and semi-presidentialism have a significant effect on the formation of coalition cabinets in Western Europe, whereas semi-presidentialism does not appear to have any consistent effect in Central Eastern Europe.¹⁵ Also, the effect of positive parliamentarism drops out from the analysis of CEE, but this is something of an institutional artefact as this institutional rule exists in all CEE countries. It is thus a *constant* rather than a variable and, hence, statistically irrelevant in analyses of the CEE region alone.¹⁶ Another institutional feature that has an effect in WE, but not confidently in CEE (although the coefficient goes in the expected direction in all models and is significant in model 9), is the power of the Prime Minister over the cabinet. Where the PM can control and direct the cabinet (by appointments and dismissals), this clearly reduces the probability of coalition formation, as the ability of junior coalition partners to influence policy becomes weaker and the pay-offs of being in government are smaller.

Table 2 also indicates that the length of the formation period, “duration of cabinet bargaining”, is largely unimportant for the outcome of coalition formation (measured in this way). Thus, a long process between the resignation of the previous cabinet and the formation of a new cabinet does not tend to increase the likelihood that the new cabinet will be formed by a coalition of parties. Furthermore, we only find weak indications that electoral volatility has a cross-national effect on coalition formation in Western European party systems. That is, if a cabinet forms after an election in which the incoming cabinet parties have experienced a large swing in voter support, this tends to slightly increase the chance of coalition formation. In the CEE countries, the effect is the opposite.

In summary, we find that positive parliamentarism tends to create a bargaining environment in which coalitions form more often (relative to negative parliamentarism). Other institutional powers, such as PM power, bicameralism and semi-presidentialism are more sensitive to model specifications.

However, certain structural attributes, namely the presence of a large party and a party with a dominant position in the party system, clearly decreases the likelihood of a coalition cabinet. Indeed, we find that the relative size of the largest party and especially the bargaining potential of the same party matters even more clearly in CEE than in WE. In the West, the combination of ideological placement and size creates situations in which median parties tend to avoid coalitions and aim for single-party cabinets. In CEE, where the ideological dimensions are less pronounced and stable, the sheer size of the party and a high number of coalition alternatives are attributes that, in themselves, matter more exclusively for the outcome of coalition bargaining.

5. EXPLAINING THE NUMBER OF CABINET MEMBERS

In the process of coalition formation, the share of cabinet portfolios that a political party is given tends to be roughly equal to the share of seats it has in parliament. From the coalition literature, it is also known that political parties do not consider all portfolios to be of equal worth (Blondel and Thiebault 1991; Mair 2007). The PM position, the ministers for Foreign Affairs, Finance, Economy and Defence often tend to be valued higher than other ministerial portfolios. Previous research has also shown that political parties that belong to certain party families have their own favourite portfolios. The agrarian parties, for instance, will bargain hard for the Ministry of Agriculture, while the Social Democrats are usually keen to have the Ministry of Labour Affairs (Budge and Keman 1990). These observations have recently been confirmed empirically for Western Europe (Bäck *et al.* 2011) as well as Central Eastern Europe (Druckman and Roberts 2008).

In the literature, there is a well know law of parity (Gamson 1961). The number of portfolios is usually based on the percentage of parliamentary seats held by a coalition party. That is, if party A has 60 % of the coalition's parliamentary seats, party B 30 % and Party C 10 %, then minister portfolios tend to be distributed accordingly (i.e. 60 %, 30 %, 10 %). Even if this is not a perfect predictor, because the largest party tends to have a somewhat less than proportional allocation (Mershon 2002: 65; see also Keman, 2006), the parity rule is empirically well established. It has also recently been shown that parity distribution is more easily achieved under conditions of uncertainty and complexity when parties can have a harder time exploiting any differences in bargaining power (Falcó-Gimeno and Indridason 2013).

Our focus is somewhat different, but it too has to do with the bargaining over cabinet portfolios. When political parties bargain for government office, they also have the option of increasing or decreasing the number of members (ministers) in the cabinet (Mershon 2002; Verzichelli 2008). As Table 1 indicates, the average cabinet size is about 17 – 18 cabinet members (including the PM) with full voting rights with the average being slightly higher in Western Europe than in CEE.

Mershon (2002) found a strong pattern in Italy, where the number of ministers actually varied from cabinet to cabinet, largely depending on coalition politics and on formation bargaining, but the evidence from other countries was more varied (Mershon 2002: 63-65, 100-108). In the Scandinavian countries, for instance, variation in the number of ministers appointed in different cabinets was much less pronounced. One explanation for the cross-national variation was the relative ease with which the number of ministers could be changed. Ireland, for example, has a constitutional requirement to maintain the number of ministers at between 7 and 15. Beyond this, Mershon suggests, parliamentary institutions such as the need for a coalition to win an investiture vote (positive parliamentarism) also had an impact on the propensity to alter the number of ministers as part of the coalition game (Mershon 2002).

In one of the very few analyses following up on Mershon's (2002) research on this point, Verzichelli (2008) found that a combination of structural attributes (seat share of the largest parliamentary party, number of cabinet parties and surplus majority cabinets), a polarisation at the extremes of the party system, dissolution power resting with the PM, the size of the lower chambers and a history of cabinet electoral volatility tend to increase the number of cabinet ministers. There are fewer variables with the opposite effect i.e. that actually decrease the number of ministers. Among these is the formation of a coalition cabinet, the degree of PM power over the cabinet and economic growth during the period immediately leading up to the formation of a cabinet. The finding that coalition cabinets lead to a decrease in the number of cabinet ministers is perhaps at first counter-intuitive, but it is arguably a result of the fact that coalitions that include no party above the majority threshold (i.e. minimal winning coalitions) might not, in general, have to include additional ministers. Conversely, surplus cabinets might want to increase cabinet size in order to keep all the coalition parties content. In table 3 we present a replication of Verzichelli's (2008) analysis for Western Europe, as well as the CEE region, based on our somewhat smaller datasets (in terms of available variables). As table 3 shows, in our analysis

of the full period for Western Europe, we do not find any evidence for the finding that the presence of a large party within the coalition is associated with larger governments in the sense of the cabinet including more ministers. We also find that the requirement of a constructive vote of no-confidence has a significant impact. This, too, is different from Verzichelli's (2008) analysis. Aside from that, our results for the full period in Western Europe are highly consistent with his results.

Looking at the more contemporary samples, the results presented in table 3 indicate that, common to both regions, party systems with large parliaments also have more ministers in cabinet. In Western Europe, institutional factors such as bicameralism, a constructive vote of no-confidence and the powers of the Prime Minister also have a clear impact on cabinet size (in terms of decreasing the number of ministers). In the CEE, only bicameralism seems to have a noticeable institutional effect (an increase in the number of ministers) and that is only when the full model is based on the manifesto data.

The type of cabinet that forms has an important impact on the number of ministers, but the impact is different in the two regions. In Western Europe, coalition governments are, just as Verzichelli (2008) found, associated with fewer ministers relative to other types of government. However, this is dependent on the size of the coalition, as evident when looking at if there are any additional non-necessary coalition partners (*cabinet surplus majority*). This, in turn, leads to more cabinet ministers. That is, when more parties than are absolutely necessary to meet the majority criterion are included, increasing the number of seats can be an easy way of facilitating portfolio allocation. However, as the cabinets that are surplus majority cabinets are a subset of all coalition cabinets and often contain more parties than other cabinets, we remove the *number of parties* in models 4 and 5 to be able to detect the effect of oversized cabinets. Our results indicate that the higher the number of cabinet parties there is, the more cabinet ministers a government will have (at least in CEE) and surplus majority cabinets tend to produce larger governments (more ministers) in both regions. The result, however, is dependent on how the bargaining environment is measured in terms of the preference cluster. When the Chapel Hill expert data are used instead of the manifesto data, the result is not statistically significant (most likely due to the smaller number of observations).

Turning our attention to other preference attributes and critical events, preference polarisation of the party system appears to increase the size of

Table 3: Explaining the number of ministers

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	
Cabinet follows election	-0.18 (0.39)	-0.27 (0.59)	0.019 (0.47)	-0.27 (0.59)	0.18 (0.48)	-0.72 (0.61)	-0.64 (0.65)	STRU
Abs. no. of parties	0.11 (0.096)	-0.046 (0.16)	0.014 (0.18)	-0.028 (0.15)	0.035 (0.18)	-0.030 (0.16)	-0.28 (0.31)	STRU
Bargaining power frag.	0.20 (0.18)	0.68** (0.27)	-0.53 (0.33)	0.71*** (0.25)	-0.37 (0.33)	0.42 (0.28)	-0.56 (0.56)	STRU
Largest party share	-0.0062 (0.084)	-0.043 (0.072)	-8.33 (6.65)	-0.043 (0.071)	-9.24 (6.81)	-0.075 (0.068)	-17.1 (11.1)	STRU
Coalition cabinet	-1.22** (0.56)	-3.36*** (0.90)	-0.77 (0.76)	-3.23*** (0.79)	0.31 (0.60)	-3.09*** (0.91)	0.87 (1.07)	STRU
Number of cab. parties	0.58** (0.29)	0.13 (0.41)	0.90** (0.40)			0.35 (0.40)	0.38 (0.56)	STRU
Cabinet surplus majority	0.98* (0.57)	1.19 (0.80)	0.49 (0.67)	1.29* (0.73)	1.37** (0.56)	0.54 (0.82)	1.02 (0.94)	STRU
Parl. pref. range (CMP)	-0.0010 (0.012)	-0.015 (0.023)	-0.089*** (0.033)	-0.015 (0.023)	-0.10*** (0.034)			PREF
Polarisation (BP Wtd. CMP)	0.052* (0.028)	0.055 (0.055)	0.21** (0.091)	0.055 (0.054)	0.22** (0.094)			PREF
Parl. pref. range (CHES)						-0.062 (0.25)	-0.10 (0.34)	PREF
Polarisation (CHES)						2.39*** (0.80)	1.93* (0.97)	PREF
Median legislator party	-0.20 (0.46)	0.67 (0.62)	-0.039 (0.54)	0.71 (0.60)	0.12 (0.55)	1.09* (0.65)	0.91 (0.76)	PREF
Bicameralism	-0.90** (0.45)	-2.14*** (0.78)	1.82*** (0.62)	-2.18*** (0.77)	2.28*** (0.60)	-2.42*** (0.71)	1.11 (0.70)	INST
Positive parliamentarism	0.65 (0.51)	-1.25 (0.81)		-1.26 (0.80)		-0.38 (1.00)		INST
Vote of c. no-confidence	-3.98*** (0.80)	-3.47*** (1.07)	-0.87 (0.69)	-3.45*** (1.07)	-0.87 (0.70)	-3.80*** (1.03)	0.33 (1.31)	INST
Powers of Prime Minister	0.45 (0.77)	-2.29* (1.19)	-1.03 (0.73)	-2.37** (1.15)	-1.04 (0.74)	-0.32 (1.15)	-1.27 (0.97)	INST
Semi-Presidentialism	-0.026 (0.66)	-1.04 (1.07)	0.65 (1.03)	-1.02 (1.06)	0.060 (1.02)	-1.27 (1.07)	-0.18 (1.26)	INST
Size of lower chamber	0.019*** (0.0013)	0.022*** (0.0024)	0.010*** (0.0029)	0.022*** (0.0022)	0.0091*** (0.0029)	0.017*** (0.0021)	0.014*** (0.0048)	INST
Cabinet barg. duration	-0.0030 (0.0052)	-0.0013 (0.0077)	-0.0059 (0.0086)	-0.0014 (0.0077)	-0.0074 (0.0088)	-0.0069 (0.0074)	-0.015 (0.016)	BARC
Cab. electoral volatility	-0.084 (0.058)	-0.30*** (0.079)	0.077*** (0.029)	-0.30*** (0.079)	0.066** (0.029)	-0.25*** (0.075)	0.14** (0.054)	CRIE
Inflation	-0.035 (0.023)	-0.026 (0.078)	0.0022 (0.0014)	-0.023 (0.078)	0.0024* (0.0014)	0.054 (0.10)	0.034 (0.11)	CRIE
Unemployment	0.14*** (0.051)	0.21*** (0.079)	-0.076 (0.078)	0.21*** (0.079)	-0.025 (0.077)	0.083 (0.091)	-0.085 (0.095)	CRIE
Constant	9.75*** (0.92)	13.5*** (1.59)	18.3*** (3.73)	13.4*** (1.54)	19.1*** (3.81)	11.9*** (1.80)	18.2** (7.17)	
Number of observations	425	143	94	143	94	122	53	
Adjusted-Rsq	0.586	0.694	0.546	0.696	0.522	0.701	0.530	

Note: Ordinary least squares estimates with standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

governments. Nonetheless, the effect sizes range from small (models 2 and 4) to large (models 5 and 6), again depending on the measurement used to measure polarisation (manifesto data or expert surveys). In addition, there are indications that exogenous events affect the bargaining situation which alter the size of the government. Cabinets in CEE are larger when electoral volatility is high. In WE they instead tend to be smaller. Another difference between the two regions is that in WE, under unfavourable economic conditions (unemployment), the number of cabinet ministers increases. In the CEE the same relationship is insignificant.

Overall, our analysis of the number of cabinet ministers as a bargaining outcome shows that, in Western Europe, this is largely an effect of the number of parliamentary parties and some institutional types – e.g. bicameralism and the presence of a constructive vote of no-confidence. Verzichelli’s (2008) finding that the levels of unemployment at the time of the cabinet formation is important for producing an increase in the number of ministers is reflected in our re-analysis, but only for Western Europe. The finding does not travel to the CEE countries.

There is one extremely robust finding in all of this, across both regions and all three samples (the full sample for Western Europe and the contemporary samples for the two regions), namely that when the number of seats in the parliament is high, so is the number of cabinet ministers. The structural attributes in terms of the number of cabinet parties and inclusion of additional coalition members (surplus majority cabinets) matter too. The latter result is seen in both regions, WE and CEE, albeit only in the model based on the manifesto data.

6. EXPLAINING CABINET DURATION

Government stability is a well-researched subject in the West European context. A few studies of the Central Eastern European countries also exist (e.g. Grotz and Weber 2012; Somer-Topcu and Williams 2008; Tzelgov 2011). From this literature, we can generate some expectations about what we might find in our empirical inquiry. More complicated governmental (bargaining) environments should tend to produce less stable governments, that is, with less durability. This basically means that, on average, majority cabinets should be more durable than minority governments; single-party

governments should be more durable than coalition governments; ideologically connected (or cohesive) coalitions should be more durable than more ideologically fractionalised coalitions; minimal-winning coalitions should be more durable than oversized ones and fragmented party systems should produce less durable governments than less fragmented systems (e.g. Lupia and Strøm 2008).

Saalfeld's (2008) results in Strøm *et al.* (2008) are, for the most part, also consistent with these expectations. He found that two structural attributes in particular decrease the risk of an early termination of the cabinet. These are when the cabinet controls a majority of the seats in parliament and when the party with the most bargaining power is included in the cabinet. Interestingly, he also found that conservative cabinets tend to be more stable than cabinets with another ideological make-up. In contrast, cabinets tend to resign earlier when there is a higher (effective) number of political parties and inflation. Institutional variables (bicameralism, positive parliamentarism and semi-presidentialism) have a similar effect. More surprising, cabinets that are ideologically cohesive tend to face an increased risk of early termination. Given the general expectation in the literature that ideologically connected (or cohesive) coalitions are more durable than more ideologically fractionalised coalitions, this is an unexpected result.

In the analysis below, we use event-history analysis or Cox regression (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004) to examine the effects of different factors identified as important by Saalfeld (2008) on cabinet duration in Western Europe. In the analysis, we focus on one type of government terminations, namely the *general risk of discretionary cabinet terminations*. We use right-censoring on all cabinets that did not experience the event during the period of study. More precisely, all cabinets that were still in office at the end of the observation period as well as all cabinets in the dataset that were terminated for technical reasons (e.g. termination by regular elections or death of Prime Minister) were right-censored. Table 4 shows the results of a replication of Saalfeld's (2008) findings for Western Europe using our updated and extended dataset. Models 1, 2 and 3 report the full models and, as with the previous results reported above, models 4 and 5 exclude collinear variables.

The results for Western Europe (WE-Full) are, for the most part, consistent with Saalfeld's (2008) analysis. Because of the relatively small number of observations, some of the coefficients – such as the one for conservative cabinets – fail to reach statistical significance (although the estimated pa-

Table 4: Cox proportional hazard models of cabinet duration

	WE-FULL (1)	WE-17 (2)	CEE-10 (3)	WE-17 (4)	CEE-10 (5)	From cluster
Max. possible duration	0.99*** (0.00020)	0.99*** (0.00055)	1.01 (0.00061)	0.99*** (0.00054)	1.01 (0.00061)	STRU
Eff. no. of parties	1.11 (0.10)	1.42 (0.33)	1.40 (0.40)	1.40 (0.32)	1.43 (0.41)	STRU
Coalition cabinet	1.20 (0.34)	12.4*** (8.68)	0.96 (0.72)	12.7*** (8.81)	1.12 (0.79)	STRU
Cabinet seat share	1.00 (0.0091)	0.97 (0.030)	0.99 (0.033)	0.97 (0.030)	0.99 (0.032)	STRU
No. of cabinet parties	1.05 (0.14)	0.67 (0.23)	0.94 (0.35)	0.69 (0.23)	0.86 (0.29)	STRU
Max. barg. party in cab.	0.47*** (0.13)	1.21 (0.92)	0.87 (0.53)	1.29 (0.94)	0.80 (0.47)	STRU
Majority cabinet	0.52*** (0.12)	1.74 (1.31)	0.36* (0.21)	1.80 (1.33)	0.36* (0.21)	STRU
Minimal winning status	0.70 (0.15)	0.28** (0.16)	1.29 (0.58)	0.28** (0.16)	1.30 (0.59)	STRU
Polarisation	0.99 (0.0090)	0.99 (0.031)	1.03 (0.041)	0.99 (0.031)	1.03 (0.041)	PREF
Cabinet preference range	1.01 (0.0057)	1.02 (0.017)	1.00 (0.017)	1.02 (0.017)	1.00 (0.017)	PREF
Median party in cab.	0.90 (0.17)	1.34 (0.73)	1.63 (0.79)	1.32 (0.72)	1.76 (0.82)	PREF
Minimal connected cab.	2.17*** (0.44)	4.37*** (2.20)	0.93 (0.38)	4.17*** (1.96)	0.87 (0.35)	PREF
Conservative cabinet	0.70 (0.15)	0.49 (0.22)	3.44*** (1.41)	0.49 (0.21)	3.44*** (1.40)	PREF
Bicameralism	2.37*** (0.45)	2.58* (1.38)	1.06 (0.52)	2.56* (1.37)	1.28 (0.50)	INST
Positive parliamentarism	1.61** (0.31)	0.46 (0.28)		0.42* (0.21)		INST
PM Cabinet powers	0.76 (0.17)	0.38 (0.25)	2.11 (1.03)	0.40 (0.25)	2.12 (1.05)	INST
Semi-presidentialism	2.21*** (0.56)	1.23 (0.95)	1.53 (1.04)			INST
Cabinet barg. duration	1.00 (0.0020)	1.00 (0.0054)	0.99 (0.0077)	1.00 (0.0052)	0.99 (0.0077)	BARC
Cab. electoral volatility	0.97 (0.023)	1.11* (0.070)	0.96 (0.027)	1.12* (0.068)	0.97 (0.027)	CRIE
Unemployment (tvc)	1.01 (0.019)	1.19*** (0.060)	1.12* (0.076)	1.20*** (0.056)	1.15** (0.065)	CRIE
Inflation (tvc)	1.04*** (0.0067)	1.41*** (0.13)	1.00 (0.0021)	1.42*** (0.13)	1.00 (0.0022)	CRIE
Log-likelihood	-1125.75	-171.13	-175.44	-171.16	-175.64	
LR χ^2	148.33***	70.91***	29.36*	70.84***	28.96*	
N failing due to risk	226	50	51	50	51	

Notes: Hazard ratios with standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1: To account for rounding error of the reported estimates (as only 2 digits after the decimal point were reported), the hazard ratios were rounded down to 0.99 (if less than 1) and 1.01 (if greater than 1) to indicate the direction of significant effects.

rameters are in the expected direction). Among the ones with statistical significance, we too find that the cabinets that are ideologically connected and do not include a party not needed to secure a majority, are actually more likely to resign early. This robust finding – which also holds for Western Europe in the contemporary sample (WE-17) – needs further research and theorising (and we will return briefly to this below). In WE-17, again consistent with the Saalfeld (2008) results, cabinets are also more unstable in the context of the three institutional variables mentioned above. We also find the somewhat increased risk of resignations in times of inflation that Saalfeld (2008) found. Only with the structural attributes *majority cabinet* and the inclusion in the cabinet of the *party with the largest bargaining power* is there a significant decrease in the risk of early resignation. This is also consistent with Saalfeld’s (2008) findings for Western Europe.

In our more contemporary and directly comparable samples, fewer variables are statistically significant. Working through the clusters, starting with the structural attributes, we find that in Western Europe, *minimal winning cabinets* have a reduced risk of breakdown. This further underscores the difference that Saalfeld (2008) also found between size and preferences in duration analysis. The minimal winning status is also important for stability, but when this is combined with ideological cohesion, the cabinet can sometimes be less stable. In fact, in our two WE models (models 2 and 4 in table 4), ideologically cohesive coalition cabinets face a serious risk of early break up. In this respect, “birds of a feather” do not seem to play well together. This might be because they are competing for the same voters and want to protect their different profiles to the detriment of coalition cooperation.

In any case, the situation is quite different in the CEE countries. In CEE, we find no significant support for the proposition that minimal winning cabinets last longer than surplus majority cabinets. Nor do we find that ideologically connected coalition cabinets face an increased risk of terminating early. In Central Eastern Europe, it is cabinets that have ensured a *majority status* that are most stable. Thus, a majority of any sort seems to be the one thing that reduces the risk of early retirement from office. Again, size as a structural attribute matters a lot for government stability.

When it comes to preference variables, there are numerous studies that show that ideology fragmentation in parliament and the government’s ideological diversity has a large influence on government durability. For instance, Laver and Schofield (1990) showed how the ‘bargaining environment’ i.e. classifying party systems into different types of bargaining systems (e.g.

unipolar centrist, unipolar off-centre, bipolar and multipolar) by using a single dimensional left-right policy space, could affect the durability of governments. Thus, the polarisation and fragmentation of the party system were seen to be important factors on cabinet stability (King *et al.* 1990; Laver and Schofield 1990). Later, Warwick (1994) and Diermeier and Stevenson (1999) argued that ideologically cohesive coalitions are less likely to break down than ideologically fractionalised ones i.e. ideological diversity increases the likelihood of early cabinet failures. However, the results in table 4 do not confirm these expectations. Having ideologically polarised parliaments does not seem to matter significantly to the risk of cabinet termination (although the estimated parameter goes in the expected direction) and our results indicate (in line with Saalfeld (2008) and ours above), that minimally-connected cabinets have an increased risk of breakdown. Although Saalfeld (2008) and Van Roozendaal (1997) found that the inclusion of the parliament’s median or central parties into the government decreases the hazard rate, we cannot find any support for this claim, either in Western or Central Eastern Europe. The second measurement for ideological polarisation within cabinets, the cabinet preference range, does not seem to matter in either region.

With regard to institutional attributes, several authors have assessed the impact of a parliamentary investiture requirement (“positive parliamentarism”) on cabinet duration (King *et al.* 1990; Saalfeld 2008; Warwick 1994). Agreeing with the results of Saalfeld (2008), we find weak indications that such investiture rules reduce cabinet stability in Western Europe (model 3), but again drops out in the CEE-only analysis (for the statistical reasons explained above). In addition, we find that bicameralism increases the risk of premature termination of cabinets in Western Europe. Finally, as with Saalfeld’s (2008) findings for Western Europe, we find that cabinets facing unfavourable macroeconomic situations, as measured through the proxies *unemployment* (both regions) and *inflation* (WE-17 only), have an increased risk of breakdown in both regions.

In summary, the results show that, for both Western Europe and Central Eastern Europe, majority cabinets increase cabinet stability and problematic macroeconomic situations make cabinets more likely to terminate early. However, outside of Western Europe, we cannot find any influence from the variables for the preference and institutional clusters. Perhaps, this is partly due to the relatively low number of observations, but this can also have its explanation in the still unsettled nature of the dimensionality of the CEE party systems.

7. CONCLUSION

The literature on coalition formation in parliamentary democracies reflects a successful research programme in political science. Since its start about five decades ago, it has grown, both in terms of size and knowledge. It is one of the few truly accumulative fields of knowledge within the discipline. However, it is also a field that has been largely (but not exclusively) based on the Western European experience. The emergence of the 10 stable new democracies in Central Eastern Europe that are now full members of the European Union does now allow for comparative investigations of the “truths” that we know from the Western European experience.

Thanks to a new dataset (Andersson *et al.* 2012), we have, in this article, presented the results of a direct comparison between 17 countries in Western Europe and the 10 new democracies. We find that it is indeed true that, on average, the differences between the regions are still considerable. This is largely because politics in the CEE region does not neatly follow the logic of one-dimensional left-right competition that makes politics in Western Europe fairly predictable. True, politics in Western Europe is far from always one-dimensional and there are plenty of differences in that respect between the countries that were members of the EU before the Eastern enlargement. However, politics in Central Eastern Europe is, for the most part, even more unstable and the constituent units, the political parties, are more fluid.

In this article, we asked if the difference between the two regions means that political parties, parliaments and cabinets structures are unimportant in the CEE region. The answer is no! In fact, we largely find the opposite. When the dimensionality of the party system and political parties themselves are in flux, this means that the structural attributes become even more important than when the conditions are more stable. In this respect, our results support the findings that one of us recently published with another co-author (Döring and Hellström 2013). Their conclusions were based on a slightly different dataset, on a different question (which party forms a coalition rather than when is a coalition formed) and using a different statistical method. Yet, the results of the comparisons are strikingly similar.

Of all the various factors we have investigated, it is the size of the largest party, or the existence of a party with much more coalition potential (bargaining power) than the other parties, that matters the most if the outcome of the bargaining will be a coalition or a single party minority cabinet. The existence of such a party will turn the odds in favour of a single party cab-

inet. Similarly, of all the factors that determine how many ministers a new cabinet will have, it turns out that it is the size of the (lower) chamber of parliament that has the most consistent impact.

Also, with regard to cabinet duration (stability), it appears that structural attributes matter a lot. In Western Europe, it is the classical minimal winning majority coalitions (Riker 1962) that are the most stable. Interestingly, in Central Eastern Europe, these are outperformed in terms of stability by the criterion that the coalition has a majority of its own (and not necessarily that it is a minimal winning one). The finding that economic conditions, in particular unemployment, matter greatly across both the East and the West will have to be further explored in another forum.

We have also identified at least three other areas for further research. One has to do with the reliability of the electoral volatility variable, where our new and, arguably, more reliable measure generates results that are sometimes different from the ones found in previous research. The other is the sometimes striking difference with regard to measurements based on manifesto data versus the data based on expert surveys in CEE. We need not go in to the controversies between the two camps that advocate either method here. Instead, we suggest that scholars, whenever possible, try to use both to see how robust their results are. Finally, it is intriguing that both we in this article and Saalfeld (2008) find that ideological cohesive (connected) coalitions tend to break down earlier than coalitions that rely on a less coherent ideological majority. This is a puzzle that is in stark contrast with the general finding (also in our results) that ideological diversity is detrimental to coalition politics. This exception to the general rule should be further explored.

In the end, one of our results is that there remains important differences between Western Europe and Central Eastern Europe. Central Eastern European parties compete under different circumstances and the constituent units i.e. the political parties themselves, are different from many parties in Western Europe. However, we also want to highlight the heterogeneity within each region. A look back at Table 1 is revealing in this respect.

We end this article with one additional suggestion for further research. This has to do with the differences that cut across the East-West divide. In Table 1, we can identify the countries in which a coalition cabinet is almost always the end result of formation bargaining. These come from both East and West: Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg in Western Europe and Lithuania and Slovakia in Central Eastern Europe are all dominated

by coalition governments. This serves to illustrate that the divide between WE and CEE is not strict. Similarly, on the number of ministers, Poland is similar to countries such as Italy and France. All have cabinets with many ministers. One difference is nonetheless evident - governments tend to last shorter in Central Eastern Europe. However, here we find an exception to the rule. In recent years, government stability has not been a problem in Hungary or (in statistical terms) in Slovenia. Rather, it is countries such as Latvia and Italy, on either side of the old “divide”, that perform the worst in this respect. Here, we side with Grofman’s (1989) note on cross-national results with pooled data. It is possible that the actual statistical relationship in sub-samples or individual countries can be different from the ones found in the pooled samples. In addition to the other areas for new research that we have identified above, this is worth exploring in more detail.

Notes

¹ The countries included in the study are the member states of the European Union, excluding Cyprus and Malta, but including two additional non-EU member states, Iceland and Norway. That is, the West European countries included are Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom. The CEE members included in the study are Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. In accordance with the practice used by Blondel *et al.* (2007), we prefer the term “Central Eastern Europe” over the more traditional “Central and Eastern Europe” for the ten new democracies that we include in this study

² The dataset also includes data on Cyprus and Malta, but we have omitted these two countries from the West-East comparison that is the focus of this article.

³ In this paper, we use “government” and “cabinet” interchangeably, but the formal unit of analysis is the cabinet. There is a new cabinet every time there is a change in any of the following three criteria: (a) party composition, (b) change in prime minister and (c) at every general election (Müller and Strøm 2000). We define a cabinet at the beginning of the section on empirical analysis. For a discussion of alternative definitions, see Damgaard (1994).

⁴ Some very useful information on intra-cabinet politics is, of course, available (Blondel *et al.* 2007), but what we refer to here is the general lacunae of systematic information about the coalition governance variables included in the book by Strøm *et al.* (2008). We are, however, working on such a project (www.erdda.se).

⁵ In the case of coalition formation, we only look at cases in which there was no single-majority party, which gives us information from 233 cabinets. Non-partisan caretaker cabinets are excluded in the total cabinet count. Of the total number of cabinets, there were 210 cabinets for which we had enough information to analyse the formation of the

coalition cabinet. For the second analysis, on the number of ministers, we have data on 273 cabinets and, in the final analysis, we have data on up to 237 cabinets. For the duration analysis, we have information on up to 207 cabinets (that had ended in 2010 or earlier). Also, note that in the duration analysis, we use the absolute duration (in days), rather than the relative duration, but for illustrational purposes both measurements of duration are shown in table 1.

⁶ In the respective models, we include variables that the literature often claims are important and that the analysis of Western Europe by Strøm, Müller and Bergman (2008) found to be important (or unexpectedly unimportant).

⁷ In an interesting development, Tavits and Letki (2009) argued that the real problem for understanding left-right politics in the CEE region is not actually the placement of the parties on the left-right scale. Rather, what is uncommon and somewhat new is that the parties on the left pursue the traditional policies of the right (e.g. market reform and fiscal austerity) more markedly than do the right parties themselves (see also Marks and Van Steenberghe 2004).

⁸ In our sample of countries, at the time of the last recorded cabinet, the countries with positive parliamentarism are all the 10 CEE countries plus Belgium, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg and Spain.

⁹ In our sample of countries, at the time of the last recorded cabinet, the countries with semi-presidentialism are France, Lithuania and Poland.

¹⁰ In our sample of countries, at the time of the last recorded cabinet, the countries with bicameralism are Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, the UK, the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania and Slovenia.

¹¹ Note, however, Strøm *et al* (2008) used a measure of PM powers that was based on a larger set of 7 indicators.

¹² Collinear, or nearly collinear, predictors are themselves not a problem, as they are, from a statistical point of view, correctly correlated with each other. However, as the sample size needs to be fairly large to be able to produce precise estimates when having nearly collinear variables, we remove collinear predictors in some of our models. Please note that this may be problematic as we may instead introduce omitted variable bias, when removing potentially important predictors.

¹³ The correlations between the variables “largest party seat share” and “bargaining power of the largest party” in CEE and the variables “bargaining power of the largest party” and “median party bargaining power” in WE are high (about 0.9). This does constitute a problem in the analysis as the sample sizes are fairly small. Removing one of these highly correlated variables from the analysis makes the remaining predictor substantially significant (not shown here).

¹⁴ Because the largest party and the median-legislator party are often the same parties (especially in Western Europe), this result is not completely robust. If we remove the predictors that measure the dominance of a large party, the influence of the median party is highly significant (not shown here).

¹⁵ With regard to semi-presidentialism, two sources of the difference between our results and the ones generated by Schleiter and Morgan-Jones (2009), who found a strong impact of semi-presidentialism, can be that they use a very inclusive definition, encompassing all countries with directly elected presidents. In contrast, we use a stricter one which demands

that elected presidents must also be able to directly influence the government formation process.

¹⁶ As we noted above, in Western Europe, the countries are roughly evenly split within this variable i.e. about half have a negative form of parliamentarism.

8. REFERENCES

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9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Appendix A. List of variables

Table A.1: Individual independent variables in each cluster (1989 – 2010).

Variable	EU-17				CEE-10			
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
<i>The structural attributes cluster:</i>								
Post Election Cabinet (v303e)	0.680	0.468	0	1	0.460	0.500	0	1
Max Possible Cabinet Duration (v305e)	1244.653	481.643	31	1840	1048.603	417.663	61	1488
Absolute No. of Parl. Parties (v306e)	7.435	2.607	4	14	7.254	2.131	3	14
Effective No. of Parl. Parties (v309e)	4.078	1.564	2.130	9.050	4.593	1.617	2.190	10.470
Bargaining power Fragmentation (v310e)	3.517	1.781	0.742	8.872	3.869	1.956	1	10.138
Largest Party Seat Share (v312e)	0.676	3.448	0.153	42.174	0.358	0.111	0.135	0.664
Bargaining Power of Largest Party (v313e)	0.496	0.252	0.159	1	0.447	0.257	0	1
Coalition Cabinet (v316e)	0.748	0.435	0	1	0.794	0.406	0	1
Cabinet Seat Share (v318e)	54.731	10.523	25.4	99.333	52.860	10.834	25.9	94.5
Number of Cabinet Parties (v320e)	2.497	1.392	1	7.	2.683	1.224	1	6.
Max Bargaining Power Party in Cab. (v322e)	0.912	0.285	0	1	0.857	0.351	0	1
Majority Cabinet (v326e)	0.728	0.447	0	1	0.603	0.491	0	1
Minimal Winning Coalition (v327e)	0.395	0.490	0	1	0.405	0.493	0	1
<i>The preference cluster:</i>								
Surplus Majority Cabinet (v328e)	0.218	0.414	0	1	0.230	0.423	0	1
Parliamentary Preference Range (v406e)	47.394	19.210	14.020	86.5	36.441	19.181	9.780	97.850
Parliamentary Preference Range (CHES)	6.569	1.309	3.460	9.222	5.285	1.438	3.200	7.800
Polarisation (BP Weighted) (v407e)	15.085	7.481	0.708	36.304	10.603	6.310	0.007	32.173
Polarisation (CHES)	1.797	0.484	0.460	2.941	1.791	0.493	0.298	2.860
Median Party Bargaining Power (v408e)	0.390	0.315	0	1	0.365	0.292	0.050	1
Cabinet Preference Range (v410e)	16.203	17.526	0	67.632	15.790	16.402	0	76.678
Median Party (1st Dim) in Cab (v411e)	0.762	0.427	0	1	0.794	0.406	0	1
Connected Cabinet (v413e)	0.646	0.480	0	1	0.563	0.498	0	1
Conservative Cabinet (v415e)	0.286	0.453	0	1	0.365	0.483	0	1
<i>The institutional cluster:</i>								
Bicameralism (v504e)	0.537	0.5	0	1	0.437	0.498	0	1
Positive Parliamentarism (v505e)	0.442	0.498	0	1	1	0	1	1
Constructive No-Confidence (v508e)	0.143	0.351	0	1	0.254	0.437	0	1
PM Cabinet Powers (calculated from v514e)	0.259	0.439	0	1	0.452	0.500	0	1
Semi-Presidentialism (v518e)	0.109	0.313	0	1	0.222	0.417	0	1
Size of Lower Chamber (v519e)	303.599	202.407	60	672	226.516	135.097	80	460
<i>The bargaining cost cluster:</i>								
Cabinet Bargaining Duration (v600e)	28.204	40.115	0	223.	26.914	25.369	0	151
<i>The critical events cluster:</i>								
Cabinet Electoral Volatility (v701e)	3.853	3.341	0.111	17.840	9.579	7.649	0.8	39.7
Inflation, (Cab beginning; v702e)	3.352	3.339	-0.9	20.8	47.111	149.994	-1.2	1061.2
Unemployment (Cab. beginning; v703e)	7.872	3.937	1	22.2	10.077	4.443	1.4	20.5
Inflation (Cab. end – table 4; v705e)	7.985	3.796	1	22.2	10.447	4.245	3.5	20.5
Unemployment (Cab. end – table 4;v706e)	2.937	2.809	-0.9	20.5	35.919	113.751	-1.2	1061.2