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MAKING PARTIES FIT FOR DEMOCRACY: GEORGIA, UKRAINE AND THE CHALLENGE FOR DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE

Max Bader

Introduction

Party system institutionalization is helpful, if not crucial, for democratization and has some widely acknowledged positive effects on the democratic process.[1] The presence of more or less stable parties in a competitive political environment stimulates 'effective programmatic representation' and reduces 'uncertainty regarding electoral outcomes'.[2] Also, durability of parties renders popular representatives more accountable to constituents and urges parties to develop strategic behavior. For many post-authoritarian states, achieving an adequate degree of party system institutionalization (or consolidation) is a troublesome element of their democratization.

A party system is understood here - rather minimally - as the aggregate of relevant parties in a political system, plus the interaction of these parties.[3] In their brief discussion of the subject, Randall and Svåsand argue that party system institutionalization entails some degree of continuity among party alternatives, relative autonomy of parties vis-à-vis the state, mutual acceptance among parties, and a widespread public perception of parties as legitimate actors.[4] These criteria largely coincide with the four dimensions of party system institutionalization that Scott Mainwaring identifies: regularity in patterns of party competition; rootedness of parties in society; legitimacy of parties in the eyes of key political actors; and the strength of party organizations beyond the party elite.[5] The party systems of

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[1] Birch, Sarah: Electoral Systems and Party System Stability in Post-Communist Europe. Paper prepared for presentation at the 97th annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, 30 August – 2 September, 2001, p.1.

[2] Mainwaring, Scott, and Edurno Zoco. "Political Sequences and Stabilization of Interparty Competition. Electoral Volatility in Old and New Democracies", *Party Politics*, vol. 13, no. 2, p.157.

[3] The element of 'interaction' in the concept of 'party system' is in line with Alan Ware's understanding of the concept. Ware, Alan. *Political Parties and Party Systems*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 7.

[4] Randall, Vicky and Lars Svåsand, "Party Institutionalization in New Democracies", *Party Politics*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2002), pp. 7-8.

[5] Mainwaring, Scott. "Party Systems in the Third Wave", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 9, No. 3 (19980, pp. 69-70 .

Georgia and Ukraine throughout their nearly two-decade long existence have fallen short of these four dimensions. In this regard, Georgia and Ukraine are clearly no exceptions in the post-communist world. Electoral volatility, a widely used measure of party system stability, has been three times higher in Eastern and Central Europe during the 1990s than it was in Western Europe over the period from 1960 to 1989.[6] Party systems tend to be more unstable still in the former Soviet Union, than in the post-communist states of Eastern and Central Europe that have become members of the European Union, which points to a positive correlation between party system institutionalization and democratic consolidation.[7]

The importance of political party (system) development in post-authoritarian states has generally been undervalued for a long time. Civil society organizations (an alternative type of intermediaries between the state and society), and particularly nongovernmental organizations, were, or still are, more popular as a subject of academic investigation and as recipients of democracy assistance. Party system institutionalization is not frequently mentioned as a crucial element in democratic consolidation. Civil society organizations, or any other type of organization, however, cannot replace political parties.[8] Reflecting a development in western democracies after World War II, political parties have gradually become to be less regarded as vital intermediary organizations between society and the state, than as mere 'public utilities', or 'institutions of democracy'.[9] Modern political parties are organizations with a limited support base and limited popular authority, more deeply entrenched in the overall state apparatus than on a grassroots level in society. Even if the representative functions of political parties (interest articulation and aggregation, social integration, societal representation) have withered, however, their procedural functions (forming and sustaining governments, elite recruitment) are intact.[10] Political parties, therefore, remain indispensable for the democratic process, and consolidation of parties probably helps consolidate democratic rule. As

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[6] Lewis, Paul G. *Political Parties in Post-Communist Eastern Europe*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 128.

[7] Bakke, Elizabeth and Nick Sitter. "Patterns of Stability. Party Competition and Strategy in Central Europe since 1989", *Party Politics*, vol. 11, No. 2 (2005), p. 243.

[8] Doherty, Ivan. "Democracy out of Balance. Civil Society can't replace Political Parties", *Policy Review*, April & May 2001, pp. 25-35.

[9] Van Biezen, Ingrid: How political parties shape democracy: www.repositories.cdlib.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1046&context=csd.

[10] Bartolini, Stefano, and Peter Mair. "Challenges to Contemporary Political Parties", p. 335 in: Richard Gunther and Larry Diamond (eds.). *Political Parties and Democracy*, Baltimore, MY: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

expectations for democratic transition have risen after the Rose (2003) and Orange (2004) Revolutions, the shortcomings of party system development in these countries suddenly appear as particularly problematic. Party system development, sometimes referred to as the 'weakest link' of democratization in formerly authoritarian countries, needs to be confronted.[11]

The defects of political party development in Georgia and Ukraine are largely similar to those in many other post-communist (post-soviet) states. Post-communist polities cope with analogous issues of party fragmentation, electoral volatility, popular distrust, and lack of legitimacy. Political party assistance (or aid) by western actors - mainly government-funded non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations - is targeted at overcoming these defects. As such, it is part of the wider effort to promote democracy in what are perceived as emerging democracies. Political party aid, being a relatively small subfield of overall democracy assistance, has received more attention in recent years from scholars and from practitioners of democracy assistance in large part due to the increasing recognition that party system development is a crucial element of the democratization process.

In this paper, I will identify the outward manifestations (symptoms) and the main underlying causes (sources) of weak party system institutionalization in Georgia and Ukraine since independence. Identification of these symptoms and sources provides hints to what providers of party assistance could or should undertake to help parties transform into organizations that are conducive to democratic development. In the final section of this paper, I will, on the basis of preliminary research findings, take stock of the efforts by western actors to assist political parties in Georgia and Ukraine and look specifically at how these western actors have addressed the shortcomings with regard to party system institutionalization.[12]

Symptoms of weak party system institutionalization in Georgia and Ukraine

Party institutionalization and party system institutionalization for understandable reasons are often treated as congruous phenomena. The party system as a whole can only begin consolidating when more or less stable parties are available to

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[11] A reference to 'the weakest link' is in the title of Thomas Carothers' book on political party assistance, the first comprehensive study of the subject matter.
Carothers, Thomas: *Confronting the Weakest Link. Aiding Political Parties in New Democracies*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006.

[12] The research findings have been attained over the course of some forty interviews with representatives of the main provider organizations of party assistance, both at the central offices of these organizations (Washington, D.C., Berlin, the Hague) and at local offices in recipient countries (Tbilisi, Kiev), and with representatives of political parties (Tbilisi, Kiev).

provide the nucleus, the building blocks of the fledgling party system. Problems with weak party system institutionalization, then, can mostly be traced to problems on the level of individual parties. When stable parties with a viable base of popular support are available, lack of consolidation on the party system level can occur in the unlikely situation that parties are so irreconcilably opposed to each other that they refuse to accept each other as equally legitimate competitors on the political playing field. An element which contributes to party system institutionalization and that individual parties have no bearing on is the presence of a political culture in which people generally trust parties and there is mutually acceptance among parties. In most polities lacking a strong tradition of competitive party politics, such as Georgia and Ukraine, stabilization of individual parties is a first prerequisite of the party system, and will for that reason precede party system consolidation.

Before I proceed to a discussion of the symptoms of weak party (system) institutionalization in Georgia and Ukraine, two remarks are in order. First, institutionalization of an individual party hangs on a great deal of factors that are highly interrelated. Similarly, the manifestations of weak party institutionalization indicated in this section hardly come in isolation: the absence of viable roots in society, for instance, probably works out negatively on, but can also be a consequence of, weakness of a party organization. The failure of party stabilization entails a complex package of interrelated and mutually reinforcing smaller issues. Second**,** the manifestations of weak party (system) institutionalization discussed in this section are by far not confined to Georgia and Ukraine; in fact, they feature to varying degrees in most post-authoritarian states, and even in established democracies. In the overview below, the focus is on those manifestations of weak party (system) institutionalization that do most to capture the essence of the issue at hand, and to some extent set the Georgian and Ukrainian cases apart from other cases.

Party fragmentation

There are several criteria available by which the 'actual' or 'effective' number of political parties in a given polity can be assessed. Counting the number of parties that are officially registered obviously does not reveal much, since many registered parties are known to be defunct and do not (or no longer) matter for the political process. As of 2006, the number of political parties that are registered at the Ministry of Justice in Georgia exceeded 180, while Ukraine counts over 130 formally registered parties.[13] Most of these registered parties in both countries,

[13] The number for Georgia is derived from: Nodia, Ghia, and Álvaro Pinto Scholtbach (eds.). *The Political Landscape of Georgia. Political Parties: Achievement, Challenges and Prospects*. Delft: Eburon, 2006, p. 52

however, barely exist beyond the point of their registration, as witnessed by the lack of a firm party organization, a reliable member base, a regularly updated website, etc. In order to establish the number of 'relevant' parties one can, alternatively, take into account the number of parties that compete in elections. The 2006 parliamentary elections in Ukraine were fought by seventeen electoral blocs (made up of dozens of parties) and twenty-eight individual parties, with only five political forces crossing the three percent threshold. Nine electoral blocs and thirteen individual parties took part in the 2003 Georgian parliamentary elections, which sparked the protests leading up to the Rose Revolution. Then there are several intricate ways to calculate the 'effective' number of parties, either from parties that compete in elections or only from those that have seats in parliament. According to one account the number of effective parties in Georgia and Ukraine during the 1990s was overall substantially higher than in most other post-communist states.[14] A sound expert assessment, finally, can reveal how many parties do matter at a certain point of time. The criteria of such an assessment would mainly include whether a party has a party organization to speak of, whether it has some base of popular support, and whether it is capable of competing in elections at any given moment. For Georgia, the number of such parties in 2007 hovers around eight to ten, while the number for Ukraine stands at ten to twelve.[15]

Perhaps the best indicator of (excessive) party fragmentation is the perception that many parties lack programmatic distinction and do not represent voters' interests and preferences. Out of the six main opposition parties in Georgia, five are deemed 'right-wing' plus 'conservative' or 'centrist'.[16] The simultaneous existence of programmatically near-identical parties has much to do with the personality-based nature of political parties, corresponding to a situation in which parties are more associated with their leadership than with their programmatic stance or ideology. Political figures with an independent profile and high name recognition are not eager to take a second or third spot in any party. Many of the better-known politicians in Georgia and Ukraine therefore have over the years established their own party and typically retain these parties, even if they do not garner notable popular support.

In order to gain parliamentary representation, a viable alternative to abolition

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Data on registered parties in Ukraine is available at: http://politicians.com.ua.

[14] Dawisha, Karen, and Stephen Deets. "Political Learning in Post-Communist Societies", East European Politics and Societies, vol. 20, no. 4, pp. 722-3.

[15] Interviews with providers of party assistance in Tbilisi and Kiev, 2007.

[16] IDEA, *Georgia: Country Report based on Research and Dialogue with Parties*, 2006, p. 7, [http://www.idea.int/parties/upload/Georgia_report.pdf].

for parties is to team up with other parties in electoral blocs. Parties are particularly prone to join blocs when they sense that they will not cross the electoral threshold on their own. In the 2003 and 2006 parliamentary races in Georgia and Ukraine, respectively, the majority of parties that competed did so as constituents of larger electoral blocs. These electoral blocs often prove to be ephemeral constructions: they tend to fall apart after elections, or reappear later in a revised form, and only in rare cases do they lead to a formal merger of the constituent parties. The widespread availability of electoral blocs entails a diminished role of parties in the political arena, since public perception often does not distinguish between blocs and parties. Parties lose visibility in favor of the bloc of which they are members. Ukrainian politician Yuliya Tymoshenko's party Batkivshchina, for instance, is less well known than her eponymous electoral bloc (Blok Yulii Tymoshenko). Next to blocs, the propensity of politicians in Georgia and Ukraine to join parliamentary factions on other criteria than partisan affiliation also blurs the view on political parties. A result is that parties lose (some of) their relevance in the day-to-day functioning of the legislature. Only one party and one electoral bloc (composed of two parties) managed to cross the seven percent threshold in the proportional representation tier of the vote in the 2004 Georgian parliamentary elections, but there are currently seven factions in parliament. In 2001, only four out of a total of fourteen parliamentary factions in the Ukrainian parliament coincided with parties that had been elected to parliament three years before.[17] Alongside parties, then, there are blocs and factions, with autonomous profile, platform, political clout, and name recognition. While fragmentation of parties is already significant, the simultaneous existence of blocs and factions multiplies the number of political players in Georgia and Ukraine, and complicates any overview of the political landscape.

An important distinction between the Georgian and Ukrainian party systems is that whereas party fragmentation in Ukraine since independence has typically stretched out to the entire party landscape, in Georgia only the opposition is affected. The party system of Georgia can be classified as a 'loose multiparty system with one dominant party'.[18] Ukraine rather has an atomized multiparty system, with considerable variation in the array of key players, and lacking a dominant force. During both the Shevardnadze and Saakashvili presidencies, the party system in Georgia has been dominated by a single 'ruling party', or 'party of power'. The overriding purpose of 'parties of power' - a familiar phenomenon of politics in the post-Soviet area - is to channel support for the president and his

[17] Andrew Wilson. "Ukraine's New Virtual Politics", *East European Constitutional Review*, vol. 10, no. 2/3, p, 62.

[18] Nodia and Pinto Scholtbach (2006), p. 118.

policies. They are mostly short on ideology and correspond to the 'catch-all' party type, in that they seek to address potential voters across the electoral board.[19] Shevardnadze's ruling party Citizens' Union of Georgia (CUG) represented a rather loose amalgam of presidential backers, and collapsed as soon as Shevardnadze was ousted from power. On the waves of Saakashvili's popularity after the Rose Revolution, his United National Movement (UNM) won two thirds of the vote in the 2004 parliamentary elections. As befits a 'party of power', the UNM purports to be 'non-ideological', and claims to 'represent the whole population'.[20] In Ukraine, several attempts have been undertaken to create a political structure resembling a party of power. In the latter half of the 1990s, plans to bring together all pro-government forces under the banner of the National-Democratic Party fell through, as the political elite did not put its full weight behind the party, which subsequently won a meager five per cent in the 1998 elections. For the 2002 parliamentary elections the electoral bloc For a United Ukraine (FUU) was a renewed attempt at uniting pro-regime forces. Despite the fact that it controlled considerable administrative resources, FUU ended in third place at the elections with twelve per cent of the vote share. The failure to create a true 'party of power' in Ukraine has preserved for the country a comprehensive measure of inter-party competition.

Electoral volatility and party replacement

Variations over successive elections in the balance of party support - electoral volatility - is held to be an important indicator of weak party system institutionalization. Electoral volatility can be expected to be substantial during any 'transitional' period, since the alignment of political competitors goes through a radical overhaul after regime change. In post-communist cases, the absence of a pre-existing party system and rapid socio-economic transformation are the main factors driving up electoral volatility. In order to measure variations in patterns of electoral preferences, some degree of party system stability is a prerequisite. Such elementary continuity in the availability of stable, recognizable parties has been conspicuously missing in Georgia and Ukraine. Essentially, voters are confronted with a radically new set of parties to choose from at each consecutive parliamentary election. Among the more or less significant parties in Ukraine that are active today, only the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU), the Socialist Party

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[19] On catch-all parties, see: Gunther, Richard, and Larry Diamond. "Types and Functions of Parties", p. 11, in: Richard Gunther and Larry Diamond (eds.). *Political Parties and Democracy*, Baltimore, MY: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

[20] IDEA, p.7.

of Ukraine (SPU) and (arguably) Rukh were also at the political forefront in the first few years after gaining independence, but all three parties are uncertain to cross the three percent threshold in the upcoming 2007 parliamentary elections. Rukh has split into three distinct parties, each claiming to be the heir to the original popular movement of the perestroika era. Volatility of electoral outcomes and the metamorphosis of the party landscape have also, and perhaps especially, affected the most successful parties. The party that came in first at the 1998 parliamentary elections – CPU – came in fifth at elections in 2006. The electoral bloc that won the 2002 elections did not exist in the previous election and, with a different composition of parties, came in third in 2006. The winner of the 2006 elections did not yet exist in its later form in 1998 and was only one of the parties that had made up the electoral bloc that came in third in 2002.

In Georgia the only source of stability is the Republican Party, which, however, has never gained considerable popular support. The ruling Citizens' Union of Georgia occupied a dominant position among political parties until the Rose Revolution, but disappeared without trace together with the demise of the Shevardnadze regime. By any measure, the rate of party replacement in Georgia is extreme. Of the 24 parties that had seats in parliament after the 1992 elections, only one, in more or less unchanged form, also gained representation in the next parliament (due in part, it must be noted, to the sudden installation of a high electoral threshold). Of the twenty parties/blocs that had participated in the 2004 parliamentary elections in Georgia, only four had also run, in the same form, less than five months before in elections that were declared invalid after the Rose Revolution.[21]

Considerable changes within parties, in addition to the replacement of parties, determines the limited degree of overall continuity between elections. Even if parties are sustained from one election to the next, they still do not necessarily contribute to party system stabilization. The Socialist Party of Ukraine, for example, was in the 'Orange camp' at the time of the Revolution, but later sided with *ancien régime* forces. This apparent switch has greatly altered the perception of the SPU, most notably among the party's western partners. In addition to switching allegiances, a party can for instance be sold to business interests, as has happened to a number of parties in Ukraine. Significant internal changes within parties and the high replacement rate of parties in Georgia and Ukraine make it difficult to speak of any 'systemness' of their party 'systems'. Calculating electoral volatility or the replacement rate of parties on a sound basis is not a straightforward task; factors that require insightful interpretation need to taken into account. The party systems of Georgia and Ukraine, in sum, have been so much in flux that

[21] Nodia and Pinto Scholtbach (2006), pp. 103-104.

accurately tracking stability and change or recording trends is beset with many difficulties.

It is unlikely that changes in voters' sentiments have kept pace with party turnover in Georgia and Ukraine. Opinion surveys from various years suggest that the ideological orientation of voters in Georgia and Ukraine has been relatively stable.[22] High levels of electoral volatility, then, are not so much caused by changes in voters' sentiments, as by the high replacement rate of political parties, which, in turn, results mostly from the whims of party elites.[23]

Why do parties come and go so quickly? Part of the answer lies in the fact that for prospective lawmakers, gaining seats in parliament is a prime objective, with parties being merely the instrument through which this objective can be attained. Controlling seats in parliament brings certain perks, such as proximity to power circles and the ability to influence lawmaking, but also immunity from criminal persecution – which is believed to be especially important for lawmakers in Ukraine. Around 2004, popular conviction held that at least two thirds of deputies in the Verkhovna Rada, the Ukrainian parliament, were dollar millionaires, most of who had become rich in a dubious manner.[24] Maintaining a party organization beyond elections is not sufficiently beneficial to invest in. Thus, once seats in parliament have been won, the party structure is often left to a state of vegetation, in which it exists only nominally, or simply dies off slowly. Many parties, in these circumstances, are created exclusively for the sake of elections, and those parties that are preserved beyond elections spring into action mainly when new elections loom.

Another factor that stimulates a large replacement rate of political parties is the lack of discipline among active party members, especially among lawmakers that have been elected over party lists. Once in parliament, these often lose the incentive to stick to their respective parties. Switching between factions has been extreme at moments in Ukraine. In the first year after the 1999 Ukrainian parliamentary elections, over one third of freshly elected lawmakers changed faction allegiance.[25] Some of these had been elected over party lists of opposition

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[22] as, in the case of Ukraine, can be concluded from IFES Public Opinion Surveys, available from: http://ifes.org/pubsearch_results.html?type_group_0=&region_name_0=Ukraine&keyword=&t=sp.

[23] Birch (2001), p. 2.

[24] Bojcun, Marko. "Ukraine: Beyond Postcommunism", in: *Debatte*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2005), p. 11.

[25] Kubicek, Paul. "The Limits of Electoral Democracy in Ukraine", *Democratization*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2002), p. 126.

parties and were subsequently lured (or actually bought, as was widely believed) into pro-regime factions. By tempting deputies to committing disloyalty to their parties, the regime managed to forge a pro-government majority in parliament. Widespread 'floor-crossing' in Ukraine has spurred debates about the possible introduction of an imperative mandate, which would bar deputies from leaving their party faction. The formation of parliamentary factions that are not affiliated to a political party has also undermined party system stability in Georgia. In contrast to Ukraine, the proliferation of non-party factions in Georgia has effectively increased opposition to the regime. After the 1999 parliamentary elections, several factions split off from the large ruling party's faction. Two of these factions subsequently transformed into opposition forces that successfully challenged the authorities at the 2003 parliamentary elections, resulting in the Rose Revolution. A second reason, evidently, to abandon a party is the failure to cross the electoral threshold. When a party proves to be incapable of procuring parliamentary representation, the motivation to remain loyal to the party disappears for many party activists.

Both turnover of parties and party fragmentation are augmented by the existence of so-called spoiler parties, which are created for the sole purpose of drawing away votes from other parties. For the 1998 parliamentary elections in Ukraine, for instance, three 'leftist' parties were set up to steal votes from the existing popular left-wing parties, while a party with an agrarian platform was created to contest the existing agrarian party.[26] Most spoiler parties last only one election cycle, thereby contributing to a large turnover of parties. The exploitation of spoiler parties in elections is an element of what Andrew Wilson has termed 'virtual politics'.[27] 'Virtual' parties, in addition to spoiler parties, are also those that defend other interests than is suggested by the party's name or proclaimed ideological stance. The Green Party in Ukraine, for example, originally was a genuine environmental lobby but transformed into a political platform for powerful businessmen, who did not seem overly concerned with the party's nominal ideology. Similarly, the Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (united) defended, during most of its existence, the business interests of their prominent members rather than credible social democratic values. Of the ten leading contenders in the 2002 parliamentary elections in Ukraine, six, according to one count, were 'virtual projects'.[28]

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[26] Birch, Sarah and Andrew Wilson. "The Ukrainian parliamentary elections of 1998", *Electoral Studies* 18 (1999), p. 279.

[27] Wilson, Andrew. *Virtual Politics Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005.

[28] Wilson, Andrew. "Ukraine's 2002 Elections: Less Fraud, More Virtuality." *East European Constitutional Review*, vol. 11, no. 3 (2002), p. 96.

Organizational weakness

Parties in Georgia and Ukraine typically have slim, top-down organizational structures. They are led by a narrow leadership and lack a base of grassroots support. The weakness of party structures has two dimensions: internally, parties are inchoate organizations with few members (or a large proportion of passive members) and activists, sometimes missing local chapters and a youth wing, and with non-institutionalized, undemocratic decision-making procedures. Externally, the weakness of party structures manifests itself in the incapability to establish links beyond the party, in particular to reach out to constituents. Both dimensions impede the transformation of political parties into stable political forces.

Rootedness of political parties in society at large can be assessed by looking at levels of party activism (mainly, but not conclusively expressed by party membership), the degree of public trust, or turnout at elections. Ukraine has recorded the lowest level of party identification in the whole of Eastern Europe: only 10-15% of eligible voters in the early 1990s identified with one of the existing political parties. By 1998, this number had risen to barely 25%.[29] A survey conducted by IRI in 2003, prior to the Rose Revolution, found that 19% of the Georgian population trusted political parties. In 2005, after the Revolution, this percentage stood at 37%.[30] In general, political parties belong to the least trusted institutions in post-communist societies, and are often even more distrusted than other institutions that are associated with the state or the government.[31] In a survey of eight former Soviet republics carried out in 2001, i.e. prior to the Rose and Orange Revolutions, Georgia and Ukraine displayed the lowest levels of trust in political parties.[32]

Membership of political parties has been recorded at 1% of the adult population in Ukraine in 1999. 63% did not perceive ideological attachment to any of the political parties, and slightly more than half of respondents thought that

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[29] Birch, Sarah. *The Effects of Mixed Electoral Systems in Eastern Europe*. Paper prepared for presentation at the 30th Annual Conference of the University Association for Contemporary European Studies, Budapest 7-9 April, 2000, p.32.

[30] Nodia and Pinto Scholtbach (2006), p. 104.

[31] Central European Opinion Research Group, *Trust in Fellow Citizens, distrust in politics across Central and Eastern European Countries,* 2004, available from www.ceorg-europe.org/research/2004_09.html.

[32] Sapsford, Roger, and Pamela Abbott, "Trust, confidence, and social environment in post-communist societies", *Communist and Post-communist Studies* 39 (2006), p. 64.

political parties are necessary institutions for democracy.[33] Party membership rates in Georgia were higher, and according to one survey stood at 4.4% in 2001, against 2.6% in 2004 according to another survey.[34] The exact number of party members in Georgia is difficult to measure because, first, most parties do not maintain a computerized database of their membership, and second, because parties tend to overstate their membership numbers.[35] Membership levels in Western Europe vary widely but on average are higher than in post-communist countries, ranging from 2% of the adult population in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands to 16% in Sweden. Voter turnout at parliamentary elections in Georgia and Ukraine has not been particularly low, but has perhaps been enhanced by the fact that a portion of parliamentarians has been elected (in Ukraine up to 2002, in Georgia to this day) from single member districts.

Three general terms used to describe party structures are inclusiveness, centralization and institutionalization.[36] Inclusiveness refers to the width of the decision-making group in a party. The measure of centralization reveals to what extent decisions in a party are made by a single group or a single body. With rare exceptions, political parties in Georgia and Ukraine have been highly centralized, top-down structures with little institutionalized intra-party democracy. The creation of parties in these countries results less from a deliberative process among people at the grassroots level than from the private initiative of a leader figure or a small group of like-minded individuals, often coupled with specific interests. The personalized nature of many parties, as a feature of the party system, is reported in almost every assessment of the weakness of party systems in non-consolidated democracies. Parties in Georgia and Ukraine typically contain the basic attributes of a classic party structure, such as a bureaucratic hierarchy, local and regional caucuses, and the institution of periodical party conventions. The façade of intra-party democracy, however, often conceals non-democratic decision-making.

According to Randall and Svåsand, the two internal dimensions of party institutionalization are ‘value infusion’ and ‘systemness’. By value infusion is meant ‘the extent to which party actors and supporters (whether or not falling into a more formalized category of membership) acquire an identification with and

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[33] Kubicek, Paul. “The Limits of Electoral Democracy in Ukraine”, *Democratization*, vol. 8, no. 2, p. 126.

[34] Nodia and Pinto Scholtbach (2006), p. 105.

[35] idem, p. 152.

[36] Scarrow, Susan. *Political Parties and Democracy in Theoretical and Practical Perspectives. Implementing Intra-party Democracy*, 2005, p. 6 [www.accessdemocracy.org/library/1951_polpart_scarrow_110105.pdf].

commitment to the party which transcend more instrumental or self-interested incentives for involvement'.[37] The low levels of party identification in Georgia and Ukraine bear witness to the failure of parties in these countries to forge bonds with potential supporters. Moreover, the ephemeral lifespan of many parties precludes a serious degree of value infusion. The second internal dimension of party institutionalization, systemness, relates to the routinization of organizational processes within a political party. When decisions are in practice taken by a small circle of people or a single individual, the incentive to formalize procedures is not as strong as when intra-party democracy is not merely a smokescreen. Overall, the instability of parties in Georgia and Ukraine renders the routinization of internal procedures unlikely.

An indication, or perhaps a consequence, of the weakness of party structures is that many parties do not spring into action until election time. Supposedly, parties lack the desire or the financial resources to keep up a full-fledged party organization between elections. The fact that the activities of many parties are excessively focused on elections confirms the observation that many party activists seem to be primarily interested in gaining power, often through procuring seats in legislatures.

Geographical concentration of party activity and support

The picture of party system development in Ukraine appears in a different light when broken down to the regional level. Analysis of election results reveals that support for parties is to a large degree geographically concentrated. Not only do parties fail to secure popular support across the whole of Ukraine, they are also organizationally underrepresented in the regions where they are unpopular. Probably, the scarcity of party activity and the lack of electoral success in certain regions are mutually reinforcing factors.

Excessive geographical concentration of party activity and support is detrimental to party (system) institutionalization, mainly because parties are at risk of not being perceived as legitimate political forces, both by other political parties and by constituents. Parties, or party coalitions, with mass popularity in some regions may not be seen as fully legitimate actors on the national level when they have close to no support in other regions. Such was the case with respect to the first government in Ukraine that had been formed on the basis of a parliamentary majority - the so-called anti-crisis coalition of 2006-2007 - which was composed of parties whose aggregate support was much more located in the southern and eastern regions of the country than in the western and central regions.

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[37] Randall and Svåsand (2002), p.13.

Especially during the 1990s, the parties whose support was confined to one part of the country, were bearers of distinct ideological programs. In the 1994 and 1998 parliamentary elections, CPU scored large victories in the southern and eastern regions, while Ukrainian-nationalist parties, particularly Rukh, won most votes in the western regions. To a significant part of the political elite and to the population, these parties had no or limited legitimacy, since (reform-) communist ideology was unacceptable to the inhabitants of western regions, while Ukrainian nationalism was hard to swallow for the eastern and southern regions. According to Randall and Svåsand, one requirement for party system institutionalization is that major political players accord legitimacy to parties.[38] Since parties are poorly represented in many regions in Ukraine, such legitimacy is permanently at stake.

The successor to Rukh as the most popular party in the western regions, Our Ukraine, is less virulently nationalistic, and the Party of the Regions, which is now massively popular in eastern and southern regions, is short on ideology, but mutual acceptance among these parties and their supporters is still far from evident. Despite association with certain regions and certain voter groups, the parties with a clear geographical concentration of electoral support have not become entrenched in their respective regions. Rukh has imploded and is now a marginal force. CPU is only a shadow of what it was in the 1990s. Since the political party scene is still subject to major fluctuations, the current regionally dominant parties are not very likely to be preserved for a very long time either.

As already indicated, the most pronounced regional fault line, with regard to election outcomes, is that between the eastern plus southern regions of the country on the one hand and the western plus central regions no the other. Within these regions, there are of course differences. The Lviv region embodies the western vote. There, president Yushchenko's party Our Ukraine came in first at the parliamentary elections of 2006. The Party of the Regions, which won the national race with one third of the vote, garnered only three per cent of the vote in the Lviv region. The east is most vividly represented by the Donetsk region, which is considered to be the home base of the Party of the Regions. Yanukovich' party scored 74% here, while the parties that occupied second and third place in the national vote received a scant 1-3% per cent of votes in the Donetsk region, according to official data. In previous parliamentary elections the electoral schism between regions was equally clear-cut. In 2002 the Our Ukraine bloc won 75% in the western Ivano-Frankivsk region, against less than 3% in the Donetsk region. The Communist Party of Ukraine won 40% in the eastern Luhansk region, and less than two per cent in some western regions. Geographical concentration of support for parties has in some cases been limited to one region, typically the home region

[38] idem, p. 7.

of the given party's leaders. In the 1998 parliamentary elections, the Hromada party scored 35% in the Dnipropetrovsk region, with a second best result of 6% in the Kirovograd region, and 5% of the overall national vote.

Regional dividing lines are also highlighted during presidential elections. In 1994, former president Kuchma won the 'eastern' vote against his rival Kravchuk, who was more popular in the western regions. In 1999 Kuchma successfully appealed to voters in Western and Central Ukraine, whose support he needed to defeat his opponent, the communist candidate Symonenko, who had gained considerable popularity in eastern Ukraine. In the 2004 presidential elections that led to the Orange Revolution, the standoff between the western and eastern halves of the country became even more poignant than in previous presidential elections, as it was abundantly clear that the 'west' supported Yushchenko while the 'east' backed Yankukovich. Some eastern regions threatened to declare autonomy when the Orange camp protested the official results of the presidential race. In the December rerun of the second round of the elections, Yanukovich still won an overwhelming majority of the votes (94%) in the heavily populated Donetsk region. Yushchenko garnered 96% in the Ternopil and Ivano-Frankivsk regions. These figures demonstrate the impressive scope of regional differences in voters' preferences in Ukraine.[39] At the time of the Orange Revolution Yushchenko pronounced that 'Donetsk plus Lviv means victory'. In reality, no single political force has been able to bridge the east-west divide.

If one leaves aside the secessionist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where Georgian state control does not reach and national elections therefore cannot be held, the issue of geographical concentration of party activity and support in Georgia is by far not as distinct as in Ukraine. By and large, voting behavior across Georgia is similar. The main explanation for this relative unanimity is the largely centralized nature of the Georgian state. All major political players have their base in the capital, home to one third of the entire population of Georgia. Regional differences can occur when people chauvinistically vote for a familiar candidate: in the 2004 parliamentary elections, the Freedom Party received twice as many votes in the Samegrelo region as on average in other regions because its leader Gogo Gamsakhurdia is from the region. Since at the same time an overwhelming majority in all regions voted for the president's party United National Movement, such regional variations fail to distort the overall picture.

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[39] All election data retrieved from the website of the Ukrainian Central Election Commission, www.cvk.gov.ua on May 3, 2007..

Sources of weak party system institutionalization in Georgia and Ukraine

This section explores some of the deeper lying causes of the weakness of party (system) institutionalization in Georgia and Ukraine. In the previous section we have seen that, in these countries, the party system is excessively fragmented, that parties often do not have a credible, independent *raison d'être* and are prone to be easily replaced, that parties have slim, top-down organizational structures and lack a grassroots base, and that parties, particularly in Ukraine, are geographically limited in terms of popular support and activity. Cultural or historical explanations are largely omitted in this section. Instead, the lack of party system consolidation is explained from the specific features of the institutional framework of the Georgian and Ukrainian states, and from the legal framework regarding political parties and elections. Additionally, the relationship between social and regional cleavages on the one hand, and electoral patterns on the other, is clarified.

Institutional framework

Until the Orange Revolution, Ukraine had a highly presidentialized semi-presidential regime, with 'semi-presidential' referring to the fact that the president worked alongside a prime minister (who much was less powerful than the president) and a cabinet of ministers, and with 'highly presidentialized' referring to the wide *de facto* prerogatives of the president, especially in relation to a relatively disenfranchized parliament.[40] The Georgian constitution of 1995 established the Georgian state as a presidential republic with an unusually strong executive and a relatively weak parliament. Hence, both Georgia and Ukraine had regimes in which the balance of power was clearly tilted in favor of the president.

It could be hypothesized that the chances for party system institutionalization in Georgia and Ukraine were thwarted partly due to superpresidentialism. Strong legislatures are fairly generally believed to be more likely to bring about democratic consolidation than presidential regimes.[41] If democratic consolidation indeed implies that some degree of party system institutionalization has taken hold, then strong legislative power is by default more conducive to party system institutionalization than strong presidential power. The more direct effects of superpresidentialism on party systems, however, are contested. It has been claimed

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[0] For a classic definition of semi-presidentialism, see: Duverger, Maurice. "A New Political System Model: Semi-Presidential Government", *European Journal of Political Research* 8 (1980), p. 166.

[41] Fish, Steven. "Stronger Legislatures, Stronger Democracies", *Journal of Democracy* vol. 17, no. 1 (2006). Also see: Valerie Bunce. "Comparative Democratization. Big and Bounded Generaltizations" *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 33, no. 6/7 (2000), pp. 710-11.

that direct presidential elections probably drive up party fragmentation.[42] On the other hand, several authors hold that there is no convincing evidence for the purported correlation between the strength of the presidency and the weakness of party system institutionalization.[43]

Some features of the Kuchma and Shevardnadze regimes, in addition to the specific effects of electoral legislation and political party law, which are discussed in the next subsection, nonetheless can be expected to have had a negative influence on the chances for party system consolidation. Since parliament is the main platform on which parties can exert political influence and present themselves, weak legislative power diminishes the role of parties in the political process and their visibility in political life. Both in Georgia and Ukraine, serious periodic confrontation with the executive branch of power has secured ample attention to political parties in parliament, but has also contributed to the unfavorable, scandal-ridden image of parties. In both countries, governments were not formed on the basis of parliamentary majorities. Instead, the president appointed members of the cabinet at his personal discretion (and to some degree with the approval of parliament). Kuchma - unlike Shevardnadze, who until 2001 commanded his own party - as well as most cabinet ministers in Georgia and Ukraine, shied away from joining a political party. For high-ranking officials, partisan allegiance in fact was a liability, in part because of the negative reputation that parties in both countries enjoyed. Many experienced politicians preferred to remain above the dirty business of party politics. By not joining parties, they implicitly acknowledged the limited relevance of parties.

As the Orange Revolution unfolded, the opposing sides agreed on a pack of constitutional amendments that came into force one year after the Revolution. The most important consequence of these amendments was that parliamentary powers were increased at the expense of presidential powers. After the Rose Revolution, by contrast, the Georgian parliament approved changes to the constitution that made the position of the president even stronger that it already was. It is as yet too early to assess what effects these constitutional changes have for party system development.

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[42] Filippov, Mikhail G., Peter C. Ordeshook, and Olga V. Shvetsova. "Party Fragmentation and Presidential Elections in Post-Communist Democracies", *Constitutional Political Economy* no. 10 (1999), p. 9.

[43] Horowitz, Shale, and Eric C. Browne. "Sources of Post-Communist Party System Consolidation. Ideology versus Institutions", *Party Politics* vol. 11, no. 6 (2005)
and: John T. Ishiyama and Ryan Kennedy, Superpresidentialism and Political Party Development in Russia, Ukraine, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, in: *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 53, no. 8 (2001), p. 1187.

Electoral legislation and political party law

Legislation on political parties and on the conduct of elections potentially has a significant impact on the size and composition of any party system. Regarding electoral legislation, two issues in particular have a marked potential influence on the level of party fragmentation: first, whether parliamentary elections are conducted according to the proportional representation (PR) principle, through single member districts (SMD), or a combination of the two ('mixed system'). Second, the height of a possible electoral threshold.

In Georgia, the 'mixed system' has been applied for parliamentary elections since 1992. 85 MPs are elected to the 235-seat parliament over SMDs and the remainder over nation-wide party lists. Ukraine has experimented with all three variants at different moments: all-SMD in 1994, a mixed system in 1998 and 2002 - with a fifty-fifty ratio - and, finally, nation-wide party lists in 2006. In most elections in Georgia and Ukraine, in sum, the mixed system has been applied. Five decades ago, Duverger argued that PR typically leads to a multiparty system, while the majoritarian principle of SMDs promotes bipartism.[44] As a very general premise, this still holds true. Of the nearly thirty formerly communist countries, a remarkably large number has opted for the mixed electoral system. Research on the effects of mixed systems on party fragmentation suggests that mixed systems tend to produce a 'moderate' sized multiparty system.[45] Application of the mixed system has perhaps constrained the number of contenders per election in Georgia, but the impressive replacement rate of parties from election to election rules out any serious conclusion about the effect of the mixed system on the size of the party system. The same can be said, *ceteris paribus*, with regard to the two instances of the application of the mixed system in the Ukrainian electoral process.

Both in Georgia and Ukraine, candidates in SMDs are far from always members of a party, let alone are they necessarily nominated by a political party to run for parliament. Many candidates in fact make the strategic decision not to align themselves with a party, believing that this will increase their chances of election. As a result, a large number of deputies enters parliament independently, a factor which puts the dominant role of parties in parliament at stake. In the 1994 elections in Ukraine, when all MPs were elected from districts, out of a total of some 6000 candidates only around a quarter were party members, and of these,

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[44] Duverger, Maurice. *Political Parties*. London: Methuen, 1954.

[45] Reynolds, Andrew and Ben Reilly (eds,). *The International IDEA Handbook of Electoral System*
Design, Stockholm: International IDEA, 1997, p. 55.

only half received official backing from their parties.[46] In the end, around one third of the candidates who were elected to parliament represented a political party. This circumstance set the tone for a situation, which continued after the 1998 and 2002 elections, in which factions in parliament very often are not formed on the basis of party platforms. It is too early to tell which lasting effects the application of PR from the 2006 elections onwards will have on party system development in Ukraine.

The simultaneous objectives of ensuring a large degree of representation while maintaining effectiveness is stricken with inherent tension.[47] In most democracies, an electoral threshold is set in order to block a too large number of small political forces from entering the legislature, at the risk of leaving many votes unrepresented. In Ukraine, the threshold stood at four percent in 1998 and 2002, before it was lowered to three percent for the 2006 elections. At times it was (and is) argued that the threshold should be raised, at times that it was already too high. In the course of three years, Georgia has experienced the two extremes of possible results from miscalculations in determining the height of the electoral threshold. Partially by way of a conciliatory gesture at a time when the country was still beset by societal unrest, no threshold was set for the 1992 parliamentary elections. As a consequence, no less than twenty-four parties gained representation in parliament, reducing effectiveness of the parliament's functioning. It was only a logical step that a threshold of five percent was introduced for the 1995 elections. With voters' preferences still scattered over many parties, this, however, led to extreme underrepresentation. 61,4% of votes went to parties that in the end were not represented in parliament.[48] At seven percent since 1999, the electoral threshold to the Georgian parliament is relatively high, compared to other countries. In the 2004 elections, only one party and one electoral bloc made it into parliament. Had the threshold stood at three percent, as in Ukraine, five parties/blocs would have made it into parliament.

Electoral thresholds can be an effective instrument to reduce party fragmentation, since they compel parties to dissolve in favor of more popular parties or to merge with other political forces into one party whose aggregate popular support is sufficient to cross the threshold. Instead of merging with other political forces, however, parties in Georgia and Ukraine rather opt to form

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[46] Birch, Sarah, and Andrew Wilson. "The Ukrainian parliamentary elections of 1998", *Electoral Studies* no. 18 (1999), p. 277.

[47] Bielasiak, Jack. "Party Competition in Emerging Democracies: Representation and Effectiveness in Post-communism and Beyond", *Democratization*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2005).

[48] Nodia and Pinto Scholtbach (2006), p. 53.

electoral blocs, which has the obvious advantage of being able to retain the political party structure, while gaining parliamentary representation. As already noted, these electoral blocs, being marriages of convenience, are ephemeral constructs that only rarely transform into united political forces.

In Georgia and Ukraine, political party law provides for a relatively liberal regulatory framework that does not confront citizens with excessively high hurdles for the founding of parties and for party activity. The Law of Ukraine on Political Parties (2001) and the Georgian Law on Political Associations of Citizens (1997) - the principal documents guiding the creation and business of parties - contain some provisions that are seemingly targeted at preventing party fragmentation, weakness of party structures, and geographical concentration of party activity.

The sheer number of officially registered parties in Georgia and to a lesser degree also in Ukraine suggests that registration there is a relatively easy process. In order to receive registration in Georgia, a party must have one thousand members, a statute, and no less than three hundred persons must attend its constituent congress. The requirements for party foundation in Ukraine are slightly less permissive. For a party to be officially recognized as such, it must be able to present ten thousand signatures collected in no less than two thirds of the districts of no less than two thirds of the country's twenty-five regions. The law on political parties explicitly states that parties shall have an 'all-Ukraine status', i.e. a nation-wide profile. This requirement of formal geographical distribution, which aims to forestall regionalization of politics, has no equivalent in Georgia. Georgian legislation does, however, with existing issues of separatism in mind, prohibit the creation of parties on a 'territorial or regional principle'. On this ground, attempts by the Armenian minority in the Javakheti region to establish its own party have been repeatedly blocked by the authorities.[49] In addition to ten thousand signatures prospective parties in Ukraine must hand over extensive paperwork, including a statute, program, information on the organizational structure of the party, and a protocol of the constituent convention. Georgian political party legislation directly prescribes the organizational structure of parties, which are obliged to have an assembly, a board, and an auditing committee. Legislative provisions on the organizational structure of parties has not produced stable, durable parties in Georgia and Ukraine, neither has the requirement of geographical distribution prevented a strong degree of geographical concentration of party activity in Ukraine. The minimal requirements for registration of political parties, finally, have failed to stabilize parties and the party system in Georgia and Ukraine, as witnessed by the large replacement rate of parties.

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[49] idem, p. 46.

Regional cleavages

Ukrainian society and politics alike are characterized by a number of intricate dividing lines, collectively creating a sense of national disunity that, according to many, is harmful for the country's prospects for democratic development.[50] Much of scholarly literature on Ukraine focuses on the intricate dividing lines in an effort to explain voters' preferences and to predict electoral outcomes. In popular perception, the country is divided between 'west' and 'east'. The east-west antagonism was most visibly demonstrated in the days when the Orange Revolution unfolded. Ethnic and linguistic cleavages are sometimes held accountable for the sharp differences in electoral outcomes, since ethnic Russians (up to twenty percent of Ukrainian citizens) and people for whom Russian is the primary language in day-to-day communication (around half of the population), are much more likely to vote for the (varying) forces that are most popular in the southern and eastern regions of the country. Close inspection informs that the relation between ethnic and/or linguistic cleavages on the one hand and voting behavior and political moods on the other does not tell the entire story of the political confrontation in Ukraine. According to an elaborate study, place of residence, in fact, offers the best explanation for why people vote for a certain candidate or embrace a certain ideology.[51] Where a person lives, in other words, determines to a large degree, more so than his ethnic background or the language he speaks, what his political ideas are and for which political forces he votes. A partial explanation for the different cultural and political outlooks of western inhabitants vis-à-vis are the historical legacies of these respective regions. Parts of the territory that nowadays is Ukraine have been dominated at different moments by Russians, Poles, the Habsburg empire, Mongols, Ottomans, and others. It is believed that the date of inclusion into the Russian empire has been of particular importance in the shaping of diverging mentalities and cultures.[52] While some of the eastern provinces have been under Russian dominance since the seventeenth century, some western provinces even as recently as in the interbellum period

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[50] Taras Kuzio, for instance, stresses that the transition process of Ukraine, on top of democratization, marketisation and state-building, should also involve nation-building if the transition is going to be successful. Kuzio, Taras: Transition in Post-Communist States: Triple or Quadruple, in: Politics, vol. 21, no. 3, pp.168-77.

[51] Barrington, Lowell W. "Examining rival theories of demographic influences on political support: The power of regional, ethnic, and linguistic divisions in Ukraine", *European Journal of Political Research*, no. 41 (2002), pp. 455-91.

[52] Birch, Sarah, "Interpreting the Regional Effect in Ukrainian Politics", *Europe-Asia Studies* vol. 52, no. 6 (2000), pp. 1017-41.

remained outside of Russian/Soviet grip.

Nominally, the parties which in the 1990s were most popular in the western and eastern regions, Rukh and CPU, represented clear-cut ideological orientations - conservative-nationalist in the case of Rukh, and (reform-) communist in the case of CPU. Regional differences in electoral outcomes, however, did not derive so much from divergent support for clear-cut ideologies as from certain cultural outlooks that were harder to define than traditional political ideologies. This observation is confirmed by the fact that Our Ukraine and the Party of the Regions, the successors to Rukh and CPU in terms of their mass support in the West and East, respectively, are less ideologically distinct than their forebearers - especially the Party of the Regions, which conforms to the catch-all party type. Put very generally, eastern Ukrainians are in favor or Ukrainian statehood but do not support 'ethnic' Ukrainization, as they feel culturally attached to the other eastern Slavs (Russian and Belarussians) and have relatively benign views of the Soviet past. Inhabitants of western Ukraine, on the other hand, unequivocally perceive themselves as Europeans, support nationalism for the good of developing a more integrated Ukrainian nation-state, and discard all things Soviet.

National disunity in the form of diametrically opposed ideas and values that are unequally distributed across the country, poses a serious problem to political development in the relatively unitary nation-state that Ukraine formally is. The divergent positions that clash on the stage of national politics in Kiev warrant an almost perpetual political crisis. It has been proposed that a state-nation model – along the lines of Canada, Belgium, or Switzerland - in which far-reaching autonomy would be granted to different parts of the country, would help Ukraine overcome the deadlock of regional divisions.[53]

The challenge for democracy assistance

Assistance to political parties is one type of external involvement through which western actors aim to foster democratic development in not yet consolidated democracies. The underlying assumption of party assistance is that the existence of viable, democratic parties is an important, if not crucial element of democratization. Western actors have assisted political parties in Georgia and Ukraine since the early 1990s. Most organizations that implement party assistance programs are affiliated with political parties in western countries. The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and the International

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[53] Stepan, Alfred. "Ukraine: Improbable Democratic 'Nation-State' but Possible Democratic 'State-Nation'"? *Post-Soviet Affairs* vol. 21, no. 4 (2005), pp. 279-308.

Republican Institute (IRI) are affiliated, albeit loosely, to the Democratic Party and the Republican Party, respectively, and typically provide assistance to a wide range of political parties, as long as these parties meet minimal criteria of viability and adherence to democratic values and non-violence. European political party foundations, which are more closely tied to national parties, often, but far from exclusively, provide assistance to individual parties that are considered partners in ideological terms. The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, affiliated with the German Social Democratic Party, for instance, cooperates with like-minded social democratic parties in non-western countries, when such a party is found to be available. A second type of institutional actors engaged in political party assistance, on a much smaller level, are intergovernmental organizations, most notably UNDP and OSCE.

The bulk of party assistance programs consists of trainings, workshops and seminars, at which representatives of political parties acquire skills inherent to political party activity (campaigning, message development, setting up the organizational structure of the party, fundraising, to name a few). Part of the programs is concentrated around election cycles, while other programs have a more long-term perspective. In addition to trainings, assistance providers offer counsel to individual politicians and organize exchange trips.

The response of aid providers

How do providers of political party assistance respond to the many shortcomings of party (system) development in Georgia and Ukraine? This section presents a brief and inconclusive overview of how western actors have addressed the specific weaknesses of party (system) development in Georgia and Ukraine that have been discussed in this paper.

One issue that we have identified is that the party system in Georgia and Ukraine is atomized to the extent that parties are hard to discern and do not serve to voters' interests. Excessive party fragmentation can be countered by attempts to forge coalition building among parties. To this purpose parties are incited to merge or join forces with other parties in electoral blocs. Promotion of coalition building by outside actors is a relatively direct form of interference in the domestic political process, first, because it seeks to alter the composition of the party landscape and second, because it generally aims to promote one particular side of the political spectrum, thus by default tilting the existing balance of strength. Diminished party fragmentation rather is a consequence (when it succeeds) of coalition building than a prime goal for providers of party assistance. More immediate goals of coalition building are either the strengthening of a particular political force, or creating a counterweight to efforts by the authorities to undermine full, genuine competition, for instance through the promotion of a powerful ruling party.

Since 2002, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), affiliated with the

German Christian Democratic Union (CDU), directs part of its activities in Ukraine towards promoting coalition building among what the Stiftung perceives as center right (and hence, ideologically akin to the CDU) political forces. KAS's main partner in the coalition building effort is the Our Ukraine party, which was created from several smaller parties, and participates in elections with other parties in an electoral bloc. The relative failure at uniting a truly wide range of center right parties is attributed to the unwillingness of party elites to abandon their autonomous party platform. KAS, being close to the CDU, does not claim to be ideologically neutral, and therefore sees no objection to favoring one particular political force. At the same time, KAS does invite representatives from a broad spectrum of parties to many of the seminars it organizes.

Providers of party assistance may also opt for coalition building when there is a dominant ruling party that overshadows all other political forces, such as in Georgia both before and after the Rose Revolution. The direct goal - whether publicly acknowledged or concealed - of such party assistance is to level the political playing field: break the dominance of the ruling forces by discriminately promoting opposing forces and thereby enhancing competition. This can be achieved by assisting parties individually or by inciting parties to join forces in order to create a counterweight to the ruling party. During the last years of the Shevardnadze presidency, part of the political party program of NDI in Georgia was aimed at bringing some of the liberal democratic opposition forces closer to each other, among others by organizing joint sessions, round tables, etc. After the Revolution, NDI has also worked at promoting coalition building, particularly in the run-up to the 2006 local elections. At all moments party elites to a large degree proved resistant to NDI's efforts, which consequently had at best a moderate effect.

Assuming that turnover of parties is aggravated by the fact that party organizations are often underdeveloped, providers of party assistance can seek to reduce party turnover by programs aimed at strengthening party organizations. These programs will typically consist of trainings, seminars, workshops on topics such as intra-party democracy, voter outreach, message development, etc. In addition to the possible effect it has on party stability, strengthening party organizations can also work at the lack of intra-party democracy and the lack of rootedness in society. During seminars, parties are encouraged to set up local chapters or a youth wing, reach out to potential voters, increase their membership base and develop a coherent program. IRI in Georgia and Ukraine organizes opinion surveys among voters and disseminates the outcomes of these surveys to parties in order to help them develop a message that is responsive to voters' priorities. A project in Georgia co-implemented by the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy has submitted an extensive list of questions to the six participating parties of the project, which should compel the parties to contemplate their ideological stance and have the parties discuss their ideological differences

and similarities.

The weakness of party organizations in Georgia and Ukraine is reflected by the fact that they are merely active for the sake of winning in elections. Brought about by the recognition among providers of party assistance that party organizations matter as key institutions of democracy, a gradual trend can be discerned that trainings are offered, more so than previously, with a long-term perspective, extending beyond elections, rather than being one-off events around election time.

Elite polarization is one of the factors driving up party fragmentation in Georgia. Since 2005, the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy implements a comprehensive program, funded by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of OSCE, which simultaneously involves the ruling party and five of the main opposition parties. One explicit objective of this project is to improve inter-party relations and contribute to a more constructive, less polarized political culture. Representatives of the six participating parties sit in jointly at trainings and, among others, are taught negotiation and communication skills. Interestingly, NDI and IRI in Georgia deliberately do not apply this format of multi-party trainings out of the conviction that inherent animosity between parties would render the trainings less effective.

The issue of geographical concentration of party activity and support in Ukraine has not been systematically addressed by western providers of party assistance. European political party foundations have implemented their (partly) bilateral assistance programs, largely regardless of the regional orientation of their partners. NDI and IRI have offered and provided assistance to parties both with a western and with an eastern support base. To avoid overlap in programming, NDI and IRI since the start of their work in Ukraine have divided the twenty-five regions of Ukraine among the two of them, with both having the mandate to work in the capital city of Kiev. Party assistance programs by NDI and IRI are largely supply-driven: assistance is offered to a range of parties, that subsequently choose whether to accept the offer or not. In practice, NDI and IRI have worked more intensely with the parties that are popular in the western and central regions of the country, primarily because these parties have been more receptive to NDI and IRI proposals.

Conclusion

The Rose and Orange Revolutions have increased expectations for democratic development in Georgia and Ukraine. Three to four years after the Revolutions the prospects for party system institutionalization (and hence, arguably, also for the consolidation of democracy) are dim. In Ukraine, the Orange coalition has largely

fallen apart, with some constituent parties participating individually in the 2006 parliamentary elections. These same elections have made clear that east-west confrontation, if anything, has intensified. A perpetual crisis meanwhile has dominated political life. Of the three leading political forces, one, Yuliya Tymoshenko's bloc, is associated with its leader to the point that autonomous existence independently from the party leader is close to unthinkable, while the other two stand on diametrically opposing sides of the east-west divide. In Georgia, the ruling party dwarfs all other political forces and its representatives control the levers of executive and legislative power, thereby jeopardizing political pluralism. Opposition parties, despite many attempts at coalition building, are weak, divided and unpopular. The 2008 election cycle will provide clues to whether the Rose Revolution's promise of genuinely competitive politics is substantiated.

Far-reaching volatility in party system development is the rule rather than the exception in post-authoritarian countries in which democracy is not consolidated. In a comparative overview of party systems in Africa, Kuenzi and Lambright argue that the weakness of party system institutionalization in African countries is not surprising, given the fact that most African countries gained independence relatively recently – but still decades earlier than the former Soviet republics.[54] As the experience of many Eastern and Central European countries show, successful democratization appears to go together with a higher level of party system consolidation. Now that Georgia and Ukraine are the frontrunners in the post-Soviet area in terms of the degree to which a number of essential benchmarks of democratization are met, according to the influential Freedom House rating, the chances for party system institutionalization might also have durably increased.[55] At the same time, the many factors hampering party system institutionalization are difficult to resolve. Western actors involved in assistance to political parties can harbor only modest ambitions. They have invested in efforts at overcoming the weakness of party system institutionalization in Georgia and Ukraine by initiatives on coalition building, trainings aimed at strengthening party organizations and boosting inter-party ties, among others. Further research by the author of this paper will shed light on the exact scope and effect of the efforts by western actors in Georgia and Ukraine to have an impact on the development of political parties.

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[54] Kuenzi, Michelle, and Gina Lambright. "Party System Institutionalization in 30 African Countries". *Party Poltics* vol. 7, no. 4 (2001), pp. 462-3.

[55] Freedom House scores are available from www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm ?page=1

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