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INTRODUCTION

Following the demise of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, international actors moved into the region to help the post-communist states and their societies break away from the legacy of authoritarian rule and let democracy take root. In nearly all post-communist states, political parties were among the recipients of the new wave of democracy assistance by international actors. Assistance to political parties, naturally, has been guided by the expectation that the assistance was indeed well-positioned to generate real effects on political parties. While parties, individual or several, were the immediate targets of assistance programs, the ultimate objective of assistance was to contribute to the emergence of party systems characterized by a degree of stability and adherence to democratic standards by all significant parties. Consistent with the failure of democratic transitions in most of the former Soviet Union (FSU), however, democratic party systems in that region did not crystallize, and assistance to political parties was unable to contribute to the accumulation of a mass of viable, democratic, and representative parties. This thesis is concerned with the question why party assistance over the course of the second decade of multi-party politics in Georgia and Ukraine failed to have a substantial positive impact.

Due to a high degree of party turnover in both Georgia and Ukraine, much assistance, in practical terms, throughout the years has been rendered futile. Of the five forces[1] that were elected to the current convocation of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, only one - the Communist Party of Ukraine - was also present ten years ago, and ironically, this party has barely received assistance from Western organizations. In Georgia, none of the forces present in the 2008 parliament was in parliament ten years earlier. Georgian parties which have survived as well as new parties are said to suffer from largely the same flaws that parties suffered from in the 1990s (Dolidze 2005). In 2009, a well-known Georgian political scientist termed the political party system 'embryonic at best' (Nodia 2009). The weakness of parties in Georgia has also been noted by donors and providers of political party assistance. An evaluation of USAID-funded Democracy and Governance programs in Georgia in 2002 noted that 'Georgia's party system remains weak, inchoate and unstable. Parties and parliamentary factions form, transform, and quickly disintegrate [...]' (ARD, Inc. 2002: v). A 2006 evaluation of party assistance by Dutch party institutes commented: 'Political parties actually hardly exist in Georgia. Political movements are in fact more or less loyal clans around individiduals' (Verheije et al. 2006: 59).[2]

In Ukraine, a modicum of continuity in political party development has become discernable in the new century, especially since the orange Revolution (Wilson and Birch 2007). Still, a noted expert on Ukraine in 2007 speaks of 'the incredible weakness of political parties in Ukraine' (D'Anieri 2007: 43), and in a 2008 scholarly article it is argued that 'Ukraine's party system is undeveloped and fluid' (Slomczynski et al. 2008: 93). In 2009, Our Ukraine, the political force that initially as an electoral bloc, and later as a party had been the biggest recipient of party assistance since the beginning of the decade, was on the brink of disintegration (Topolianskiy 2009). The negative assessment of Ukrainian parties is echoed in writings by the donors and providers of political party assistance. A work plan for 2006 of the International Republican Institute remarks: 'Though almost 100 political parties are registered in Ukraine, few are anything more than personality-driven organizations' (IRI 2005d: 4) and '[...]few political parties have developed into well-defined ideological forces that could guide the country's path' (idem: 2). A 2008 publication by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung argued that, prior the Orange Revolution, parties in Ukraine had only 'peripheral significance'. Moreover, 'The parties of Ukraine still contain many features of projects. They are first and foremost personality-centered networks, which are strongly interwoven with the economic interests of their leaders' (KAS 2008a: 32).[3]

These assessments of the state of party development in Georgia and Ukraine suggest that party assistance has been ineffectual in engendering durable change in Georgian and Ukrainian parties. In a most general formulation, party assistance seeks to contribute to the development of stable, democratic, and representative parties. Accordingly, the effectiveness of assistance is measured by the degree to which recipient parties become more stable, democratic, and representative. The limited effectiveness of party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine confirms rather than disconfirms the observations of those who have written about party assistance. Carothers (2006a: 162) finds that assistance to parties 'rarely has transformative impact, despite the hopes and sometimes beliefs of its providers' and 'is unlikely [...] to produce decisive changes in the basic organization and operation of parties (idem: 218). Gero Erdmann (2006: 1) similarly notes that 'transformative effects' from political party assistance have hitherto been seldom observed, while Peter Burnell (2000: i) argues about political party assistance that 'the effects are likely to be modest, the consequences marginal to political development'. The donor community, by contrast, does report success stories of party assistance.[4] In light of the paucity of detailed case studies of party assistance, little can be said with certainty about the mean impact of assistance programs (Burnell 2000c: 20).

The failure of party assistance to generate transformative effects is problematic for two reasons. First, after impressive growth in the 1990s, party assistance is now carried out in around 75 countries at a considerable financial cost.[5] The fact that these resources are allocated for an effort that, outside the donor community, is widely believed to be ineffectual, invites serious thinking about whether the effort is still worthwhile and whether its providers are sufficiently held accountable. Second, parties remain crucial institutions in political processes, both in democracies where they fulfill indispensable procedural functions such as organizing government and recruiting candidates for elections (Lipset 2000; Schattschneider 1942), or as 'agents of change' in authoritarian settings. The low degree of institutionalization of party systems in many target countries of party assistance is believed to depress the quality of democratic governance (Tóka, 1997). If parties are weak in settings with an uneven electoral playing field, moreover, they are unable to mount an effective challenge to incumbent forces. The poor state of political parties outside most Western democracies suggests that, in theory, they could benefit massively from assistance; in practice, however, parties are rarely transformed as a consequence of party assistance.

Since they are often vehicles of personal ambitions and products of deep-reaching legacies of political culture, parties are infamous for being resistant to reform. In new democracies, undemocratic attitudes are still widely found within parties. For these and related reasons, parties are sometimes depicted as the 'weakest link' in democratization (Carothers 2006a: Randall 2007: 642). Party assistance, accordingly, is riven with difficulties. While rather tangible results are achieved in different areas of democracy assistance - aimed at, for instance, reform of the judiciary or the electoral system - party assistance is less likely to produce quick results. Altogether, party assistance is 'one of the most controversial and vexing policy areas in democracy promotion' (Melia 2005: 24). It targets a type of actor that is a participant and a stakeholder of domestic political processes and that is typically on the forefront of political change. The perception that party assistance is not very effective combined with its enhanced sensitivity raises important (political) questions about the assistance effort. The following chapters are concerned with the question why party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine, despite a sustained effort of many years, has not been capable of helping parties to become viable and democratic organizations. Logically, the degree of effectiveness of party assistance programs is a function of the adequacy of the input of assistance on the supply-side plus the permissiveness of conditions on the recipient-side of assistance. An answer to the question about the ineffectiveness of party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine therefore is sought both in the nature of the assistance effort and in domestic determinants of party (system) development in

Georgia and Ukraine. The weight of domestic factors has been identified before as a brake on the effectiveness of party assistance programs. Carothers (2006a: 162) explains the absence of a 'transformative effect' from party assistance from 'the difficulty of the task and the inadequacies of much of the assistance', where the difficulty of the task is largely determined by constraining factors over which providers of assistance have little control. Elsewhere he argues that 'party aid tends to have only rather limited effects not only because parties are hard organizations to try to help but also because parties are shaped by a whole set of underlying conditions and structures upon which party aid usually has no bearing' (Carothers 2006a: 182). A study of party assistance in Eastern Europe and Eurasia commissioned by USAID in a similar vein contends that the success of party assistance hinges on a number of (domestic) structural variables which are outside the control of providers of assistance and therefore 'may impede the success of even the most expertly designed party assistance programs' (USAID 2007: 9).

The main argument which is unfolded in the following chapters is that domestic constraints on the development of stable and democratic parties in Georgia and Ukraine have practically presented a sufficient condition for the failure of party assistance. Assistance has been unable to outweigh these domestic constraints, which include foremost the impact on party politics of a less-than-democratic regime context and a high degree of volatility in party politics. This conclusion is alarming because the domestic constraints on party development in Georgia and Ukraine are also observed, in varying degrees, in many other countries where assistance is provided. The supply-side of assistance is investigated by conceptualizing party assistance as a type of norm promotion. As will be demonstrated, conditions that are often seen as conducive to norm diffusion are largely absent in the diffusion in Georgia and Ukraine of what will be referred to as the 'party assistance norm'. The effectiveness of party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine is further undermined by the requirement to adhere to standards of good practice, obliging the providers of assistance, among others, to work with an inclusive, non-partisan selection of parties. The discussion of the input of assistance is supported by data that were collected by the author over the course of nearly one hundred interviews with both recipients and providers of assistance.

Significance of the study

Roughly until the early 1990s, scholarly publications on Third Wave democratization tended to downplay the weight of external factors on domestic political processes. In the introduction to a path-breaking volume on democratic transitions, Schmitter (1986: 5), for instance, noted: '[O]ne of the firmest conclusions that emerged...was

that transitions from authoritarian rule and immediate prospects for political democracy were largely to be explained in terms of national forces and calculations. External actors tended to play an indirect and usually marginal role... '. Despite the fact that the external dimension can no longer be said to be a 'forgotten dimension of democratization' (Pridham 1991: 18), as, indeed, 'our appreciation of the international dimensions of democratization has grown' (McFaul et al. 2008: 6), 'our understanding of the causal impact of international instruments on domestic outcomes is still underdeveloped and unsystematic' (ibid). Schmitz (2004: 409) similarly notes that 'even though a consensus is emerging on the significance of international influences on regime change (...), surprisingly little systematic work has explored the exact mechanisms linking international norms and domestic political change'. Rather than uncovering the 'exact mechanisms' of effects from international factors on political processes, a few studies have attempted to measure the aggregate effect of foreign aid on democratization, finding no evidence of a relation between aid levels and democratization (Knack 2004), and a 'significant, albeit modest, impact on democratic outcomes' from USAID democracy assistance programs on democratization (Finkel et al. 2007: 435). The conclusion of Schmitter and his collaborators about the relative insignificance of external factors in democratization is reflected in literature on political parties. Since party politics is regarded as being overwhelmingly shaped by domestic factors, authors in studies of party politics rarely involve international factors, with probably the biggest share of the studies that do involve international factors focusing on the effects of Europeanization on national political parties (e.g. Ladrech 2002; Lewis and Mansfeldová 2007). Notwithstanding the typically much larger role of domestic factors in party development than of international factors, as Burnell (2000b: 3) argues, 'the study of party politics in new democracies must be alert to the role of international factors including international party support'.

Knack (2004: 262) notes that quantitative studies such as his 'must be complemented by case study evidence that more closely examines the effectiveness of particular democracy-promoting programs'. This thesis is concerned with the effectiveness of one type of democracy-promoting program - political party assistance. In the sole book-length investigation of the topic, Carothers argues credibly that party assistance 'rarely has transformative impact' (Carothers 2006a: 162) and 'is unlikely [...] to produce decisive changes in the basic organization and operation of parties (idem: 218). Assistance is also frequently looked upon as an ineffectual undertaking by recipients.[6]

According to Burnell (2000c: 20), however, 'at present we simply do not know enough about the consequences, intended and unintended, to reach such conclusions [about

the alleged limited impact of party assistance]. Large-scale empirical research by area specialists and comparativists is needed first'. Erdmann (2006: 1) similarly observes that, in the absence of detailed case-oriented studies, it is as yet too early to pass a verdict on the effects of party assistance. This thesis contributes to filling the void of empirical scholarly research on party assistance. Starting from the observation that parties in Georgia and Ukraine during the time that they have participated in assistance programs generally have remained weak and unreformed organizations, the thesis asks why party assistance has not been able to make inroads in (contributing to) the reform of parties.

The thesis purports to remedy crucial shortcomings of existing research on external influences in political processes (McFaul et al. 2008). First, contra the tendency of studies on democracy promotion to focus overwhelmingly on the input of the outside factor, 'isolating the effects of outside factors requires an assessment of domestic factors in the process of democratic change. The study of international democracy promotion, in other words, necessitates breaking the domestic-international barrier' (idem: 7). Jacoby (2006: 625) similarly argues that 'a focus on external influences is a growth area only if it addresses the union of foreign and domestic influences'. Instead of jumping immediately to a discussion of party assistance, this study first investigates the domestic variables which have shaped party development in Georgia and Ukraine in order to understand why party assistance has not been able to generate more effect. As will be argued, domestic constraints on the development of stable and democratic parties have invalidated the assistance effort to such an extent that the assistance has become highly ineffectual. The discussion of the domestic variables is not just an upbeat to the case studies of party assistance, but itself contains innovative perspectives on the nature of party development in (semi-)authoritarian states, in particular those of the FSU, with fluid party politics. Through a synthesis in the overall argument of the domestic and international dimensions of party development, this study weaves together insights from two subfields of political science. The discussion of domestic variables is informed by insights into areas of investigation that are traditionally situated within Comparative Politics - party politics, constitutional design, electoral legislation, etc. The body of literature on norm diffusion which provides insights for the discussion of party assistance, on the other hand, is embedded in International Relations. Integrating the two subfields of political science is increasingly acknowledged as a productive approach (Schmitz 2004). Indeed, in a discussion of transnational diffusion, Bloom and Orenstein (2005: 4-5) concurrently note that 'following developments in international relations theory and sociological

institutionalism (…) Comparative Politics scholars have begun to collapse boundaries between International Relations and Comparative Politics'.

A second shortcoming that this study addresses is that 'existing analyses on international democracy promotion focus on the democracy promotion efforts (the "supply side") of individual countries' (McFaul et al. 2008: 6-7). The case studies in this thesis, by contrast, look at the entire range of significant actors in party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine. The distinction between U.S. and European providers of assistance masks striking similarities in approaches and conceptual underpinnings. As will be argued throughout the pages of this thesis, party assistance programs, whether by U.S. or by European actors, are shaped by a shared underlying norm about the type of organization that recipient parties transform into.

The third shortcoming of existing research that this study helps to correct is that 'to date, studies of democracy promotion have tended to follow "successful" cases of democratization' (McFaul et al. 2008: 9), a point reiterated by a string of authors. 'There has been a bias to focus on successful cases of diffusion' (Checkel 1999b: 86), and 'efforts to explore norms suffer from a bias toward the norm that worked' (Legro 1997: 34). Since 'scholars [...] have a tendency to select for study a subset of events that actually occur and to neglect events that do not occur', 'very few studies have looked at failed campaigns' (Levy 2007: 201). However, 'serious analysis of the external influences on internal change cannot focus only on cases of successful democratic breakthroughs, but must heed equal attention to cases where either significant external efforts to encourage transition to democracy produced little effects, or where successful transition to democracy has apparently taken place with virtually no external role' (Magen 2009: 17). Despite the call to study negative cases, few have taken up the task.[7]

This thesis further contributes to existing scholarly work by explicitly conceptualizing party assistance as a type of norm promotion. Doing so, the thesis draws on insights from social constructivist literature on the transnational diffusion of norms, rules, and policies. Rather than operationalizing a theoretical framework of norm diffusion throughout, the thesis turns to insights from social constructivism to gain a complementary perspective on the failure of the party assistance as norm promotion. Providers of political party assistance have previously been identified as 'norm entrepreneurs' (Brucker 2007; Dakowska 2005: 155), and party assistance has been associated with norm promotion (Carothers 2006a: 188-9), but a systematic treatment of party assistance as a type of norm promotion has not been performed before. Viewing party assistance as norm promotion in line with constructivist

literature is done on the premise that the approach is instrumental in explaining the failure of assistance to effectively pass over a set of standards of behavior regarding party operation that collectively constitutes a norm. The discussion of norm diffusion in this study diverges from most other discussions of norm diffusion in two respects: first, as noted above, scholars tend to look at 'successful' norms that *do* travel across borders. Here, by contrast, the focus is on cases of failed norm promotion despite concerted efforts. Second, while in most studies the norm recipients are states, represented by government bureaucracies, this study descends to a lower level of analysis at which the recipients are non-state organizations. Although there are no restrictions to studying norm diffusion to actors below the level of states, this is done relatively rarely.

Georgia and Ukraine are expressly understood as negative cases of norm diffusion. Studying negative cases of norm diffusion in party assistance is particularly relevant because the non-occurrence of diffusion is believed to be more common in party assistance than instances of successful diffusion. Georgia and Ukraine present poignant cases for the examination of failed party assistance. They have been among the biggest recipients per capita of democracy assistance, both in the FSU and worldwide, and party assistance programs in the two states have been bigger than in most surrounding states. Furthermore, Georgia and Ukraine have experienced dramatic instances of regime change in the form of 'electoral revolutions' which have raised important questions, both scholarly and political, about the role and impact of Western democracy promotion. Besides these factors, Georgia and Ukraine have not been unlike other FSU states (with the exception of the Baltic states) in terms of political trajectory and party (system) development. As these other states, Ukraine and Georgia have not gone through a transition to liberal democracy. The persistence of (semi-)authoritarianism in Ukraine (until 2005) and Georgia, like elsewhere in the FSU, has had a profound impact on party politics. In FSU states such as Georgia and Ukraine, where some degree of political pluralism was preserved, party politics has been characterized by a large degree of volatility and weak party institutionalization. Given that Georgia and Ukraine are rather typical cases within the FSU, the findings from the two case studies of this thesis are expected to prove generalizable to other FSU states to at least some degree. Moreover, it is expected that the main argument developed throughout this study, concerning the centrality of domestic constraints on party development in explaining the relative failure of party assistance, holds up for other cases which contain the first, and at least one of the second and third of the following conditions: the presence of party assistance programs; a less-than-democratic political setting; and a high degree of volatility in party politics. In-depth

investigations of cases, naturally, would have to demonstrate whether the findings from this study indeed hold up in different locations with analogous conditions.

Plan of the thesis

After this introduction, the thesis proceeds as follows. Chapters one, two and three lay the ground for the case-study based chapters four, five, and six. Chapter one addresses key questions related to empirical research on political party assistance. Its first section provides a working definition of party assistance and explains the relation of party assistance to adjacent concepts such as democracy assistance and democracy promotion. Section two specifies the type of case study research conducted for this study. In relation to the case-studies, section three makes explicit five paramaters that are relevant to any research design in the social sciences. In the process, this section delineates the subject of inquiry and sets its temporal and spatial boundaries. Finally, the chapter discusses data-gathering and the use of sources, in particular with respect to interviewing.

Chapter two offers an introduction to political party assistance and identifies the elements of what will be referred to as the 'party assistance norm'. The first section introduces general features of party assistance to the extent that they apply to party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine. The next section discusses two principal standards of good practice which play an important role in party assistance and, as will be demonstrated later in chapters five and six, bear consequences for the effectiveness of assistance. In section three, party assistance is conceptualized as a form of norm promotion in line with other phenomena that are similarly conceptualized as norms. From a collection of publications by the donors and providers of party assistance, the key elements of the 'party assistance norm' are deduced. Drawing extensively on insights from social constructivist literature into the diffusion of norms, section four, finally, presents a number of tentative explanations for the failure of party assistance that subsequently will be revisited in the course of chapter six.

Political party assistance has a bearing on party development in recipient countries and by extension on political change. Besides, it is only one type in a broader effort of democracy assistance and only form of external influence on political parties. Chapter three discusses several of the layers of the context of political party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine. The first section notes where Georgia and Ukraine have been situated in regime classifications. Section two discusses the foremost explanations for why Georgia and Ukraine, unlike a range of other post-communist states, have not become liberal democracies after 1991. Section three pauses on the sources of the Rose and Orange Revolutions, probably the most significant political events in Georgia

and Ukraine since the early 1990s. Together, sections one, two, and three deal with political change. Section four looks at other forms of democracy assistance than assistance to parties, and section five, finally, gives an overview of other elements in the 'international dimension' of political party development than party assistance.

To understand why party assistance has not been able to generate more effect, it is imperative to consider which domestic factors have blocked the development of stable and democratic parties in Georgia and Ukraine. Chapter four provides an extensive discussion of these factors. Section one argues what has been distinctive about party politics in Georgia and Ukraine, particularly relative to party politics in Central and Eastern Europe. Section two notes the pitfalls of studying party politics that are as volatile as they have been in Georgia and Ukraine for most of the post-communist period. Sections three, four, and five in turn discuss three of the major constraints on party development in Georgia and Ukraine - the elite-driven nature of party development, the limited overall leverage of parties, and the impact on party politics of the less-than-democratic political context. Section six demonstrates how these constraints have translated into the incentives that have driven party creation and operation. Section seven traces trends in party development during the years that the research comprises. Section eight argues on the basis of which criteria parties in Georgia and Ukraine should be classified in order to capture the dynamics of party politics in these countries. Section nine, finally, summarizes the main implications flowing from the discussion in this chapter, for party assistance.

Chapters five and six present the findings from the two case studies of political party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine from 1999-2000 until 2007-2008. The first two sections of chapter five consist of a raw overview of party assistance programs in Georgia and Ukraine, respectively. Sections three and four assess to what extent providers of assistance have complied with the two core standards of good practice that were identified in chapter two. Chapter six is specifically concerned with the failure of party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine. Its opening section explores what effects there have been from party assistance in the two recipient countries. The second, most crucial section assesses how party assistance has related to the domestic constraints on party development that were highlighted in chapter four. Section three shifts focus to the recipients of assistance, listing the main reasons why these have failed to comply with the party assistance norm. Finally, the chapter takes a quick tour of the main shortcomings in the input of political party assistance, which in varying degrees have contributed to invalidate the effort.

The conclusion summarizes the core arguments put forward in preceding chapters regarding the failure of party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine, and in addition reflects on the implications of the findings from this research for the future of party assistance.