

FLUID PARTY POLITICS AND THE CHALLENGE FOR DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE IN GEORGIA

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Abstract

Party politics in Georgia since independence has suffered from a complete lack of institutionalization, reflected most visibly in the high rate of turnover of parties. Furthermore, Georgia's elusive party system has been affected by regime changes and by abuses of executive authority. This article highlights the dilemmas inherent to studying fluid party systems such as that of Georgia and identifies a number of underlying reasons for the lack of party system institutionalization. Over the course of a brief overview of international political party assistance in Georgia, it is argued that party assistance by western actors has not been responsive to the structural problems of party and party system development.

Keywords: *Georgia, political parties and party systems, authoritarianism, democracy promotion*

Introduction

The institutionalization of a party system enhances the prospects for democratic consolidation in states moving away from a recent authoritarian or totalitarian past. Whether or not party system institutionalization is also a necessary condition for democratic consolidation, at the very least it is believed to have a number of significant positive consequences for the quality of democratic governance.¹ It is therefore apt that Georgia's tumultuous post-communist political trajectory has been matched by equally tumultuous party system development. The two changes of head of state that have occurred since 1991 were accompanied by a radical realignment of the political party landscape. For the most part, parties have entered and left the political arena at dazzling speed between elections. As a result of the ever-changing supply of parties, voters have been confronted with a radically different set of parties and electoral coalitions from election to election. Not only are Georgia's political parties often transient, they also have persistently failed to satisfactorily perform functions that are associated with political parties in established democracies, such as representing groups in society, aggregating interests, or mobilizing voters. Those parties

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¹ Birch, Sarah. *Electoral Systems and Party Systems in Europe East and West*. in: *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 2:3 (2001), pp. 355-377
Also see: Mainwaring, S., and E. Zoco. *Political Sequences and the Stabilization of Interparty Competition: Electoral Volatility in Old and New Democracies*. in: *Party Politics* 13:2 (2007), pp. 155-178

that were not mere ‘flash parties’ were either parties of power, whose existence was contingent upon the regime’s durability, or parties that generally were not very influential. In this highly volatile environment, a range of international actors since the mid-1990s has attempted to assist Georgian political parties in transforming into stable, responsive and democratic organizations, as these actors have in almost all post-communist states of Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union.

In this article, the activity of these actors will be considered against the background of political party (system) development in Georgia since independence. The first section demonstrates the inherent difficulties of studying parties in conditions of fluid party politics and political ambiguity. The second and third sections consecutively argue which are the main characteristics of party development and which factors explain why political parties and the party system are such weak institutions in Georgia. On the basis of preliminary research findings, the concluding section will argue how there has been a disconnect between the efforts of international actors to assist parties and the actual shortcomings of party development.

Studying Parties in the Former Soviet Union

Political parties in Georgia have not grown out of social cleavages, do not represent large segments of society (though they may articulate their sentiments) and are difficult to identify on the left-right spectrum of classical political ideologies. Concepts from the study of parties in western societies often travel poorly to non-western contexts.² A significant literature has developed on party politics in Eastern and Central Europe, partly using old concepts from the study of political parties in western states, and partly inventing new ones. In Central and Eastern Europe, the degree of party system institutionalization is lower than in established democracies, but generally increasing against the backdrop of consolidated liberal democracy or firm democratic consolidation. Much less attention has been directed toward political parties in the former Soviet Union, where the level of party system institutionalization is even lower than in Eastern and Central Europe and party development mostly takes place under (semi-)authoritarian regimes or in a context of uncertain democratization at best. Understandably, it merits asking whether it is of much use to study parties in a political and party system as volatile and unstructured as that of Georgia.³

No systematic analysis of party politics in Georgia exists, and, except for large quantitative surveys, Georgian political parties are left out of cross-national comparative studies. The difficulty of studying parties in circumstances of fluid party politics becomes apparent when we attempt to apply common analytical concepts to party development in Georgia. Three basic characteristics of any party system are its size plus shape (or fragmentation), its degree

² For a discussion of this with regard to African political parties, see: Erdmann, Gero. *Party research: Western European bias and the ‘African labyrinth’*. in: *Democratization* 11:3 (2004), pp. 63-87.

³ Sartori argued 1976 that studying unstructured party systems is of little use, see: Sartori, Giovanni, “*Political Parties and Party Systems*”, New York, Cambridge University Press (1976). For an argument on why and how parties can be studied even in a highly volatile environment, see: Wolinetz, Steven. *Party System Institutionalization: Bringing the System Back In*. Conference paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, p. 15

of ideological polarization, and its degree of institutionalization.⁴ The first two of these form the basis of Sartori's influential classification of political parties, while the third characteristic features more often in more recent analyses of party systems.⁵

The most commonly used indicator for party system institutionalization is Pedersen's index of electoral volatility, which primarily reveals aggregate changes in support levels for parties between subsequent elections.⁶ Any discussion of electoral volatility in Georgia, however, would have to start with the observation that the volatility score of the Georgian party system results more from the whims of elites than from changes in voters' preferences. The high turnover rate of parties as well as incessant changes within parties and electoral alliances render calculating electoral volatility for Georgia since independence a very complicated and ultimately rather futile undertaking.⁷ Moreover, official elections results may not reflect the actual relative strength of parties given the alleged occurrence of electoral fraud. Those who do calculate scores of electoral volatility in Georgia for the purposes of large cross-national studies of post-communist countries find that it is either average⁸ or one of the highest in their sample.⁹ If one wants to assess party system institutionalization in Georgia by applying other popular indicators, such as party age or stable roots in society,¹⁰ then this would *ex ante* lead to the conclusion that the level of party system institutionalization in Georgia is extremely limited.

While political polarization, primarily around the pro-regime/anti-regime fault line tends to be quite high in Georgia, ideological polarization is not. Most relevant parties, if you ask them, position themselves as centre-right, speak out in favor of pro-market reforms, and consider Euro-Atlantic integration as the top priority of foreign policy. Only the Labor Party states it is left-of-centre, while the ruling United National Movement purports to be 'non-ideological' and to 'represent the whole population'.¹¹ Ostensibly, differences between parties in Georgia do not hinge on different ideological positions, and, to the extent that

⁴ Siaroff, Alan, *Comparing Political Regimes: A Thematic Introduction To Comparative Politics*, Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press (2005), pp. 184-5. Also see: Mainwaring, Scott, *Party Systems in the Third Wave*. in: *Journal of Democracy* 9:3 (1998), pp. 67-81

⁵ Particularly so since the path-breaking volume of Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully about party system institutionalization in Latin America. Mainwaring, Scott, and Timothy Scully. *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America*, Stanford: Stanford University Press (1995)

⁶ Pedersen, Mogens, *The Dynamics of European Party Systems: Changing Patterns of Electoral Volatility*. in: *European Journal of Political Research* 7 (1979), pp.1-26

⁷ Andrew Wilson and Sarah Birch likewise make the point about the uselessness of calculating electoral volatility when party turnover is excessively high with reference to Ukraine: Wilson, Andrew, and Sarah Birch, "Political Parties in Ukraine. Virtual and Representational", in: Paul Webb and Stephen White (eds.) *Political Parties in New Democracies. Trajectories of Development and Implications for Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2007)

⁸ Tavits, Margit, *The Development of Stable Party Support: Electoral Dynamics in Post-Communist Europe*, in: *American Journal of Political Science* 49:2 (2005), p. 285

⁹ Bielasiak, Jack, *Party competition in emerging democracies: representation and effectiveness in post-communism and beyond*, in: *Democratization* 12:3 (2005), p. 341

¹⁰ The indicator of stable roots in society is applied by Mainwaring and Scully in their influential study. Mainwaring, Scott, and Timothy Scully. *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America*, Stanford: Stanford University Press (1995)

Kuenzi and Lambright use party age as an indicator of party system institutionalization. Kuenzi, Michelle, and Gina Lambright, *Party Systems and Democratic Consolidation in Africa's Electoral Regimes*, in: *Party Politics* 11:4 (2005)

¹¹ IDEA, Georgia: *Country Report based on Research and Dialogue with Parties* (2006), p. 7, [http://www.idea.int/parties/upload/Georgia_report.pdf]

differences in ideological positions are discernable are they of secondary value in informing voters' choices.

The degree of party system fragmentation is given by computing Laakso and Taagepera's Effective Number of Parties (ENP) score, where the strength of parties is either determined by their vote share or by the percentage of seats they occupy in the legislature.¹² As with electoral volatility, it is not obvious what the best strategy is to calculate the ENP for the Georgian party system due to the high turnover of parties, the abundance of unstable electoral coalitions, the incongruence of parliamentary factions and political parties, and the high number of independents in parliament, among others. Bielasiak finds that the Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties between 1992 and 2004 on average was 4.5.¹³ This however conceals major fluctuations over the concerned time period, from a high point of 21.16 in 1992 to a low point of only 2.60 in 1999.¹⁴ More crucially, as Bogaards has demonstrated, 'different party constellations can hide behind the same effective number of parties'.¹⁵ With regard to the Georgian party system, then, it seems more important to identify the constellation of the party system, established by the shape of the system and mode of competition within the party system, which over the last fifteen years almost consistently has been that of a dominant ruling party versus a fragmented and disunited opposition.

Apart from the fact that conventional concepts for the analysis of party politics travel less readily to the fluid politics of Georgia than to most of Eastern and Central Europe, party politics in Georgia must also be viewed as inherently different compared to when the regime context is that of liberal democracy or transitions to liberal democracy. Under each of the three presidents' regimes since 1990 have there been serious restrictions on the observance of full political rights. Leaders have tended to tilt the political playing field in their favor by abusing their executive authority, but hardly ever to such an extent that pluralism and competitiveness were entirely thwarted. Although little consensus exists over the nature of the political regimes under Shevardnadze and Saakashvili, in part due to the lack of scholarship on modern Georgia, it is clear, and attested by democracy indices such as Freedom House's, that they should be regarded as highly defective democracies in terms of the degree to which full political contestation was inhibited.

Party politics in such a 'competitive authoritarian', 'semi-authoritarian' or 'illiberal democratic' setting should be expected to display a different dynamic than in a setting in which fair contestation can be taken for granted, among others for the following reasons, which all apply to Georgia. First, a 'party of power' is often established in (semi)authoritarian regimes in order to organize support for the regime. Such a party of power enjoys electoral advantage over opposition parties since they are habitually propped up by state resources. Second, competition between parties is often less about policies than about the rules of the political game, and primarily runs along a pro-regime/anti-regime

¹² Laakso, M., and R. Taagepera, *Effective Number of Parties: A Measure with Application to West Europe*, in: *Comparative Political Studies* 12:1 (1979), pp. 3-27.

¹³ Bielasiak, Jack, *Party competition in emerging democracies: representation and effectiveness in post-communism and beyond*, in: *Democratization* 12:3 (2005), pp. 331-56.

¹⁴ The figures have been derived from: Dawisha, K., and S. Deets, *Political Learning in Post-Communist Elections*, in: *East European Politics and Societies* 20:4 (2006), p. 691.

¹⁵ Bogaards, Matthijs, *Crafting competitive party systems: Electoral laws and the opposition in Africa*, in: *Democratization* 7:4 (2000), pp. 163-90.

division. Anti-regime parties will often declare democratic convictions as an important motive for their struggle against the incumbents, and organize anti-systemic protests against government decisions or election results. Third, clientelist and neo-patrimonial practices which are more common to authoritarian states than to democratic ones may also infect party politics, especially among parties close to the regime, and thereby have an impact on party development and interparty competition.¹⁶ Finally, the party system configuration under authoritarianism mostly lasts only as long as the regime lasts, since regime change often leads to a radical shake-up of the party landscape. Hence, party system change is conditioned upon the regime's capability of survival, instead of, for instance, gradual changes in voters' preferences as a result of shifting cleavage structures.

Continuity amid Fluidity

The previous section argued why studying party politics is replete with difficulties when the party system is to a very large degree unstructured and democracy is not 'the only game in town'. This begs the question whether it is worth at all to study relations between parties in these fluid, unstructured systems. Still, even in such cases patterns of continuity can be identified and analyzed. On the level of individual parties, it is possible to identify dominant types of parties, whereas on the level of the party system one can look into continuity and changes in the mode of competition between parties.

As noted, during most of the last fifteen years the power balance within the party system was that of one dominant force and a great number of mostly small opposition parties. Parties of powers have dominated legislatures both under the Shevardnadze (Citizens' Union of Georgia) and Saakashvili presidencies (United National Movement). Over the course of the second half of Shevardnadze's presidency a second party of power was present, pointing to the existence of an alternative centre of executive power outside of Tbilisi, in this case in the autonomous region of Adjara, ruled by strongman Abashidze, and in many ways until 2004 a de facto independent entity which unlike Abkhazia and South Ossetia did not seek full secession.

The dominance of parties of power is not only reflected by control over the legislature through a majority of seats, but also by the electoral advantage parties of power enjoy as a result of their proximity to or coincidence with ruling circles. The existence of a party of power is common in presidential regimes with authoritarian leanings, and is especially a hallmark of politics in many former Soviet republics. In Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, among others, parties of power have been established by regime actors, mostly from the presidential administration, to prop up incumbent regimes. If parties of power are successful in electoral terms, then they contribute to the regime's stability by bringing together people who are interested in the regime's survival and by granting the regime some degree of popular legitimacy.¹⁷ Parties of power tie political and administrative elites to them by assuming the key functions of a patronage network; jobs, economic gains and other goods are distributed as a reward for proven loyalty to the party and hence the regime. Parties of power

¹⁶ Erdmann, Gero. *Party research: Western European bias and the 'African labyrinth'*. in: Democratization 11:3 (2004), pp. 63-87

¹⁷ Brownlee, Jason, "Ruling Parties and Durable Authoritarianism." Center On Democracy, Development, and The Rule of Law, Working Papers number 23 (2004)

are an instrument of (semi-)authoritarian politics, and should be regarded as non-pluralistic in that they seek to dominate the political playing field through employing state resources to their benefit, thereby undermining full electoral contestation.¹⁸ Regime change in authoritarian states is often brought about by splits within political elites.¹⁹ Around the turn of the century, the Citizens' Union of Georgia lost its ability to unite the political elite, when influential young politicians such as Saakashvili, Zhvania and Burjanadze defected and started creating their own opposition parties. The political forces of these politicians subsequently were at the forefront of the Rose Revolution. The party of power should be regarded as a distinct party type. With regard to the other parties in Georgia, it is useful to consider Kitschelt's popular typology of programmatic, clientelistic, and charismatic parties, developed specifically for the analysis of party politics in the post-communist world. According to Kitschelt most parties in Eastern and Central Europe can be seen as combining programmatic, clientelistic, and charismatic elements in different proportions.²⁰ Since most opposition parties in Georgia neither boast discernable ideological platforms nor dispose of credible grassroots organizations or sufficient material means to be able to act as clientelistic networks, their main appeal to voters is of a charismatic, personalistic nature. Looking at the current set of parties in Georgia, many of them are first and foremost political vehicles for their leaders: Natelashvili, S. Zurabishvili, Davitashvili, Okruashvili, K. Gamsakhurdia, to name a few. These individuals are, as the literature on African party politics calls them, *big men* (only occasionally women) who would not accept a second spot in other parties and whose parties are close to inconceivable without them.²¹ This is not to say that these parties do not have serious political programs, but these programs are hardly ever their defining feature. The liberal Republican Party, one of a few parties which have experienced an orderly leadership succession, and the populist left-wing Labor Party, perhaps come close to the programmatic party type, which is associated with the old mass parties of Western Europe. The fact that personalistic parties exist at the discretion of their leaders obviously can be an important source for a high rate of party turnover. Often, leaders have moved quickly to abandon their parties when these did not meet certain electoral targets. The lack of classical programmatic parties does not necessarily bode ill for democratic development, as there seems to be evidence that democracy can endure in the absence of a core of strong programmatic parties.²²

Sources of Weak Party System Development

Most explanations for variations of party systems can be divided in sociological (broadly defined) and institutional ones.²³ While the former stress the primacy of cleavages and

¹⁸ The pluralist versus proto-hegemonic opposition is derived from Gunther and Diamond's typology of political parties. Gunther, Richard, and Larry Diamond, *Species of Political Parties: A New Typology*, in: *Party Politics* 9:2 (2003), pp. 167

¹⁹ Geddes, Barbara, "Authoritarian Breakdown." Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Department of Political Science, January 2004

²⁰ Kitschelt, Herbert, "Party Systems in East Central Europe: Consolidation Or Fluidity?", Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Strathclyde (1995)

²¹ On the phenomenon of 'big men' in party politics, see for example: Van de Walle, Nicolas, Presidentialism and clientelism in Africa's emerging party systems, in: *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 41:2 (2003), pp. 297-321.

²² Kitschelt, Herbert, *Linkages between Citizens and Politicians in Democratic Polities*, in: *Comparative Political Studies* 33:6-7 (2000), pp. 845-879

²³ Ware, Alan, "Political Parties and Party Systems", Oxford: Oxford University Press (1996)

historical legacies as the main formative factors of party systems, the latter concentrate on institutional traits such as regime type, the electoral system, and political party legislation. On the sociological side, initial conditions of the postcommunist period in Georgia were clearly hostile to the development of a stable party system around recognizable societal divisions. The social structure of society left behind by socialism did not provide for the type of cleavages that had once been decisive for the formation of party systems and their subsequent ‘freezing’ in Western Europe.²⁴ Nor did Georgia have a pre-communist legacy to fall back on in this regard, as some Central European states did. Moreover, the social fabric that was there at the onset of multiparty politics was gravely affected in the years immediately following the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the end of the socialist system, extreme economic deprivation, and bouts of armed conflict at the time of the Gamsakhurdia ouster and around the secession of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The Leninist legacy and its Soviet variant of patrimonial communism bequeathed on Georgia traditions of state-society relations that, according to Kitschelt, were inimical to the formation of strong programmatic parties.²⁵ Elements of the patrimonial-communist legacy include a weak civil society, systemic corruption, and patron-client relationships in governance. Under such conditions, the creation of parties from below by groups in society on the basis of well defined interests was unlikely to occur, while the emergence of the phenomenon of the party of power appears rather natural.

Turning to institutional factors, there is a reasonable degree of consensus among scholars of regime types that presidential systems are less conducive to democratic consolidation than arrangements with strong legislatures when states are in the initial stages of post-authoritarian democratization.²⁶ Among others, the ‘perils of presidentialism’ include the personalization of power, the often limited check on executive authority, the blurring of authority and accountability between the executive and legislative branches, and the lack of accountability of presidents due to their fixed terms of office.²⁷ As in most other former Soviet republics, but in contrast to the majority of Eastern and Central European states, the constitution of 1995 establishes Georgia as a republic with a strong presidency. After the Rose Revolution, presidential powers were further increased simultaneously with the introduction of formal semi-presidentialism through the creation of the post of prime minister. Strong presidential power in combination with weak parliamentarism has the following negative consequences for party development and party system institutionalization. First, the relative weakness of the legislature means that the main price of political competition is for control over the executive, which takes away much of the incentive for

²⁴ Lipset, Seymour, and Stein Rokkan, “*Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments*”, in: Seymour Lipset and Stein Rokkan (eds) *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*, New York, Free Press (1967)

²⁵ For the impact of the ‘leninist legacy’ on post-communist political transformation, see: Jowitt, Kenneth, “*New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction*” Berkeley: University of California Press (1993)

Kitschelt distinguishes between three types of communist rule: bureaucratic-authoritarian, national-accommodative, and patrimonial, and associates the Soviet Union with the latter type
Kitschelt, Herbert, “*Divergent Paths of Postcommunist Democracies*.” in: Richard Gunther and Larry Diamond (eds) *Political Parties and Democracy* (2001), pp. 299–323.

²⁶ Bunce, Valerie, *Comparative Democratization: Big and Bounded Generalizations*, in: *Comparative Political Studies* 33:6-7 (2000), pp. 710-1.

²⁷ Linz, Juan. J., “*The Perils of Presidentialism*.” in: *Journal of Democracy* 1:1 (1990), pp.51-69.

and Fish, M. Steven. “*Stronger Legislatures, Stronger Democracies*” in: *Journal of Democracy* 17:1 (2006), pp. 5-20.

creating strong and durable parties. Second, the fact that cabinets in Georgia are formed not on the basis of a majority parliamentary coalition, but directly by the president, further decreases the importance of parties.²⁸ Finally, presidents in strong presidential regimes often prefer to present themselves as standing above party politics and similarly tend to appoint non-partisan politicians to government posts.²⁹ This circumstance leads aspiring high-rank politicians to refrain from seeking party affiliation, as a party affiliation could hamper their careers.

With regard to electoral legislation, the following elements that probably have been damaging to party development can be singled out. First, elections in Georgia since 1995 have been conducted according to a mixed electoral formula, with around two thirds of parliamentarians elected from one countrywide electoral district through party lists, and the remaining third from single member districts (SMDs). Instead of delivering the ‘best of both worlds’ of PR and the majoritarian principle the mixed system in Georgia rather manifested itself, in Sartori’s formulation, as a ‘bastard-producing hybrid that combines their defects’.³⁰ Probably the main reason why the mixed system did not stimulate healthy party system development in Ukraine is because it created an alternative route, via SMDs, for parties and individuals into parliament.³¹ Especially parties with a limited popular base had reasons to try their luck in SMDs, thereby neglecting the national race. Small, unviable parties which otherwise would not be able of gaining representation could also team up with other parties in electoral alliances. These alliances would mainly be created for electoral purposes and rarely grew into durable coalitions. Both the opportunity to contest SMDs and to join electoral alliances created a major disincentive for these small parties to dissolve and formally merge with other parties.

Also damning for party development has been that electoral laws have been subject to a great number of amendments from election to election, making it difficult for parties to anticipate to electoral rules.³² Changing electoral rules have concerned, among others, the presence and height of an electoral threshold, the electoral formula, assembly size, and the composition of election management bodies. In many respects, each new parliamentary election marked the creation of a new party system and a new electoral system. In addition to electoral laws, legislation regulating the creation and operation of parties has set the threshold for party creation very low, contributing to undue party system fractionalization.

²⁸ D’Anieri, Paul, “*Understanding Ukrainian Politics. Power, Politics, and Institutional Design*” Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe (2007), p. 55

²⁹ Meleshevich, Andrei, “*Party Systems in Post-Soviet Countries*” New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan (2007), p. 69

³⁰ Sartori, Giovanni, “*Comparative Constitutional Engineering: An Inquiry Into Structures, Incentives, and Outcomes*”, New York, NY: NYU Press (1997), pp. 74-5

³¹ D’Anieri, Paul, “*Understanding Ukrainian Politics. Power, Politics, and Institutional Design*” Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe (2007), p. 159

³² Herron, Erik S., and Irakly Mirzashvili, “*Georgians Cannot Help Being Original: the Evolution of Election Rules in the Republic of Georgia.*” in: In Christopher Waters (ed.), *The State of Law in the South Caucasus*. London: Palgrave (2005)

International Political Party 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 since the mid-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 Republican Institute (IRI) in the United States are affiliated, albeit loosely, to the Democratic Party and the Republican Party, respectively, and typically provide assistance to a comprehensive range of political parties from mainstream ideological stripes and both from the opposition and from pro-regime forces, as long as these parties meet minimal criteria of viability and adherence to democratic values and non-violence. Until the Rose Revolution, the offices of NDI and IRI in Georgia were simultaneously involved in party assistance without a clear division of labor. Out of keeping with its mandate, NDI was directly engaged in coalition-building efforts among the opposition. The large majority of parties with which NDI and IRI worked before the Revolution no longer exist or are no longer relevant. After the Revolution it was agreed that from that moment NDI would only work with parties within the framework of its parliamentary program, while IRI continued working with parties outside parliament.

Important actors in party assistance are a number of political foundations (*Stiftungen*), each linked to one of the main political parties in Germany. Often, though far from exclusively, do these foundations provide assistance to individual parties that are considered partners in ideological terms. In Georgia, only the liberal Friedrich Naumann Foundation has selected a counterpart, the Republican Party of Georgia, while the other German foundations are either not active in Georgia or refrain from setting up a party assistance program because natural ideological partners cannot be identified and on the whole the party system is too unstructured.³³

Since 2005, a large multiparty project is carried out by the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) in partnership with a local NGO and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE. The project comprises six parties, including the party of power United National Movement and five opposition parties, that were deemed to be the most viable parties after the Rose Revolution. The main component of the projects is a program of training events to party activists on relatively conventional topics. The multi-party format was chosen to stimulate dialogue between parties, especially between the ruling party and opposition parties. The severe political tension of 2007-2008 however has eroded much of the potential for constructive relations between different parties. Additionally, it is not evident anymore that the set of five opposition parties that were selected at the onset of the project still constitute the core of opposition forces. Parties may have lost significance, while others have become more prominent.

Three important conclusions which can be derived from Thomas Carothers' writings on party assistance are: first, party assistance programming resembles a template which is copied to countries without necessary attention to local specifics of party systems; second, funders and

³³ Author interview with Konrad Adenauer Foundation official

implementers of party assistance have naive ideas of the virtues of party systems in western democracies and of the extent to which party system types, borrowed from a rather mythical image of party systems in Western European countries, can be replicated elsewhere; third, the effects of party assistance, if any, are mostly residual rather than transformative.³⁴ These conclusions appear to apply well to the case of Georgia. Favorite topics of party trainings in general as well as in Georgia are fostering intra-party democracy, promoting youth, and teaching campaign skills. While these are valuable matters in and by themselves, they hardly answer to the most pressing shortcomings of party development and party system development in Georgia, as described above. Moreover, they reveal a certain view on what parties should be that is informed by a typically western experience. While this view may very well be justifiable, it is of little value with regard to the real problems that the Georgian party system faces. Party assistance by international actors clearly has not had a transformative effect on parties in Georgia. Most of the parties that were assisted before the Revolution, are no longer at the forefront. The lament about Georgian political parties, particularly concerning their personalism, lack of constituency and lack of discernable program, moreover to a large extent resembles what it was ten years ago. Among the residual positive effects of party assistance are that thousands of individuals, many of them of young age, have been exposed to democratic ideas. As a result of this norm diffusion, democratic values are now probably more widely accepted and more deeply ingrained in society.

One reason for the discrepancy between the actions of providers of party assistance and the structural weaknesses of party development is that the political situation in which democracy assistance programs are carried out, at least in the post-communist world, has been mostly assumed to be one of progressive transition towards democratic consolidation. As we have seen, however, party development in Georgia has been heavily affected by (semi)authoritarian tendencies. A second element in party system development that has been difficult for providers of party assistance to deal with is the rapidly changing supply of political parties. Consequently, the impact of party assistance on parties, if any, is often lost quickly when parties cease to exist or become irrelevant.

Conclusion

The most important features of party development in Georgia since independence that distinguish it from party development in a majority of the Eastern and Central European states are the highly unstable supply of parties and the semi-authoritarian or politically ambiguous background against which multiparty politics has evolved. An implication of this is that concepts used for the study of party politics in Eastern and Central Europe and in established democracies often cannot be replicated when studying the party politics of Georgia and other fluid, inchoate party systems. Initial explanations for the weakness of party development in Georgia can be found in a number of sociological and institutional factors, such as the legacy of Soviet communism, the strength of the Georgian presidency, and the electoral system. A cursory overview of international political party assistance in Georgia reveals a disconnect between the structural weaknesses of party development and efforts by western actors to assist Georgian parties. Ongoing research by the author will shed more light on the scope and impact of international factors on Georgia's party system.

³⁴ Carothers, Thomas, "*Confronting the Weakest Link: Aiding Political Parties in New Democracies*" Washington, D.C, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2006).