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ABSTRACT

International assistance to political parties has been continuously carried out in Georgia and Ukraine for almost all of the post-communist period, as in most other post-communist states, and as part of a broader policy of democracy promotion. Despite this sustained effort, parties in Georgia and Ukraine have remained far removed from the type of stable, democratic, and representative organization that is commonly aimed for by party assistance. This thesis asks why party assistance during the second decade of multi-party politics in Georgia and Ukraine has failed to exert a bigger positive impact on parties. In search of an answer, the thesis looks at both the input of the assistance (the international dimension) and domestic constraints on the development of stable and democratic parties (the domestic dimension). In relation to the input of assistance the thesis identifies a 'party assistance norm' that is shared between the main providers of assistance, and accordingly conceptualizes party assistance as a type of norm promotion. It is then argued that there are inherent qualities to the 'party assistance norm' which contribute to limit its impact, including a lack of determinacy and moral urgency, a cognitive and ideational distance between providers and recipients of assistance, and incompatibility with the incentives to which parties are often exposed. Regarding the domestic dimension, two constraints on stable and democratic party development which in particular have undercut the effectiveness of party assistance are highlighted: first, a high degree of volatility in party politics, resulting in large part from institutional arrangements and the 'elite ownership' of parties; and second, the impact on party development of a (often) less-than-democratic political context, reflected mainly in the existence of regime-initiated parties which distort the electoral playing field. As a consequence of these constraints on party development, most relevant parties that were eligible to receive party assistance were in fact unsuitable recipients: they were either unlikely to survive long, or their operation was driven by incentives which were incompatible with the values that party assistance sought to infuse into party politics, or both. The practice of party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine moreover reveals that providers of assistance were generally powerless against the domestic constraints on party development, due in large part to standards of party selection to which assistance has to adhere. Only if party assistance had adopted a highly unconventional approach that would have violated the prevalent standards of party selection, would party assistance perhaps have generated more effect. The existence of the domestic constraints on party development therefore has practically presented a sufficient condition for the failure of party assistance. Given that these constraints on party development are also found in many other recipient countries, it appears plausible that the account offered in this thesis can be extended to other cases.