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Regional Fault Lines and Elite Polarisation as Sources of Weak Political Party System Institutionalisation in Georgia and Ukraine: Challenges for Democracy Assistance

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Abstract

Recent years have witnessed an increasing recognition by academics and practitioners of democracy assistance alike that a lack of political party system stability is often a serious impediment to comprehensive democratisation. Party (system) development in Georgia and Ukraine suffers from most of the common defects associated with the emergence of new political parties in formerly authoritarian states. On top of that it is characterised by issues that to some degree set it apart from that taking place in other post-communist countries. More so than in most other post-communist countries, party system development in Ukraine is hampered by a far-reaching regional concentration of party activity and support, while in Georgia an extreme polarisation of party elites, which is not grounded on ideological differences, keeps the political party landscape fragmented and short of representing voters' interests and preferences. After the introduction, this paper discusses these most characteristic defects of party system development in Georgia and Ukraine. Towards the end of the paper, efforts by western actors to promote stable and democratic party development in Georgia and Ukraine, with particular reference to the issues discussed in the first section of the paper, are analysed. On the basis of the preliminary research findings, the paper briefly assesses the effects of party assistance programmes aimed at addressing and overcoming the issues of the regional concentration of party activity and support in Ukraine, and elite polarisation in Georgia.

Introduction

Party system institutionalisation – the development of a set of recognisable, stable political parties – is helpful, if not crucial, for democratisation and has some widely acknowledged positive effects for democratic politics.¹ The presence of more or less stable parties in a competitive political environment fosters effective programmatic representation and reduces uncertainty regarding electoral outcomes.² Also, durability of parties renders popular representatives more accountable to constituents. For most post-authoritarian states, achieving a sensible degree of party system institutionalisation is a burdensome aspect of their democratisation trajectories.

A party system is understood here rather minimalistically as the aggregate of relevant parties in a political system, plus the interaction of these parties.³ Party system institutionalisation, according to Scott Mainwaring, encompasses the following four dimensions. First, the regularity in patterns of party competition. Second, the rootedness of parties in society. Third, the legitimacy of parties in the eyes of key political actors. Fourth, the strength of party organisations beyond the party's elite.⁴ The party systems of Georgia and Ukraine throughout their nearly two-decade long existence have fallen short of each of these 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, was three times higher in Eastern and Central Europe during the 1990s than it was in Western Europe over the period from 1960 to 1989.⁵ The hypothesis that a correlation exists between the level of party system stability and the democracy score of a country is boosted by the fact that in a number of Central European states, a higher level of party system stability has been reached than in other parts of the post-communist world.⁶

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 / Zoco, Eduino: Political Sequences and Stabilisation of Interparty Competition. Electoral Volatility in Old and New Democracies, in: 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 Mainwaring, Scott: Party Systems in the Third Wave, in: Journal of Democracy (vol. 9), No. 3, pp. 69–70.

5 Lewis, Paul G.: Political Parties in Post-Communist Eastern Europe. London: Routledge, 2000, p. 128.

6 Bakke, Elisabeth/ Sitter, Nick: Patterns of Stability. Party Competition and Strategy in Central Europe since 1989, in: Party Politics (vol. 11), No. 2, p. 243.

The importance of political party and party system development in post-authoritarian states has generally been undervalued for a long time. Civil society, and particularly nongovernmental organisations, were, or still are, more popular as a subject of academic investigation and as recipients of democracy assistance. Civil society organisations, or any other type of organisation, however, cannot replace political parties.⁷ Reflecting a development in western democracies after the Second World War, political parties have gradually come to be regarded less as vital intermediary organisations between society and the state, and more as mere ‘public utilities’, or ‘institutions of democracy’.⁸ Modern political parties are organisations 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, their procedural functions (forming and sustaining governments, elite recruitment) are still intact.⁹ Political parties, therefore, remain indispensable for the democratic process, and the consolidation of parties probably helps consolidate democratic rule. As 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 democratisation in formerly authoritarian countries, needs to be confronted.¹⁰

The defects of political party development in Georgia and Ukraine are largely similar to those in many other post-communist states. An incomplete list of these defects would include: high levels of alternation in electoral outcomes for subsequent elections (electoral volatility); the fragmentation of the political party scene into a large number of mostly small parties (party fragmentation); the inherent instability and non-durability of parties, resulting in a large turnover of parties; the lack of a meaningful grassroots base in society; the overly geographical concentration of party activity and support; and finally, the internal weakness of parties due to the absence of a sound organisational structure. Political party assistance (or aid) by western actors – mainly government-funded nongovernmental organisations and intergovernmental organisations – 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 democratisation process.

In the remainder of this paper, I will look at two features of weak party system institutionalisation that to some extent set Ukraine and Georgia apart from many other cases of post-communist transformation.¹¹ In Ukraine, regional fault lines have an overwhelming impact on party development and on the political trajectory of the country. In Georgia, bitter contestation between party elites, typically not grounded in ideological differences, has plagued party development ever since the onset of pluralist politics in the late 1980s. Political party development in Georgia and Ukraine suffers from all the ‘standard’ defects of party development in recent post-authoritarian states listed above. Regional concentration of party activity and support in Ukraine and extreme elite polarisation in Georgia, however, are probably its most recognisable features and arguably represent the most serious problems that need to be overcome in order to reach a

7 Doherty, Ivan: Democracy out of Balance. Civil Society can’t replace Political Parties, in: Policy Review, April & May 2001, pp. 25–35.

8 Van Biezen, Ingrid: How Political Parties Shape Democracy <http://www.repositories.cdlib.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1046&context=csd>.

9 Bartolini, Stefano / Mair, Peter: Challenges to Contemporary Political Parties, p. 335 in: Diamond, Larry / Gunther, Richard (eds.): Political Parties and Democracy. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

10 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.

11 Spatial constraints do not allow an exploration of more of the factors that impede party system institutionalisation in Georgia and Ukraine. A more extensive and inclusive discussion of these factors will be presented in my PhD thesis.

degree of party system institutionalisation that can facilitate democratic consolidation. In this paper I will also review efforts by western actors to address the issues of far-reaching regional concentration of party activity and support in Ukraine and elite polarisation in Georgia, since the second halves of the Kuchma and Shevardnadze presidencies, based on preliminary, tentative research findings.¹² The central questions here are: Do western actors engaged in party assistance have specific programmes aimed at overcoming these issues? What effects do party assistance programmes by western actors have on the regional concentration of party activity and support in Ukraine and elite polarisation in Georgia?

Ukraine: cleft nation, confrontational politics

Ukrainian society and politics alike are characterised 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.¹³ Much of the 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 visibly demonstrated in the days when the Orange Revolution unfolded. The mass protests in Kiev drew most of their support from the western and central regions of the country, while the eastern regions backed Yanukovich even in the rerun of the second round of the elections. By 2007, the picture of east-west antagonism, perhaps against widespread expectations in the wake of the Revolution, has by no means faded.

Cleavage patterns in Ukraine can be drawn up on the basis of several different criteria. Ethnically, there is a sizeable Russian minority of up to twenty per cent of the population. Ethnic Russians are geographically concentrated in the southern and eastern regions, and are much more likely than ethnic Ukrainians to favour close ties with Russia and, in the current balance of political forces, to vote for Yanukovich and his Party of the Regions. As for religious differences, there are three popular confessional denominations: the Russian Orthodox Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and the Greek Catholic Church. More interesting for academic investigation are linguistic patterns. Studies reveal that the number of people who prefer Ukrainian as language of first choice in day-to-day conversation and the number of those who prefer Russian, are roughly equal, meaning that many ethnic Ukrainians actually speak more Russian than Ukrainian, if they speak Ukrainian at all.¹⁴ A comprehensive drive for cultural and linguistic Ukrainisation since 1991 – involving a proclamation of Ukrainian as the sole language in state affairs, and an increase of tuition in Ukrainian – have so far not resulted in a dominant position of the Ukrainian language in Ukrainian society. Speakers of Russian, not surprisingly, are, like ethnic Russians, more likely to favour close ties with Russia and to support the political forces that are popular in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine.

Another way to look at divisions in Ukrainian society is to take into account historical legacies. A key criterion here is the date of inclusion in the Russian empire or the Soviet Union, a factor which could be considered to have implications for political culture.¹⁵ The suggestion that is sometimes put forward is that inhabitants of those regions that have stayed away from Russian influence for a longer time are now more imbued with democratic values than their fellow Ukrainians who have experienced extended periods of Russian dominance. In cultural-ideational terms, a distinction is often made between proponents of an ethnic Ukrainian version of nationalism, linked to an ethnic national identity, and proponents of an

12 The research findings have been acquired mainly through interviews with donors and recipients of political party assistance in Washington, Berlin, Tbilisi and Kiev.

13 Taras Kuzio, for instance, stresses that the transition process of Ukraine, on top of democratisation, 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. 168–177.

14 For an elaborate discussion of the language question in Ukraine, see: Wilson, Andrew: *Elements of a theory of Ukrainian ethno-national identities*, in: *Nations and Nationalism* (vol. 8), No. 1, pp. 31–54.

15 A proposal for a regional division of Ukraine on historical grounds is made in: Birch, Sarah: *Interpreting the Regional Effect in Ukrainian Politics*, in: *Europe-Asia Studies* (vol. 52), No.6, pp. 1017–1041.

Eastern Slavic identity, associated with a civic national identity.¹⁶ During the early years of independence, Ukraine's first president led an Ukrainisation campaign that sought to solidify Ukraine's independent status and identity, and laid stress on its unique culture and history. The version of national identity promoted by Ukraine's second president Kuchma has been more reminiscent of civic nationalism: Kuchma stood up for his country's independence, without making many references to (ethnic) Ukrainian uniqueness.¹⁷

Close inspection reveals that the relation between ethnic and/or linguistic cleavages on the one hand and voting behaviour and political moods on the other does not tell the entire story of the political confrontation in Ukraine. Place of residence, in fact, offers the best explanation for why people vote for a certain candidate or embrace a certain ideology.¹⁸ Where a person lives, in other words, determines to a large degree, in any case more so than his ethnic background or the language he speaks, what his political ideas are and for which political forces he votes. The most pronounced regional fault line is that between the eastern plus southern regions of the country versus the western plus central regions. Within these regions, there are of course differences. In the western half of the country, the Lviv region embodies western Ukrainian mentality. 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, 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 past 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 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 city, typically the home city of the given party's leaders. In the 1998 parliamentary elections, the Hromada party scored 35% in Dnipropetrovsk, with a second best result of 6% in the city Kirovograd, 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 Symonenko of the Communist Party of Ukraine, 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 Yanukovich. 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.¹⁹

Political party legislation mandates parties to be geographically distributed: in order to receive official registration a prospective party must be able to present ten thousand signatures, collected in no less than

16 Shulman, Stephen: The Contours of Civic and Ethnic National Identification in Ukraine, in: *Europe-Asia Studies* (vol. 56), No. 1, pp. 35–56.

17 The terms 'civic national identity' and 'ethnic national identity' are juxtaposed: Shulman, Stephen: The Contours of Civic and Ethnic National Identification in Ukraine, in: *Europe-Asia Studies* (vol. 56), No. 1, pp. 35–56.

18 Barrington, Lowell W.: Examining rival theories of demographic influences on political support: The power of regional, ethnic, and linguistic divisions in Ukraine, in: *European Journal of Political Research*, No. 41, pp. 455–491.

19 All election data retrieved from the website of the Ukrainian Central Election Commission, <http://www.cvk.gov.ua> on May 3, 2007.

two thirds of the districts of no less than two thirds of the administrative regions of Ukraine.²⁰ This rule has failed to ensure that the leading parties of the country are genuinely all-Ukrainian in nature.

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. The situation in Ukraine to some degree resembles that of the United States, where parts of the country are traditionally ‘red’ or ‘blue’. There are, however, at least two important differences: first, the antagonism in Ukraine is by far more clear-cut. Second, democracy in Ukraine is not yet consolidated, and concerns continue to exist over the country’s immediate and longer-term prospects for democracy. These concerns are for a large part motivated by the seemingly irreconcilable differences between various parts of the country in terms of political preferences. It has been suggested that a solution out of the impasse might consist of reforming the state’s administrative make-up according to the state-nation model, which grants considerable autonomy to the state’s administrative sub-units, after the example of Belgium, Canada and Switzerland.²¹ Such a reform would acknowledge the inherent regional differences and bring an end to the state-sponsored illusion of national unity.

Georgia: elite contestation and polarisation of politics

Regional divisions in Georgia are not as clearly reflected in electoral outcomes as they are in Ukraine. Georgian state authority does not extend to two regions on its legal territory – the de facto independent regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia – but the nation is relatively uniform in terms of electoral preferences and political representation, especially since central authority was strengthened in the wake of the Rose Revolution of 2003. When Saakashvili was elected to the presidency in 2004 with 96% of the vote, his victory was overwhelming in all regions of Georgia. In parliamentary (2004) and local (2006) elections since then, Saakashvili’s party has won resounding majorities.

Both among the general public and the political elite, there exists a remarkable consensus over key political issues. The population is massively in favour of Euro-Atlantic integration; pro-Russian sentiments, in contrast to Ukraine, are marginal. In addition, almost every political party stresses the importance of restoring ‘territorial integrity’ by regaining authority in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Differences of opinion on this matter only concern the means through which this goal should be achieved. Even on social issues, parties are not very distinct. Of the parties that have enjoyed most support since the Rose Revolution, only the Labour Party identifies itself as centre-left, and has pronounced the ambition to develop into a traditional, west European style social democratic party. Most other prominent parties – notably the United National Movement, the Republican Party, the New Rights Party, Industry Will Save Georgia and the Conservative Party – would rather fit classification as centrist or centre-right.²² Classifications of this type can only be applied conditionally though, since as in many other polities outside western Europe, the left-right ideological spectrum is not easy to utilise, and traditional ideological distinctions play only a secondary role at best in recently democratising countries, with Georgia being no exception. It is telling, nonetheless, that parties are so difficult to identify on the basis of programmatic-ideological positions.

Perhaps the most widely discussed characteristic of weak party system institutionalisation is electoral volatility – changes over successive elections in the balance of party support.²³ Counts of electoral volatility

20 Article 10 of the 2001 Law of Ukraine on Political Parties, available at: <http://www.legislationline.org/legislation.php?tid=57&lid=3804>

21 Stepan, Alfred: Ukraine: Improbable Democratic “Nation-State” But Possible Democratic “State-Nation”?, in: *Post-Soviet Affairs* (vol. 21), No. 4, pp. 279–308.

22 For a recent overview of the most viable political parties and their ideological positions, see: IDEA / Center for Social Studies Georgia: Georgia. Country Report based on Research and Dialogue with Political Parties, 2006. [www.idea.int/parties/upload/Georgia_report.pdf].

23 The seminal article on electoral volatility is: Laakso, Markku / Taagepera, Rein: ‘Effective’ Number of Parties. A Measure with Application to West Europe, in: *Comparative Political Studies* (vol. 12), No. 1, pp. 3–27.

are often carried out to indicate changes in voters' preferences, but what really drives up electoral volatility in countries such as Georgia is the large turnover of political parties. Over the last fifteen years, the set of political parties or electoral blocs between which voters could choose has been a radically different one for each subsequent election. This feature of party development, therefore, derives much less from volatility in voters' preferences – voters do not swing from left to right or from nationalistic to tolerant that easily – than from the whims of elites.

The particular constellation of the Georgian political party landscape far from reflects real voter preferences or interests; in fact, many parties exist or continue to exist principally at the discretion of a single leader or a narrow elite within the party. The reasons why parties of largely corresponding ideological stripes refuse to merge or dissolve in favour of more viable parties, are manifold. The most mundane reason is probably that individual ambitions and interpersonal rivalries play a strong role in Georgian politics. Parties in Georgia are typically made up of core groups of confidants, whose loyalty to their party is grounded on personal relations. Party leaders and their cronies often also have an economic interest in maintaining their party organisation, since political parties in Georgia in many cases are patronage networks that deliver benefits in the form of jobs, financial gain, etc. to leaders and a narrow group of party representatives. Financial gain is, among others, extracted from the funds that many parties receive for the purpose of election campaigns. Because government allocations to parties are wholly insufficient to be able to run campaigns, parties depend on support from business structures or individual 'oligarchs'.²⁴

For the sake of crossing the electoral threshold, which at seven per cent for parliamentary elections is relatively high in Georgia, parties often combine forces in blocs. These electoral blocs mostly prove to be ephemeral constructions and their emergence, therefore, does not prevent a splintering of the political party scene. According to recent data, over 180 parties are officially registered at the Ministry of Justice.²⁵ A majority of these are probably defunct, many others are mere 'sofa parties' (denoting what it takes to have all party members seated). Of the remaining, viable parties, most are primarily associated with their leader, more so than with a particular ideological stand. Many of these parties are an empty shell beyond the stature of their leaders.

Another factor that promotes party fragmentation and a large turnover of parties is the fact that political party law in Georgia is relatively permissive; in order to be registered, a party is required to have one thousand members, and three hundred people need to attend the constituent congress of the party. In contrast to Ukraine, legislation on political parties does not state the requirement that party members must be geographically distributed.²⁶

The response of international political party assistance

Western actors have assisted political parties in Georgia and Ukraine since the early 1990s. Most organisations that implement party assistance programmes are affiliated with political parties in western countries. The National Democratic Initiative for International Affairs (NDI) and the International 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. On the other hand, many European political party foundations, which are more closely tied to national parties, primarily provide assistance to individual parties of a kindred ideology. The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung of the German Social Democratic Party, for instance, cooperates with like-minded social democratic parties in non-western countries.

24 Nodia, Ghia / Pinto Scholtbach, Álvaro (eds.): *The Political Landscape of Georgia. Political Parties: Achievements, Challenges and Prospects*. Delft: Eburon, 2006, p. 147.

25 Nodia, Ghia / Pinto Scholtbach, Álvaro (eds.): *The Political Landscape of Georgia. Political Parties: Achievements, Challenges and Prospects*. Delft: Eburon, 2006, p. 52.

26 The most recent legal document regulating the formation and activity of political parties is the 1997 Law on Political Associations of Citizens, available through: <http://www.legislationline.org/legislation.php?tid=57&lid=1966&less=false>.

A second type of institutional actor which is engaged in political party assistance are intergovernmental organisations, most notably the UNDP and OSCE.

The bulk of party assistance programmes consists of training, workshops and seminars, at which representatives of political parties acquire skills inherent to political party activity (campaigning, message development, setting up the organisational structure of the party, fundraising, to name a few). Part of the programmes are concentrated around election cycles, while other programmes have a more long-term perspective.

How have western actors, engaged in political party assistance, gone about addressing the flaws of party development and party system development in Ukraine and Georgia, as discussed in this paper? An overview of party assistance programmes by western actors shows that the issue of regional concentration of party activity and support in Ukraine has not been touched on to any significant extent by these actors. European political party foundations have implemented their (mostly) bilateral assistance programmes, regardless of the regional orientation of their partners. The 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 among the two of them, with both having the mandate to work in the capital city of Kiev. Party assistance programs by the 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. Whereas in Russia the (reformed) Communist Party and ruling parties have declined assistance by western actors, in Ukraine the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU), the Socialist Party of Ukraine (SPU) – which has roots in the soviet-era Communist Party – and Viktor Yanukovich' Party of the Regions have been more eager to cooperate with the American suppliers of party assistance. Apparently, these parties have enough democratic credentials in the eyes of the NDI and IRI to qualify for their assistance programs. In practice, the 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 were more receptive to the NDI and IRI proposals. More significantly, the NDI claims to have been instrumental, through coalition-building initiatives, in bringing the political forces together that later formed the nucleus of the united opposition that nominated Viktor Yushchenko as its candidate for the presidential elections of 2004.²⁷

In contrast to the NDI and IRI, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) of Germany, affiliated with the Christian-Democratic Union, has not sought to uphold a neutral stance in its work in Ukraine. Since 2002 the KAS has implemented a program aimed at consolidating a wide range of (putative) centre-right parties into one political force, with the explicit aim of strengthening the position of centre-right ideology in Ukrainian politics.²⁸ All or nearly all parties that were drawn into this initiative have their roots in the western and central regions of the country. The actual impact of the coalition-building initiatives by the NDI, the KAS, and possibly other western actors, on party system development in Ukraine remains to be properly assessed. In sum, party assistance has reached the political forces that are popular in the west and in the centre of Ukraine more than the opposing forces. There have been no substantial party assistance programmes that specifically seek to overcome east-west antagonism, or that incite parties with a strong support base in the east to develop their party organisation in the west, and vice versa.

With regard to Georgia, western actors have taken a more active approach in addressing the issue of elite polarisation. A majority of party assistance programmes in Georgia, as elsewhere, are of a bilateral nature and do nothing to promote coalition-building or communication between parties. In recent years, however, western actors have started some initiatives that suggest that western actors realise the desirability of breaching the situation of extreme elite polarisation. Two initiatives stand out. First, as in Ukraine, the NDI has for some years encouraged coalition-building, mainly through consultations and informal meetings with individual politicians and with representatives of political parties. Early 2003, three opposition leaders – Saakashvili, Zhvania, and Gamkrelidze, all of them formerly of the 'young reformers' faction of

27 Interview with an anonymous former NDI program officer.

28 Interview with an anonymous KAS official.

Shevardnadze's ruling party, the Citizen's Union of Georgia – were sent on a trip to Serbia that was funded by George Soros and had been encouraged by the NDI. The purpose of this trip was to explore opportunities for coalition-building among these three politicians and the political forces standing behind them. The trip appears to have generated some effect, since afterwards Saakashvili and Zhvania (Gamkrelidze refrained) announced their intention to forge a coalition alliance for the parliamentary elections to be held later in 2003.²⁹ Saakashvili and Zhvania, however, entered the parliamentary race heading different parties, and teamed up to resist the authorities only after the first, fraudulent round of the elections. In 2006 the NDI advised opposition parties to combine forces for the upcoming local elections. In the end, only the Conservative Party and Republican Party ran as a bloc, with the other parties either competing solo or boycotting the elections. Even if the coalition of the Republican and Conservative parties was an result of the NDI consultations, the overall attempt at coalition-building seemed rather fruitless.

Second, since 2005 a large multi-year party assistance project has been implemented by the Netherlands Institute for Multi-Party Democracy (NIMD) in cooperation with a Georgian NGO. The project is entirely funded by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the OSCE and has no analogies in the Former Soviet Union. One explicit objective of the project is to promote constructive relations between the leading parties of the country. For this purpose the project simultaneously involves six political parties – the ruling United National Movement, and five opposition parties: the Labour Party, the Conservative Party, New Rights, Industry Will Save Georgia, and the Republican Party. Representatives of these parties sit in jointly at training sessions and, among others, are taught negotiation and communication skills. Interestingly, the NDI and IRI deliberately do not apply this format of multi-party training out of the conviction that animosity between parties would render the training less effective.³⁰ Possible results of the NIMD/ODIHR are not yet discernable.

Conclusion

The string of democratic breakthroughs in Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine since the end of the 1990s is perceived by some as a 'second wave of democratisation' in the post-communist world, after the fall of the socialist regimes and the onset of democratisation in 1989–1991.³¹ The Rose and Orange Revolutions have increased expectations for democratic development in Georgia and Ukraine. One complicating factor in the democratic transition of Georgia and Ukraine are the gross inadequacies of party system development, which suffers from most of the common defects associated with party development in formerly authoritarian countries. In Ukraine, the emergence of a more or less stable national party system is, among others, hampered by regional divisions which are reflected in electoral outcomes. This east-west antagonism is barely addressed by western suppliers of party assistance programmes, most of whose programmes fit into what Carothers terms 'the standard method' of international party assistance.³² More by default than by design, the recipients of western party assistance are mostly those parties that are popular in the western and central regions of the country and unpopular in the southern and eastern regions. One of the most serious defects of party system development in Georgia is the splintering of the political party scene, resulting from fierce competition between elite groups. In recent years, initiatives specifically aimed at overcoming elite competition complement more typical party assistance programme types. These initiatives have, however, yielded limited results so far.

29 Devdariani, Jaba: Opposition leaders seek elusive accord in Georgia, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav012903.shtml>, Jan. 30, 2003.

30 Interview with an anonymous NDI program officer.

31 see: Bunce, Valerie / Wolchik, Sharon: Favorable Conditions and Electoral Revolutions, in: *Journal of Democracy* (vol. 17), No. 4, p. 5. or: McFaul, Michael: Transitions from Postcommunism, in: *Journal of Democracy*, (vol. 16), No. 3, p. 7.

32 Carothers, Thomas: *Confronting the Weakest Link. Aiding Political Parties in New Democracies*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006, chapter five.

Three to four years after the Rose and Orange Revolutions the prospects for party system institutionalisation (and hence, arguably, also for democratisation) are dim. The Orange coalition of political forces in Ukraine has partially fallen apart, with some constituents of the coalition participating individually in the 2006 parliamentary elections. These same elections have made clear that the east-west confrontation, if anything, has intensified. A perpetual crisis meanwhile has dominated political life. In Georgia, the ruling party dwarfs all other political forces and its representatives control the levers of executive and legislative power, thereby jeopardising 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 competitive politics is substantiated.