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## KOMBINIRANI IZBORNI SUSTAVI U EUROPI 1945–2014.

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Professor Mirjana Kasapović has been a leading figure in comparative politics in Croatia for more than twenty years, especially on the topic of elections and political parties. In her new book *Kombinirani izborni sustavi u Europi 1945–2014*, she not only analyzes the case of Croatia but also others in Europe to make a theoretical argument on the relationship between the electoral system and the party system. Unlike many other studies on this topic, which tend to treat the electoral system as an independent variable and the party system as the dependent variable, her new book examines both causal directions, i.e. the electoral system as a dependent variable (analysis of its causes) and an independent variable (analysis of its effects on the party system). This makes her book comprehensive, dynamic and unique.

The book consists of three parts. Part I deals with the literature review and the theoretical and conceptual discussion and has four chapters. The first chapter presents the literature review, especially on the scholars' mostly positive view on the combined electoral system. This chapter also presents the general trend of the countries adopting the combined electoral systems, including the number of countries and elections using the combined electoral systems in Europe. The second chapter presents the literature review on the conceptual and typological issues. This chapter demonstrates how different scholars have used so many different terms, concepts and typologies, and is very useful not only for those who study the electoral system but also for the general readers who are not familiar with the academic discussion on the typology of electoral system. The third chapter presents the theoretical framework to explain the genesis of the combined electoral system. This chapter is especially useful and interesting for those who are interested in the electoral system as a dependent variable. The fourth chapter presents the definition of the combined electoral systems in this book. This chapter points out that the combined electoral systems have three constitutive

elements, namely (1) two structurally different levels (nominal and party-list) for the voting and mandate distribution, (2) the system of voting with two votes, one at the nominal level (for the candidates in the constituency) and the other at the party-list level, (3) different forms of selection of political representatives in one representative body (p. 73).

The Part II conducts a single case-study of the four cases, namely Germany, Italy, Croatia and Bulgaria, and has four chapters corresponding to the cases. The first chapter analyzes the case of Germany, which has used the combined electoral system since the end of the World War II. The second chapter examines the case of Italy, which adopted the combined electoral system in the period between 1993 and 2005 after the major electoral system reform. The third chapter discusses the case of Bulgaria, which used the combined electoral system for the 1990 and 2009 elections but used different systems for the other elections. The fourth chapter conducts the analysis of the case of Croatia, which used the combined electoral system in the period from 1992 to 1999. In each chapter, the author analyzes how the combined electoral systems came into existence and how they affected the party system in these countries.

The Part III is the comparative and conclusive section and has two chapters. The first chapter conducts the comparative analysis of the four cases examined in the previous part. More specifically, the author employs the method of “paired comparison,” comparing two established democracies (Germany and Italy) in one section, and two newly democratized countries (Bulgaria and Croatia) in the other section. The second chapter presents the conclusion of the book.

This book is full of interesting and convincing theoretical and empirical insights. For example, the conclusion she presents after the examination of the general trend (in Chapter 1 of the Part I) is rather striking: “the 21st century will not be the era of the combined electoral systems, as was predicted at the beginning of the century” (p. 28). Indeed, after reading her book, one would agree with her argument that the combined electoral system is not a combination of the “best of the two worlds” as some scholars thought. Also, the theoretical framework to explain the genesis of the combined electoral system (in Chapter 3 of the Part I) is original and convincing. Here, the author not only makes an extensive literature review but also points out five patterns for the genesis of the combined system, namely (1) compromise of ruling and opposition parties, (2) compromise within the ruling block, (3) compromise of major actors in the government system, (4) compromise between two major parties, (5) compromise between established parties and civil society actors. This explanatory framework is a significant theoretical contribution to the literature on the electoral system and party system.

One of the central arguments of the book is that the combined electoral system constitutes a political institution *sui generis*, or a “third category” of electoral system, not just a mixture of characteristics of two electoral systems. What makes it unique, different from both majoritarian and proportional (PR) system, is the possibility for the voters to split votes in the same elections. Thus, the “combined system” defined here should not be confused with a “mixed” system in which many scholars tend to include everything which is not pure majoritarian or pure PR system. I find this theoretical claim convincing, which makes her book theoretically interesting and unique.

Empirically, the author combines the “thick” case studies of four countries and the paired comparison of these four cases. One of the most interesting is the analysis of Croatia, in which the author played an important role in the change of the electoral system as a member of the expert committee for the reform of the electoral law. In this sense, this book is not only a sound scientific work but also an interesting insider account of the process of electoral system change in the transition countries. Other case studies are equally fascinating, with rich empirical data and updated information on the most recent debates on electoral reforms in these countries. It is especially interesting to see how the combined electoral system did not bring about the effects that are predicted by the conventional theory, for example in Italy (p. 152).

These theoretical and empirical contributions notwithstanding, there are some elements which I found somewhat problematic. Here, I would like to discuss three issues, namely (1) the research question and the definition and operationalization of the dependent variable, (2) link between the theoretical argument and empirical analysis, and (3) research design of the empirical analysis.

The first issue is related to the research question and dependent variable. As I wrote above, it is clear that this book examines both causal directions between the electoral system and the party system. However, when the author presents her research questions in the foreword, she does not mention the party system as a dependent variable. In the foreword, she presents her first question as follows: “what caused the surprising explosion of the combined electoral system, and what caused the equally unexpected and relatively quick implosion of it?” Her second “reason” to write this book was the challenge to present the combined system as a particular type of electoral system. She does not formulate her research question clearly when it comes to the party system as a dependent variable. In my opinion, this lack of clear research question on the *effect* of the combined electoral system on the party system leads to the lack of clear definition and operationalization of the dependent variable. Yes, it

is obvious that the dependent variable is “party system” broadly speaking, but as it has so many different aspects and there are so many different ways to operationalize them, it would have been better if the author presented her definition and operationalization of the dependent variable *before* she started her empirical chapters.

The lack of clear definition and operationalization of the dependent leads to rather unsystematic examination of various kinds of data in case-study chapters, such as “share of voters who split the votes” (Germany), “party that controlled the median parliamentarian” (Germany), “index of unproportionality” (Germany, Bulgaria briefly), “nominal number of political parties that entered the parliament” (Germany, Italy, Croatia), “index of fractionalization” (Italy), “the effective number of political parties” (Italy, Bulgaria briefly, Croatia), and the “duration of the government” (Italy, Croatia). The case-study chapters thus leave the impression that the examination of the key dependent variable – “party system” – is not so systematic, and the author examines the empirical data in a rather arbitrary manner. Indeed, the author refers to the “operationalization” at the very end of the comparative chapter, where she states that the “political effects of the combined electoral system” are “operationalized” as the type of party system and the level of its institutionalization and consolidation (p. 249). But the discussion on how to define and operationalize the level of party system institutionalization and consolidation is still missing here. Even if the author thinks that “good description is better than bad explanation,” the clearer definition and operationalization of the dependent variable and more systematic examination of the empirical data across four cases would have made this book much more interesting and empirically convincing.

The second issue is the weak link between the theoretical argument and the empirical analysis. In the theoretical part, the author argues that what distinguishes the combined electoral system from other systems (majoritarian or PR) is the possibility for the voters to split their votes. This theoretical emphasis notwithstanding, the empirical chapters – both single case study and comparative chapter – do not discuss or empirically analyze this aspect much, except for the case of Germany in which the degree of vote-splitting in the elections is measured across time (p. 109). The chapter on Italy mostly analyzes the effect of the combined electoral system on the number of parties, government formation and its stability/change, but not on the voting behavior. The chapter on Bulgaria also lacks a discussion on the voting behavior. The chapter on Croatia contains the data on the results of voting at each level (Table 20 on p. 215), from which one can get a rough idea about the degree of vote-splitting, but there is not an explicit discussion on the extent of vote-splitting or its effects on the party system, except for the argument on the effect on strategies of opposition

parties (i.e. lack of electoral cooperation between opposition parties). The comparative chapter mostly discusses the effect of the electoral system on the party system (especially the number of parties and the type of party system), but the voting behavior is not mentioned at all. Even the term “vote-splitting” or “the system of voting with two votes” rarely appears in the empirical chapters. This term reappears in the concluding chapter, but the argument made here is not so well connected to the analysis conducted in the empirical chapters (although the discussion on the case of Albania is quite interesting). I believe that this book’s theoretical claim that the combined electoral system is a system *sui generis* would have been empirically more convincing if the author empirically analyzed the voting behavior in four cases in detail and demonstrated how the vote-splitting (or the possibility thereof) affected the voting behavior, the behavior of political parties and the party system.

The third issue is related to the research design of the empirical analysis. The author is very conscious about her methodology, giving a detailed discussion to justify her choice of the “paired comparison” method in the first chapter of Part III. And yet, as the conclusion of the empirical analysis on the effect of the combined electoral system on the party system, the author repeatedly emphasizes the importance of various “contextual” or “contingent” factors, *specific to each country* (for example, p. 249). But if this is the key variable that she wants to emphasize, I think this renders the research design indeterminate: arguing that each contextual factor *specific to the country* explains the outcome of each country means that  $n$  (the number of cases) equals  $k$  (the number of variables), i.e. there is no “degree of freedom.” If this is the conclusion she wanted to draw, I do not think it was necessary to conduct a paired comparison based on the “most similar” case design (p. 230), which is typically used to “control for” the factors that are common to both cases, because controlling for common factors does not help the causal inference here (i.e. even if we eliminate the factors common to both cases, we still face the problem of no degree of freedom).

Despite these issues, this book certainly is a wonderful addition to the existing literature on the electoral system and the party system. This book is a *must* not only for those who are interested in the party politics in Europe, but also for those who study the comparative politics in general and are theoretically interested in the relationship between the electoral system and the party system.

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