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EXPORTING EUROPOLITICS IN THE EASTERN NEIGHBORHOOD:

ELECTIONS IN THE POST-COMMUNIST AREA, THE REGIONAL ACTIVITY OF EUROPARTIES AND INTER-PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION

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Abstract:

The opening up of the electoral arena and the staging of more-or-less competitive elections in recent years in most states that make up the EU's Eastern Partnership has created new opportunities for European political families (Europarties) to export their brand and impact party competition there. Increasingly, one detects a dual dynamic, whereby Europarties seek partners and try to establish a presence in new electoral arenas, and local actors seek status and legitimacy by associating themselves with recognizable European ideological traditions and party families. This paper tries to map the impact of this dual dynamic on the patterns and dynamics of electoral competition in Eastern Neighborhood countries. The authors examine recent elections in three countries (Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova) with regards to the ways the increasing presence of Europarties affect the degree of consolidation and the direction of competition in party systems there. Preliminary results point to interesting congruence between Europarty involvement in national politics, and processes of consolidation of partisan identities and polarisation of partisan competition as it transforms from intra-elite power contests to more ideological (and societally more consistent) contestations of all three states' overall international orientation.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper will suggest some new avenues in the research of the impact of Europe on national party politics. These new avenues concern both sides of the relationship: On the 'Europe side', this paper will focus on a seldom studied transmission mechanism of influence from the European to the national level of party politics, the transnational party federations most commonly referred to as 'Europarties'. On the 'national side', this paper will test the effect of 'Europolitics' on the next frontier of European party politics, the party systems of the states comprising the Eastern Partnership (EaP) of the EU. Both approaches are relatively novel. While the impact of Europe on national party politics has been studied extensively in the last 20 years, a focus on Europarties as avenues of this impact has been lacking. This was understandable given the low degree of institutionalization of Europarties until recently, but today it may make sense to start exploring this avenue as well. On the other hand, the party politics of Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet area have been studied extensively through the lens of literature on transition, democratisation and, especially, the variants of competitive-electoral authoritarian regimes. This paper suggests that the increasing closeness of these countries with Europe contributes, among other things, to the establishment of more stable and patterned party politics. The impact of Europarties, as opportunity structures for politicians in EaP states, is seen here to be one mechanism pushing towards this direction.

This paper will develop some primary theoretical suggestions about the ways Europarties can affect party politics on a national level, and especially in the EU's periphery under conditions of as yet unformed party systems, semi-authoritarian power structures and rampant economic and political corruption. These theoretical suggestions will then be tested on the cases of three post-Soviet states: Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The choice of these cases was made thus: Out of the six member-states of EaP, two (Belarus and Azerbaijan) are perfect authoritarian systems, where the staging of electoral contests merely serves as a confirmation of non-democratic rulers. Europarties have contacts with dissidents and parties in these states, but it makes little sense to discuss political developments there in terms of party systems and organizations. Of the remaining four EaP states, I choose to focus on the three that have the most varied political systems. Armenia's political system is made up of competitive factions of a unified political-economic elite and exhibits significant elements of authoritarianism[1]. Instead, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine all share one characteristic that has opened up their respective political systems and made them reasonably multifaceted and unpredictable: The staging of democratic revolutions that, even if culminating in little more than alteration between factions of oligarchic elites, have created expectations with respect to the conduct of elections and the respect of civil liberties, and, perhaps most importantly, have made genuine competitive politics ('democracy' or 'anti-authoritarianism') a normative reference point (as well as a discursive resource) of party competition.

The primary argument of this paper is that Europarties are important mechanisms of legitimation and consolidation of party politics in these regimes, but not necessarily forces that inescapably contribute to further democratisation or to the establishment of Western-style party politics (in terms of genuine expression of cleavages and societal mobilization, and of the establishment of full-fledged party organizations). In all three cases, democratic revolutions have made

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[1] Bunce and Wolchik (2010: 45).

democratization/authoritarianism the overarching dimension of political competition and increased proximity to Europe (through the Eastern enlargement in 2004-2007 and the subsequent creation of EaP in 2008-2009) has further strengthened it by allowing self-proclaimed anti-authoritarians to underline their visions of domestic governance with outspoken positions on these states' long-term strategic orientation (with democracy and 'Europe' presented as mutually reinforcing choices). In all three cases and to a varying degree, the democratization/authoritarianism axis has also served to structure better than before across parties the expression (if not genuine representation and mobilization) of social divisions (linguistic, ethnic, religious), and it forms a powerful normative framework with which personal-oligarchic agendas are compelled to engage. In this context, the opportunities for transnational political cooperation offered by Europarty affiliation are important legitimating mechanisms for 'anti-authoritarian' strategies, they exacerbate the polarisation and the ideological character of what would normally be intra-elite competitions, and they serve as resources for organizational evolution and ideological streamlining of what remain essentially elite-driven, weakly institutionalized parties.

THE IMPACT OF EUROPARTIES ON NATIONAL PARTY POLITICS

For long Europarties were considered secondary actors, federations completely dominated by their constituent parts, like-minded national parties. Such research that exists on the transnational dimensions of party politics on a European level has focused on the role of European Parliament groupings and the way they contest issues put to vote there[2]. When it comes to Europarties though, interest has been much smaller[3]. Perhaps this is understandable, given that the exact place of Europarties in the EU political system is unclear, and that the interactions between them do not follow a discernible pattern akin to proper party system dynamics[4] (unlike European Parliament groups, that are seen as contesting socioeconomic issues of European governance reasonably predictably according to their relative ideological positions along the Right-Left axis[5]).

Having said that, it might be the right time to start considering the role of Europarties in EU politics more seriously – and, going beyond that, even start pondering the independent effect of Europarties on national party politics. Inevitably, to do the latter one has to start from the former. Perhaps the most important function of Europarties in the EU political system is that of providing an alternative forum of coordination, communication and exchange between political actors along ideological lines. Europarties have slowly built up an expertise in staging summits for their member-party leaders and specialized meetings for party experts and/or like-minded ministers ahead of the plenary meetings of EU organs. This makes Europarties an important arena for the exchange of viewpoints of national actors, as well as important actors in their own right, to the extent that

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[2] Van Hecke (2010: 395-396).

[3] Important studies on Europarties include Bardi (2002, 2006), Deschouwer (2006), Ladrech (2006) and Van Hecke (2010).

[4] 'Party systems are defined by reference to a given structure of competition, in which the patterned interactions between the parties enjoy a pronounced degree of predictability and stability […] Europarties that emerge in the European Parliament are much more akin to the notion of the basket of parties, being juxtaposed to another rather than competing with one another in any predictable or patterned sense' (Mair 2000: 38-39). While subsequent research has shown that specific dynamics are discernible in the legislative arena of the European Parliament, transnational party federations still interact with each other in terms of what Mair called an unformed 'basket of parties'.

[5] See Hix et al (2007).

Europarties also maintain an independent capacity to put items in the agenda of these meetings and help the discussion move accordingly. In other words, Europarties are trying to carve out a niche in the EU polity, mediating between the supranational and the governmental-national level and exploiting any opportunities they have for independent agenda-setting and policy entrepreneurship in a framework still firmly dominated by member-parties[6].

If Europarties hold such a modest position in EU politics, one can wonder whether it makes any sense to even ask about their independent effect on national party politics. In some senses, such effect is really miniscule. If we think about Peter Mair's famous argument about the 'limited impact of Europe on national party systems'[7], then the effect of Europarties on national party politics (as a subset of the overall European impact) should indeed be marginal to non-existent. To the extent that Europarties remain creatures of their constituent units, national member-parties, any effect of Europe on national party politics (such as the one detected in recent years due to the Eurozone crisis) would probably best be attributed to the adaptation activities of national parties in national arenas. If anything, Europarties seem incapable to escape the patronage of their most prominent members, if these members wish to use the arenas provided by transnational partisan cooperation to push their positions on smaller like-minded partners (as evidenced in the activism of CDU in EPP forums towards centre-right parties from the European South). And yet, the proliferation of this type of cooperation, as well as the independent functioning of Europarties, contributes to changes on the national level, even if this goes unacknowledged in relevant research. The analysis of Poguntke, Aylott, Ladrech and Luther of the effect of Europe on national party organization for example correctly identifies the empowerment of EU specialists within these organizations[8]. However their analysis neglected another interesting organizational development, namely the establishment and constant empowerment of the position of 'international secretaries' of parties, whose role in liaising with counterparts in other national parties has received a boost by the organizational expansion of Europarties themselves.

Beyond examples such as this though, the independent effect of Europarties on the national level is indeed small – but only if one focuses on existing EU member-states. Interestingly, Europarties are probably the only actor, arena or institutional setting of the EU polity where non-EU policymakers have ready and relatively easy access. All three major Europarties have partners in non-EU states, and it has been shown that their activity as complements of the EU's conditionality ahead of enlargement is very significant: Europarties have not only pushed for organizational changes in affiliated or wannabe-affiliated parties in states close to accession, but they have even influenced these parties' programmatic and ideological profile (most importantly, by pushing these parties to adopt unequivocally pro-EU programmatic positions)[9]. What Europarties offer in return to non-EU national party actors is really not much different than what they offer to party politicians in EU member-states: Opportunities for positive exposure in international and national media (photo-ops etc.), campaign coordination and assistance, a forum for the promotion of a party's (or a

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[6] It is in this sense that Van Hecke (2010) insists on the use of the term 'transnational' to describe the functions of Europarties. For an example of their coordinating function, see his analysis of their role in the Convention to draft the EU Constitution (Van Hecke 2008).

[7] Mair (2000).

[8] Poguntke et al (2007).

[9] See the interesting empirical work of Klapacova (2013). On the effect of Europe on the programmatic profile of parties before and after EU accession in Central and Eastern Europe see Vachudova (2008).

government's) positions, a repository of new policy ideas, elite coordination, and a powerful signal of corporate and ideological identity[10]. Yet what is usually welcome but secondary dividends for parties from EU member-states can be an important difference-maker for politicians and parties in states expecting to accede to the EU, or desperately hoping to do so. Acquiring 'European credentials' by establishing affiliation with a Europarty, and the opportunities that come with this, is an important complement and a visible example of what these parties want to achieve as their key policy, i.e. European membership. With little opportunities to meet European leaders in EU summits, Europarty gatherings become for these leaders first-class opportunities for self-promotion. The same logic applies to party cadres on lower levels of party leadership as well[11]. It is then a counterintuitive suggestion that, while Europarties' position in the EU polity makes them an ever more important but still quite modest actor vis-à-vis national parties from EU members, this very same position and function is very important in the eyes of politicians from prospective members, seeking to acquire political dividends from the process of adaptation to EU enlargement criteria.

This paper takes this logic a step further and submits that Europarties have an equally substantial independent effect on the national party politics of states beyond the EU's 'enlargement zone', and more particularly of states comprising the Eastern Partnership. I would even go a bit further in saying that an independent Europarty effect can be discerned not only in the programmatic and organizational outlook of specific parties, but even in the systemic parameters of party competition (format and mechanics) that Mair had seen as being relatively impervious to European influence in the EU[12]. There seems to be an inverse correlation between a state's degree of proximity to the EU (with full membership as the end of the continuum) and the receptivity of party actors in this state to Europarty demands and influence. While Europarties gain in importance for their member-parties in EU member-states, they also are part of 'business as usual', an ever-important actor in an otherwise familiar political scene (and one suffering a severe legitimation crisis across Europe at the moment). In prospective EU members on the other hand, accession processes of new member-parties to Europarties mirror the accession processes of countries to the EU, with the eventual choice of partners by the Europarties crucially affecting the relative position of strength of national politicians relative to their competitors. Moving further away from the EU though, this function is amplified in states lying halfway between Europe and their Soviet past, riven by ethnic, linguistic and religious cleavages and with unstable national identities and governmental institutions. Seeking association with a Europarty is a choice as monumental for national parties in these countries as it is for these countries themselves to move closer to Europe.

It is assumed here that Europarties can influence both a party system's format and mechanics in states in precarious geopolitical situations and deep divides threatening the legitimacy of their polity altogether. A party's association with a Europarty confers legitimacy and signals its seriousness

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[10] See Hanley (2006).

[11] Klapacova (2013: 29).

[12] Here I follow the identification of different areas of Europe's impact on national political parties as identified by Ladrech (2002). While his first area ('policy/programmatic content') will be implicit in subsequent analysis and his second area ('organization') less so, I will focus here particularly on the third area, 'patterns of party competition', as the phenomenon to be explained. Of course, changes in the third area can also be derivative of development in the first and second (i.e. parties' programmatic and organizational changes impact the patterns and direction of the party system) (Vachudova 2008). The mechanism of Europeanization I focus on here (transnational party cooperation) corresponds to Ladrech's fifth area of research, 'relations beyond the national party system'.

about its ideological orientation that can make a huge difference in a context of weakly institutionalized party politics. First, Europarties can influence the format of the party system by forcing for consolidation of like-minded parties or by favouring one party that slowly eclipses others that compete as genuine expressions of the same constituencies and of a state's pro-European direction. Sometimes, this process may actually be double-tracked: Europarties care about associating themselves with strong partners in a given electoral arena, and a party's strength puts it in a favourable position to enjoy a Europarty's association. But association with a Europarty clearly gives a party major head start against its competitors. In conditions of weakly institutionalized parties, inability of parties to express major social cleavages and dominance of parties by different (and usually shadowy) members of economic oligarchies, a party's association with a Europarty gives credence to its claims to ideological consistency and seriousness. As competitors slowly fade away or merge with Europarty-associated parties, one can assume that Europarty nods decisively influence the format of these party systems[13].

Europarty nods can also influence the mechanics of a party system – if not the actual direction of competition, then perhaps the degree of its polarization[14]. Association with Europarties calls for interested parties to make 'European orientation' a core component of their programmatic orientation[15]. In a context of geopolitical uncertainty and unstable state identities as the one experienced in the post-Soviet world, an unequivocal pro-Western orientation carries important repercussions about a state's identity and form of governance, such that contestation of its relationship with Europe can serve as a stable proxy or aggregation of major societal divisions that had been up until that point imperfectly reflected in party competition (to the extent that these divisions shape political and social identities that cue clear-cut attitudes towards Europe, Russia, the Soviet past, the state etc.). Again, the process may run in the opposite direction: It may be that some partisan actors in these countries were already positively predisposed towards Europe, especially if they had sided with anti-authoritarian revolutions against leaderships more or less cosy with Russia in the 2000s, or if they have a past in anti-Soviet mobilization in the late 1980s and early 1990s. 'Europe' then overlays the democratization/authoritarianism axis of competition that can be detected in post-democratic revolutionary settings, whereby political actors (many of them already members of oligarchic semi-authoritarian elites who happen to have opposing personal interests and agendas) use 'Europe' as a powerful signal and discursive resource as they contest a state's domestic governance and international orientation[16]. In this case, the effect of Europe, among other ways in the shape of Europarty involvement in national party settings, serves to ideologize what would otherwise be intra-elite feuds, colouring them as fundamental contests of geopolitical orientation that in turn have specific referents to other ethnic, religious, linguistic etc. divisions. In this way, Europarty involvement does not create the axis of competition as such, but serves to increase the polarization of the democratization/authoritarianism axis and help other divisions feed into it as well.

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[13] This is a variation of the argument made by Hanley (2006) about Central and Eastern Europe. He spoke of a 'cleaning' and consolidating of the political scene under the effect of transnational party cooperation.

[14] See Mair (2000: 31) for the distinction between Europe increasing the degree of polarization of an existing dimension of competition and the creation of an altogether new dimension around Europe.

[15] Klapacova (2013).

[16] Europarty association has served as a powerful legitimating device for suspect political entrepreneurs in Western Europe as well. Most typical example is the association of Silvio Berlusconi with the EPP (Ladrech 2002: 399).

PARTY POLITICS IN GEORGIA, UKRAINE AND MOLDOVA: DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTIONS AS A TURNING POINT?

There is an abundance of analysis of the dynamics of political competition in post-Soviet states, such that at this stage the author of this paper would not dare to claim expertise either of this literature or of Eastern Europe more generally. Based on a cursory literature review, it suffices to say that most of the regimes in the region have been identified as falling within one of the categories denoting some degree of hybridity between competitive democracy and authoritarianism: semi-authoritarian[17], competitive authoritarian[18], electoral authoritarian[19], patronal presidential[20] etc. In all states that became independent in the wake of the Soviet Union's dissolution, historical circumstances and trajectories allowed political-economic oligarchic elites to compete for control of the state's resources, pursuing more or less personal agendas and manipulating ethnic and other allegiances as they saw fit[21]. In this context, those states that did not develop into outright autocracies like Belarus or Azerbaijan developed systems exhibiting the outside characteristics of competitive democracy (chiefly the regular staging of elections) but essentially controlled by and reflecting the infighting among deeply entrenched and corrupt elites.

Despite the existence of deep and meaningful societal divisions (if not fully developed cleavages as in Western Europe[22]), party politics in EaP states reflect mostly the infighting of these elites, sometimes recruiting support among different population segments 'from above'[23]. In this context, even if they started off as more or less open and competitive, polities in Eastern Europe invariably developed into semi-autocracies by the early 2000s, with political power serving as the arbiter between rival oligarchic economic interests and the electoral process progressively closing off against genuine competitors arising from the fringes of these elites[24] (even though even crude autocracies like Belarus and Azerbaijan never shed the façade of electoral competition). Under these circumstances, party competition in EaP states remained for most time since their independence inherently unstable and weakly institutionalized. Political parties lacked such characteristics as rooting in social cleavages, internal democracy or programmatic identity. Interactions between them did not follow any particular pattern (party 'non-systems' instead of systems). Deeply ideological parties also tended to be the least successful. Instead, party politics was (and to some extent still is) dominated by regime-initiated or oligarchy-lead ('spoiler' or 'façade') parties, with almost non-existent political programs or ideological references. Such parties also tend to disappear when their patrons lose access to government power, while in more authoritarian contexts the main structural characteristic is the dominance of one (government-close) party over small, weak and fragmented

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[17] Kuzio (2005).

[18] Bunce and Wolchik (2010), Levitsky and Way (2002).

[19] Schedler (2006).

[20] Hale (2006).

[21] Bunce and Wolchik (2010: 61), Way (2005).

[22] For a classical treatment of social cleavages in mature democracies, see Bartolini and Mair (1990). On the lack of formed cleavages and the weakness of civil society in Eastern Europe, see Geddes (2005), Howard (2003) and Lewis (2006).

[23] Hale (2006: 309).

[24] Way (2005).

opposition parties. However, depending on intra-oligarchy competition patterns, party creation and destruction is frequent and electoral volatility high[25].

The three states studied here however all experienced democratic revolutions that halted the process of authoritarization of their polities[26]. Much like before the revolutions, the only clear dimension of competition structuring party interactions remained the one dividing pro and anti-regime forces. However, in the post-revolutionary era this dimension was infused with the normative question of democratization and political reform as a stake of competition. The revolutions allowed challengers of semi-autocracies (all of whom had been part of political elites and/or the economic oligarchy in some capacity or other during the times of semi-autocracies) to claim for themselves the mantle of 'democratizers'[27]. The reflexive[28] contestation of regime shape, prerogatives and policy contents under the normative weight of 'democracy' (and not just opposition to the ruler of the day) as the key stake has allowed party competition to become a bit more multidimensional, reflect more on policy issues and mobilize social groups along more stable patterns through parties. Post-revolutionary party systems exhibit less volatility than before, while in all three states I am examining the stability of party politics was served by constitutional changes that gave more power to parliaments and weakened the powers of the presidents[29].

In Ukraine after the Orange Revolution of 2004 and in Moldova after the Twitter Revolution of 2009, the mechanics of party competition pit the presumed heirs of the revolutions that challenged the increasingly authoritarian regimes of Leonid Kuchma and Vladimir Voronin against the heirs of these regimes under conditions of more or less genuinely competitive electoral contests. In Georgia on the other hand, the cycle seems to have repeated itself twice, with the leader of the Rose

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[25] There are many works dealing with party politics in Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet area, however here I base my analysis on the excellent literature review of Bader (2010: 75-107).

[26] These revolutions took place usually as reaction to blatantly rigged elections, the Rose Revolution following the parliamentary election of late 2003 in Georgia, the Orange Revolution following the presidential election of late 2004 in Ukraine, and the Twitter Revolution following the parliamentary election of mid-2009 in Moldova.

[27] According to Way (2005), intra-oligarchy competition dynamics defines party competition in semi-authoritarian settings (also see Hale (2006)). While I accept of course that elite bickering and personal agendas determine the rise of parties and the direction of competition to a significant extent, I modify this argument in stating that democratic revolutions create a qualitatively different setting for intra-oligarchic competition, reflected among others in better institutionalized party systems. On the links between elite defection and genuine popular mobilization on occasions of electoral contestation as key elements of liberal-democratic revolutions, see Bunce and Wolchik (2006).

[28] I use the term 'reflexive' here in the sense that pro or anti-regime position are increasingly legitimated with reference to the merits of the very democratic process parties engage in – in other words, both sides claim for themselves the identity of democrat and accuse the opponents for authoritarian tendencies. This line of thinking is influenced by Schedler's classical statement about competition in electoral authoritarian regimes: 'At the same time as incumbents and opponents measure their forces in the electoral arena, they battle over the basic rules that shape the electoral arena' (Schedler 2002: 110).

[29] Generally presidential systems are seen to be detrimental to the development of parties (Croissant 2002; Hale 2006; Shugart 1998). In Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova constitutional changes have moved those regimes away from presidentialism and close to parliamentarism. Ironically, only in Ukraine were these reforms the outcome of democratic revolution (and there only indirectly, as democratizing President Yushchenko had to agree to a watering down of his own powers as part of a deal to be allowed to enter office) (Hale 2006: 313). In Moldova it was actually the semi-authoritarian, 'highly cohesive' Communist party that stripped the presidency of its powers after it won the elections in 2001 (Way 2005: 244-245), while in Georgia Rose Revolution leader Saakashvili centralized power even more to the office of the President (Bader 2010: 91) before he conceded to giving powers to parliament towards the end of his reign in 2012.

Revolution of 2003, Mikhail Saakashvili, developing authoritarian tendencies of his own as president[30], eventually losing out to another oligarch-challenger, billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, claiming to be a genuine democrat and also backed by mass mobilization. In all three cases, the legacy of revolutions functions as argumentation and resource of legitimacy in competition between parties that still remains overwhelmingly controlled by exponents of different parts of political-economic oligarchy.

This democratization/authoritarianism axis of competition probably would not have been enough to cement stable party systems were it not for the contemporaneous closing of the distance between these states and Europe after 2004. The EU Eastern enlargement and the development of the EU's Eastern Partnership exacerbated the already uncertain position of these states between West and East. In terms of the main dimension of competition, rapprochement with Europe and the West became a readily imported and exploited discursive resource in the challengers' efforts to claim democratic legitimacy. Support for EU (and/or NATO) accession (or other forms of association) has become a very powerful proxy of post-revolutionaries' declared belief in democratic values and the establishment of properly functioning liberal democracies. In this way, the main dimension of competition also acquires a wider meaning as contrast of projects of geopolitical orientation. This in turn serves to more firmly link party competition with important social, religious or regional divisions in consistent patterns (and not just on account of ad hoc elite-oligarchical efforts of mobilization).

For example, the dissolution of Shevardnadze's authoritarian regime in Georgia gave rise to a purposive policy of antagonizing Russia (that sponsors breakaway provinces on Georgian soil) and orienting the country towards NATO membership. The Orange Revolution and subsequent electoral contests cemented the stark religious and ethnic contrasts between West and East Ukraine, and deep divergences in terms of historical traditions, identities and visions for Ukraine's future, that have consistently structured party politics ever since[31]. And the fall of Voronin's Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) and competition between it and parties of a pro-European alliance reflects the divides running through Moldovan society between ethnic Moldovans and pro-Russian minorities, and between Moldovans adhering to the maintenance of an independent state (and clamouring for the return of the Russian-sponsored Transnistrian breakaway province) and Moldovans propagating a Romanian identity[32]. In all these cases, even if intra-oligarchy competition

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[30] It is a recurrent pattern in the analysis of electoral turnover of governments under semi-authoritarianism that the incumbents change without necessarily the structures of authoritarian governance, manipulated elections and heavy-handed judicial and political treatment of oppositionists giving way to liberal democratic practices. See among other Hadenius and Teorell (2007). This insight forms the core of Hale's argument about 'patronal presidentialism', with Saakashvili (and Shevardnadze before him) serving as example of an initially liberal President who became embedded in a system of all-powerful executive (Hale 2006: 312-313).

[31] Of course the East-West divide structured party politics in Ukraine before the Orange Revolution as well (Bader 2010: 82). In the post-revolutionary contest however one may surmise that this regional competition reflects less the different geographical rooting of rival oligarchic interests (that still play a role of course in mobilizing from above) but has absorbed and reflects deeper divides about Ukraine's future (Way 2005: 257). In any case, it must be noted that some see in this geographical divide not the elements of a single structured party system, but 'a series of (partially) interlocking regional subsystems' (Wilson and Birch 2007, quoted in Bader 2010: 102).

[32] Mungiu-Pippidi and Munteanu (2009: 140-141) and Way (2005: 253-254). Moldova is the country where the democratic revolution led to the creation of few more-or-less consolidated political parties engaged in patterned interactions. In Ukraine the Orange Revolution has seen the establishment of two large camps (representing roughly West and East Ukraine), with one party per camp remaining stable (Party of the Regions

keeps driving the creation and strategies of weakly institutionalized parties, following democratic revolutions their competition has acquired stability, a certain ideological gravitas and more or less patterned dynamics[33].

EUROPARTIES IN EASTERN EUROPE

Europarties generally have a rigorous approach to identifying and associating themselves with partners in non-EU members. Vetting of candidate parties is particularly demanding, including demands for far-reaching organizational and programmatic adaptations. While Europarties understandably seek to expand their presence beyond EU borders as a way to increase their own relevance as meaningful arenas of deliberation, coordination and information-sharing in the EU polity, they are also careful before associating themselves with partners that will expect political and moral support through hard times and awkward situations in the future. Europarties also want to have strong partners, even though a party's strength should only go so far to make it an attractive partner for Europarties on its own. Parties that receive a Europarty nod acquire important advantage over rivals of the same political orientation in the eyes of the electorate, thus potentially leading to consolidation of a part of the party system around that privileged party[34]. But Europarty influence can be at work even before the nod is given. For example, the EPP's conscious strategy is to encourage merges and cooperation between like-minded parties, often as an important step to eventual accession to the party (reflecting also the fact that the EPP itself contains varying ideological traditions and that it accepts applications by parties of self-declared Christian, conservative, nationalist etc. orientation in the same country). Either way, the process of vetting can have important effects on the shape of party competition in the affected countries. On the other hand, the degree of wannabe-associated parties' integration in Europarties depends on each Europarty's structure. The EPP and PES have devised three degrees of membership shadowing the different degrees of a country's integration in the EU (full member, accession candidate or some

for the East, Bloc Yulia Tymoshenko for the West) but high volatility and instability for other parties in the two camps (Bader 2010: 100-101). In Georgia the stability of the party system hinges on the Saakashvili party's capacity to survive in opposition. Also the most homogeneous society of the three examined here, the two rival parties of Georgia exhibited some consistent patterns of support in the 2012-2013 electoral contests, such that both parties may find stable anchors of support down the way.

[33] It is important to note though that, despite the impact of Europe as a discursive resource of post-revolutionary democratizers, claiming that party competition revolves inescapably around a Europe/Russia divide is not an accurate depiction of party competition in these three countries (Way 2005: 239). The PCRM ascribed both as government and opposition to Moldova's European orientation, while its Moldovan nationalism was challenged by Russia's persistent support for Transnistria (Mungiu-Pippidi and Munteanu 2009: 137; Way 2005: 254). Since his election as President of Ukraine in 2010, the leader of the East-based Party of the Regions Viktor Yanukovich has tried to play Europe and Russia off each other, most lately supporting EU integration as Ukraine's strategic goal, while Leonid Kuchma also went through pro-Russian and pro-European phases (McFaul 2007; Way 2005: 256). The Shevardnadze regime followed in theory a pro-European policy, and Saakashvili's successor as Georgia's leader, Ivanishvili, has distanced himself from his predecessor's fiery anti-Russian rhetoric but has also expressed willingness to keep Georgia on a pro-European path. By the same token, it would be mistaken to characterize the pro-Western democratizers in the region as inescapably anti-Russian (apart from Saakashvili). This fluid situation reflects, if anything, the need of even the heirs of pre-revolutionary semi-authoritarian regimes (such as Yanukovich and Voronin) to engage with and claim for themselves 'democracy' as a value underpinning party competition. But Europe does feed into this axis as a complement of post-revolutionary democratizers' strategies of legitimacy-enhancing polarisation against opponents who are supposedly weakly committed to the European way, if not suspect (despite assurances) of their relations with Russia.

[34] See generally Klapacova (2013).

other form of association)[35]. ALDE is an exception in that it counts all affiliated national parties as 'full members' regardless of whether they come from EU members or not, which makes it probable that this Europarty will be much more willing to go out of its way to involve itself in national arenas supporting its member-parties, but also that it will seek associations primarily with well-vetted ideological partners (perhaps to the detriment of long-term electoral strength as a criterion of membership). In this section I will investigate how Europarty involvement has contributed to changes in the format and mechanics of party competition in Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova after democratic revolutions that took place there[36].

a) Format

Europarties had an effect on the number and relative strength of parties in EaP states, through their active involvement but mostly through their ability to serve as arenas of political activity and legitimating mechanisms in intra-elite competition, particularly involving like-minded parties from the camp of post-revolutionary democratizers. In all three countries, all three major Europarties were united in their support of anti-authoritarian forces, however to the extent that they were also looking for associates in these arenas, their involvement also played a role in processes of consolidation (whereby some pro-democratic parties were annihilated to the benefit of Europarty-associated ones) or processes of intra-coalition squabbles that determined the relative strength of pro-European parties, as well as the overall balance in the party system between parties both of the post-authoritarian and the post-democratizing camps.

Ukraine has been the field of activity of the biggest Europarty, the EPP. The EPP became actively involved in the feud between the two main components of the Orange Coalition, Our Ukraine of Viktor Yushchenko and Fatherland led by Yulia Tymoshenko[37]. Both Yushchenko and Tymoshenko had roots in the power structures of Ukraine and ties to the Kuchma regime – Yushchenko had been Prime Minister under Kuchma while Tymoshenko was a successful businesswoman. Their parties were created following familiar patterns of Ukrainian politics, reflecting regional political-economic power structures and having ties to oligarchic interests. After the Orange Revolution in 2004 however both parties were seen in Europe as bearers of demands for Ukraine's democratization and pro-European orientation. Consequently, both Yushchenko (by now elected President of Ukraine) and Tymoshenko sought actively links with Europarties. Forming the biggest party family, expressing an unequivocal Atlanticism and being home to all major conservative parties with roots in dissident anti-Soviet movements in Central-Eastern Europe, the EPP was a natural ideological 'home' for the

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[35] Both EPP and PES have three degrees of membership: Full members are parties from within the EU. Associated members are parties from the European Economic Area/EFTA (Norway, Switzerland, Iceland etc.) and from accession-candidate countries (Western Balkans, Turkey etc.). Parties from EaP and beyond can only hope to acquire observer status. This status excludes them from decision-making organs, programmatic debates etc., but gives them opportunity to participate in various meetings, including sometimes Europarty summits and other high-level occasions.

[36] The empirical analysis concerns only the activities of the 'Big 3' Europarties: the centre-right EPP, the social-democratic PES and the liberal ALDE. Other party families (like the Greens) have contacts with parties in Eastern Europe, but the Big 3 are usually seen as the only party families of adequate institutional maturity in the European party system, and so will be the exclusive focus of analysis here.

[37] In Ukraine electoral coalitions or 'blocs' were formed prior to parliamentary elections around prominent politicians and their parties. Both Our Ukraine and Fatherland served as backbones of such wider blocs (e.g. the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc) for the elections of 2002, 2006 and 2007. Since the 2012 elections, blocs are banned from running in parliamentary elections and results refer to the individual parties.

post-revolutionary democratizing parties, as well as an attractive destination, offering access to most major politicians and policymakers of the EU. The race to join the EPP became really competitive after Yushchenko and Tymoshenko had a fallout due to Tymoshenko's tactical alliance with Viktor Yanukovich's Party of the Regions that brought about the fall of a pro-Yushchenko government in 2006 and the increasing disagreements between the two Orange leaders over various policy decisions. Elected Prime Minister in 2007, Tymoshenko increasingly sought to marginalize Yushchenko as the heir of the Orange tradition and as the exponent internationally of Ukraine's pro-Western forces (assisted in this by the constitutionally mandated parliamentarization of the Ukrainian political system). Our Ukraine and Fatherland joined the EPP as observers in 2007 and 2008 respectively.

The EPP's expressed policy was to promote accord and cooperation between the two parties, especially in light of the post-Kuchma forces' reorganization[38]. It is also a fact though that of the two, Tymoshenko exploited much more forcefully the opportunities provided by association with the EPP to outmanoeuvre Yushchenko. Even though Yushchenko was President of Ukraine, and therefore should have benefited from opportunities to network and collaborate with likeminded leaders across Europe, it was Tymoshenko the one who had a much more active and charismatic presence in EPP activities (also thanks to her capacity as Prime Minister of Ukraine)[39]. Even though the EPP lamented the inability of the two parties to cooperate, thus losing the 2010 Presidential election to Yanukovich, that result accelerated the annihilation of Our Ukraine from the political field and the imposition of Tymoshenko's party as the sole legitimate bearer of the post-revolutionary heritage, as well as EPP's sole legitimate representative in the Ukrainian party system. Tymoshenko's rise and Yushchenko's demise had more to do with conditions specific to Ukrainian politics of course, but EPP involvement may have accelerated this process to the extent that, while stressing the need for the pro-European camp to be represented by one party and leader, it amplified the difference in charisma and opportunities for self-promotion between the two rivals, it clearly favoured Tymoshenko's version of events in her feuds with Yushchenko, and indirectly lay the blame for Orange's failures on the President's leadership[40]. Following the 2012 parliamentary elections that witnessed the complete disappearance of Our Ukraine, the party was suspended from the EPP in late 2013, its place taken up by ex-wrestler Vitali Klitschko's pro-European UDAR party.

Table 1: Evolution of relative strength of pro-democratic forces in Ukraine (vote % in parliamentary elections)

	2002	2006	2007	2012
Yushchenko-near blocs/parties	24.5%	13.9%	14.2%	1.1%
Tymoshenko-near blocs/parties	7.5%	22.3%	30.7%	25.6%
UDAR (Klitschko)	-	-	-	14.0%

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[38] 'Elections in Ukraine: Martens and Daul congratulate Yushchenko and Tymoshenko. Support orange government coalition', *EPP-ED Group*, 1/10/2007.
[39] Andrei Fedyashin, 'Brussels and Kiev: Suspended Ukraine', RIA Novosti, 10/12/2009.
[40] Martens (2009: 215-216).

In Moldova Europarty involvement has served to consolidate the forces that sprang out of the anti-Voronin Twitter Revolution around three parties with direct links to the three major party families. The examples of the Liberal Democratic Party (PLDM) and the Democratic Party (PDM) are characteristic of the consolidating-stabilizing, but also disturbing, effects of Europarty involvement. The PDM existed as a label since the 1990s, when it formed part of a pro-European government in 1998-2001. Yet with the election of PCRM into power in 2001, the PDM, as is typical for parties falling into the opposition in post-Soviet semi-authoritarian settings, virtually disappeared, and remained irrelevant in the April 2009 elections that spawned the revolution. Subsequently though it was taken over by PCRM defector Anton Lupu, who led it to a very strong result in the elections of late 2009. Under Lupu, PDM was supposed to become a consistent pro-European social-democratic party, and that effort received a huge boost after the PDM was accepted to PES shortly before the November 2010 elections[41]. This in turn offers substantial opportunities for sustained presence under an ideological façade of a party led by an ex-member of semi-authoritarian elites and, supposedly, acting as a front for oligarchic economic interests. The PDM though also spawned the major party of the pro-European post-revolutionary coalition, the PLDM. That party was created by businessman Vlad Filat in 2007, after he quit the PDM, attracting mostly the support of members of the Christian Democratic People's Party, an old EPP-associated party that however lost support when it allied with the Communists. The PLDM was the second-strongest party in the contested 2009 elections, but its rise was meteoric in the next two elections of June 2009 and November 2010, becoming the backbone of pro-European governing coalitions, with Filat as Prime Minister. Filat sought EPP association already in 2009, and the PLDM was granted observer status in 2011, after Filat had become Prime Minister. Much like the PDM, the PLDM's claims to consistent centre-right ideology were pretty shallow (Filat himself has a past in pro-Romanian nationalistic student politics, but he entered politics through business and by working from within the supposedly 'social-democratic' PDM). EPP association promises to increase opportunities for elaboration for a more structured ideological profile, but it also provides a much-needed legitimating mechanism for an elite-oligarchy created party.

Perhaps the most consistent Europarty-national party nexus in Moldova is the liberal one. ALDE had been associated with the pro-democratic liberal party Our Moldova before the Liberal Party (PL) under Mihai Ghimpu arose as the main partisan expression of the anti-Voronin mobilization in April 2009. An ideologue and veteran of pro-Romanian anti-Soviet pro-democracy mobilization in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Ghimpu's pro-Romanian nationalism fell out of fashion in Moldova during the 1990s, however his own fortunes changed in the context of democratic revolution in 2009. The protracted crisis and three consecutive elections of 2009-2010 saw PL establish itself as the chief force of liberal politics in Moldova, eclipsing Our Moldova that eventually merged into the PLDM in 2011. It became part of the pro-European governments leading Moldova since 2009, however electoral dynamics since 2009 point to its receding role, passing from leading to third force of the pro-European coalition. This may be due to a combination of its ideological character[42] (traditionally a strong predictor of electoral weakness in the post-Soviet region) and the other two parties', PLDM and PDM, access to political-economic power structures, but it is also a tendency that should

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[41] 'Democratic Party of Moldova welcomed into PES family', *Party of European Socialists*, Brussels, 14/10/2010.
[42] Andew Wilson, 'Filat's Gamble', opendemocracy.net, 23/5/2013.

increase given the difference in resources association with the EPP and the PES (as opposed to ALDE) provides (better access to more European leaders, more electoral and political assistance, more avenues for finding a voice in Brussels etc.).

In sum, Europarty involvement in Moldova has probably accelerated existing tendencies towards consolidation in the party system. With major Europarty coverage combined to their rooting in major oligarchic interests, the long-term prospects of PLDM and PDM as labels (if not genuine forces of mobilization) of Moldovan party politics seem healthy. The opportunities for interaction with important European political figures that EPP and PES association provide can indeed be important resources for the ruling forces of these parties to legitimise their rule. The same cannot be said of the PL though, a more ideological party that only rose to prominence during the heady days of anti-Voronin and anti-Russia mobilization, slowly lost power relative to the other two members of the pro-European coalition and whose membership of a smaller Europarty offers less in terms of support than what the PLDM and the PDM can enjoy. Europarty involvement has conflicting effects in terms of the health of party politics in Moldova, allowing for organizational consolidation and some ideological legitimation of parties there while also serving as resource in the efforts of oligarchic interests to legitimize and perpetuate their presence in the electoral arena.

Table 2: Evolution of relative strength of pro-European parties in Moldova (vote % in parliamentary elections, with actual or eventual Europarty affiliation. Italics indicate failure to enter in parliament)

	2009 (April)	2009 (July)	2010
PL (ALDE)	13.13%	14.68%	9.96%
PLDM (EPP)	12.43%	16.57%	29.42%
AMN (ALDE)	9.77%	7.35%	*2.05%*
PDM (PES)	*2.97%*	12.54%	12.72%

Much like in Moldova, in Georgia the involvement of Europarties has contributed and can further contribute to consolidation of party politics despite the rooting of political parties in elite strategies and economic interests, but unlike Moldova the consequences of this may be even more far-reaching, as this consolidation may go hand-in-hand with the polarization of Georgian politics between deadly enemies. For almost ten years after Shevardnadze's fall the Georgian Parliament was dominated (in typical post-Soviet fashion) by the United National Movement (UNM) of President Mikhail Saakashvili, a defector of the Shevardnadze regime and leader of the Rose Revolution. Saakashvili's uncompromising attitude towards Russia (that sponsors breakaway provinces on Georgian soil) endeared him to the Atlanticist EPP, home to many anti-Russian conservative parties from Central-Eastern Europe. Saakashvili was supported in his reelection campaign in 2008 by right-wing leaders from CEE, and his posturing during the war with Russia in summer 2008 further contributed to his rapprochement with the EPP. While in the beginning the UNM had approached the Liberals, in the end it joined the EPP as observer in 2008. Thereafter, as Saakashvili himself was becoming target of accusations of authoritarianism, the EPP provided a valuable channel for the UNM to express its positions in the European setting. Much like in Ukraine

and Moldova, the EPP's propensity to choose a 'big' partner won out, despite evident problems with this choice.

PES and ALDE were involved in the Georgian political scene through small ideological actors (the Social Democratic Party for PES, which however had no formal link, and the Republican Party for ALDE). The Georgian political scene has traditionally been full of small and weak parties with indistinguishable ideological profiles revolving around the strong governing party of the day. But the stakes increased incrementally when reclusive billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili entered the fray as challenger to Saakashvili in late 2011. His Georgian Dream coalition (centred around his Georgian Dream party) presented a viable alternative to Saakashvili, uniting everyone from democrats disenchanted with the authoritarian turn of the government to hard-core nationalists to Shevardnadze elements. Georgian Dream won the parliamentary elections in October 2012 and the Presidential elections of early 2013, completing the first peaceful transfer of power in the post-Soviet world. That victory was celebrated by PES and ALDE[43]. The latter was particularly supportive of Ivanishvili in Brussels, despite suspicions of his background and ties with Russia, it relished Saakashvili's defeat in the parliamentary elections of October 2012, and raised the pressure on him to orderly step down after his certain defeat in the parliamentary elections of early 2013, reflecting the strong investment its member parties (the Republicans and new member Free Democrats) had made in opposing Saakashvili.

Much like in Moldova, ALDE was associated in Georgia with more-or-less principled partners. The PES on the other hand saw in Saakashvili's shameful demise an opportunity not only to embarrass the EPP, but also to capture the new 'big fish' of the Georgian party system: The Georgian Dream party. Portraying a good understanding of the role of transnational political affiliations, Ivanishvili has pursued association with PES and the PES itself is receptive to the idea[44]. This association though has been impeded by evidence of Ivanishvili building an authoritarian system around him anew, prosecuting key members of the Saakashvili regime for corruption. When it comes to party consolidation and while it is too early to tell, it is not out of the question to assume that UNM stands a better chance of surviving in opposition than previous governing parties, not only because organized persecution by Ivanishvili's government can galvanize its members, but also because EPP membership promises access to resources of political and moral support that the party will only reap if it maintains some semblance of organizational continuity[45]. Georgian Dream on the other hand can afford to forego formal links with PES for as long as it is in government, but both it and PES have common interests in association – for Georgian Dream, association with PES can offer resources in terms of political support, electoral cooperation and ideological evolution that can assist it to survive even if it loses power. The next political cycle until elections in 2016 should determine whether the format of the Georgian party system has acquired some stability. The survival of UNM in opposition is probably the most crucial indicator of this, as well as of Europarty effect on party system parameters.

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[43] 'PES welcomes democratic elections in Georgia', *Party of European Socialists*, Brussels, 5/10/2012. Graham Watson, 'Peaceful transition of power in Georgia', European Parliament statement, Strasbourg, 26/10/2012.
[44] 'Georgian foreign minister lashes out at EU centre-right party', euractiv.com, 21/12/2012.
[45] See for example 'Georgia: "Ivanishvili's populism has no limits", says Joseph Daul', *European People's Party*, Strasbourg, 23/12/2013.

Table 3: Evolution of electoral and parliamentary balance between government and opposition in Georgia (parliamentary elections)

	2004	2008	2012
Winning Party (Vote percentage and number of seats)	UNM 67% 135/235	UNM 59.2% 119/150	Georgian Dream 55% 85/150
Main Opposition (Vote percentage and numbers of seats)	Rightists 7.6% 15/235	United Opposition 17.7% 17/150	UNM 40.3% 65/150

b) Mechanics

It would be of course a tall order to prove that Europarties (and Europe more generally) have had a decisive effect on the fluid, weakly institutionalized party systems of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Europe however has had an indirect effect to the extent that it is now an important proxy in the reflexive competition between post-revolutionaries and heirs of authoritarian regimes with democracy as the normative stake. The democratization/authoritarianism dimension of competition in all three countries is qualitatively different from the ad hoc regime/anti-regime competition that had characterized these countries in the past, since it concerns the establishment of democracy as such, taking place as it does in the shadow of democratic revolutionary heritages. It is a matter of historical-political circumstance that this competition takes place at a time when, through the EU's Eastern enlargement and the establishment of the Eastern Partnership, this competition takes place much closer to Europe. Europe serves then as a powerful discursive resource in political rivals' contestation of the shape of domestic governance and each others' democratic credentials. If it helps the democratization/authoritarianism axis acquire an even more fundamental character as a contestation of states' long-term strategic orientation, Europe also links an otherwise intra-elite (or even intra-oligarchic) competition with the different societal preferences cued by major social divisions in a consistent, cleavage-like way.

For all these reasons, one can assume that Europe (and Europarty involvement as a sub-set of Europe's impact) has an effect not in bringing about a direction of competition, but in increasing polarization of the democratization/authoritarianism axis. To the extent that post-revolutionary democratizers tend to be much more unequivocally pro-European (or pro-Western) that post-authoritarians (who do not dismiss Europe but also have an eye turned towards Russia as well), we can assume that Europe is a tool in a purposive strategy of polarization on behalf of those post-revolutionary elites who see in democracy and European orientation both a tool in their struggle against their opponents and a way to increase their own legitimacy.

In Ukraine Yulia Tymoshenko has found in the EPP a loyal supporter in her quest to maintain the sense of urgency of her competition with President Yanukovich after his victory in the 2010

Presidential elections. Even as Yanukovich adhered to the view that Ukraine has to pursue EU membership as a long-term goal (but not NATO accession), Tymoshenko pursued a principled opposition against the re-authoritizing tendencies of his government. Yanukovich's case was not helped by the heavy-handed handling of Tymoshenko as she was being charged for corruption[46]. That the charges were politically motivated probably is as true as the fact that they are not completely unfounded, but the conduct of the trial and Tymoshenko's incarceration led credence to her own claim that Yanukovich is re-establishing authoritarian government in Ukraine. The EU has thoroughly condemned Tymoshenko's treatment, but it is the EPP that has been the most uncompromising voice requiring Tymoshenko's release as a precondition for EU-Ukraine relations to continue. Tymoshenko's daughter has been invited to EPP events and in the party's congress in Marseille in November 2011, there was an empty chair with Tymoshenko's name reserved in order to symbolize the EPP's empathy with her politically motivated persecution. In 2012, EPP President Martens took the initiative to call on the EPP heads and deputy heads of government to boycott the European football championships co-hosted by Ukraine[47]. The refusal of the Yanukovich government to allow her to travel to Germany for treatment for her deteriorating health led, among other factors, to the collapse of the foreseen free trade agreement between EU and the Ukraine, to be signed in the EaP Summit in Vilnius in late 2013. Yet while the EU officially is seeking a formula to go through with the agreement (compromising somehow on the Tymoshenko issue), the EPP's rhetoric remains uncompromising about the need of Tymoshenko to be set free before an agreement could be signed[48]. As it still includes the biggest number of governing parties in the EU, it is safe to assume that the EPP is a very important channel for Tymoshenko to make her case towards these actors.

In Moldova Europarty involvement has underlined and increased the polarization between post-revolutionary democratizers and the post-authoritarian Communists, but after 2010 it has also contributed to processes of fragmentation of the pro-European alliance. After the Twitter Revolution and the contested elections of April 2009, politicians opposing Voronin's policies (perceived as catering too much to the needs of Russian-speakers) rode the wave of the revolution and claimed an anti-authoritarian political identity that helped to cement first a discernible mechanics of party competition, and then distinct ideological identities within the pro-European alliance. Between April 2009 and November 2010, a protracted political crisis (revolving around the inability of the parliament to elect a President of the Republic) and three electoral contests consolidated three main parties as components of the pro-European alliance, while the polarization of the party system around a democracy/authoritarianism dimension of competition has also brought about a more consistent linkage between parties that remain elite driven and oligarchy-influenced, and major divisions permeating Moldovan society[49]. Throughout the 2009-2010 crisis, with the ouster of PCRM

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[46] The perceived return to authoritarian practices on behalf of Yanukovich also halted a potentially interesting development in terms of Europarty involvement in Ukraine, as in October 2010, as Yanukovich was stressing his desire to bring Ukraine closer to the EU, the Socialst group in the European Parliament (S&D) signed a Memorandum of Cooperation (covering training and communication) with the Party of the Regions. See Adrian Severin, 'Ukraine is back on the EU agenda', euobserver.com, 15/11/2010.

[47] 'Five minutes with Wilfried Martens, President of the European People's Party: "Yulia Tymoshenko is a shining example of Ukraine's democratic spirit"', LSE EUROPP blog, 18/5/2012.

[48] 'Tymoshenko case: the European Court of Human Rights condemns the practice of selective justice in Ukraine', *European People's Party*, Brussels, 30/4/2013.

[49] The pro-European alliance rallies all currents opposing Russian influence in Moldova, ranging from Moldovan-centred nationalism to pro-Romanian ideology, and voting patterns reveal indeed a consistent

from government the cardinal stake of political competition, the rhetoric of all three Europarties was consistently about galvanizing the unity of the coalition in light of the common struggle. Our Moldova and PL's association with ALDE, PLDM's application to EPP in 2009 and PDM accession to PES shortly before the November 2010 elections played a role as signals of these parties' commitment to bring Moldova closer to Europe in practice, therefore also portraying the seriousness of their democratizing agenda.

Europarty involvement in Moldova then came on the heels of a pervasive rhetoric about a democratic, pro-European camp opposing an authoritarian, pro-Russian Communist party. With the possible exception of the PL though, the parties of that camp were (also) vehicles for elite interests mobilizing 'from above' parts of the electorate along relevant, but not properly represented or institutionalized, social divisions. While all three major Europarties supported the pro-European coalition in its effort to remove Voronin from power in 2009-2010, their involvement since then both reflects and reinforces tendencies of fragmentation of the pro-European alliance. Throughout 2013, a governmental crisis has been brewing, reflecting the rival personal agendas of Filat on the one hand and Lupu and oligarch Vlad Plahotniuc (for many the real force behind PDM) on the other, as well as the competition between PLDM and PDM in controlling different parts of the bureaucracy and judiciary[50]. Filat was removed as Prime Minister in May 2013 after a series of convoluted moves, some of which included both PLDM and PDM requesting the parliamentary support of the Communists. The victim of these moves ended up being the most genuine and ideological member of the coalition, the PL that split and left the government[51]. These developments have been a source of embarrassment for the EPP and the PES, forced as they are to balance between inclusive calls for pro-European forces to cooperate and their obligation to verbally support their associates' policies[52]. The PL seems to have gotten the short end of the bargain, as it has exited the government but is also urged by ALDE to continue supporting the overall pro-European direction of the government[53]. Paradoxically then, Europarty involvement in Moldova seems to have inconsistent effects, supporting on the one hand the entrenchment of the democratization/authoritarianism dimension of competition and underpinning on the other hand processes of fragmentation of the pro-European coalition. This may reflect the simple fact that after a period of contestation of semi-authoritarian regimes (when all Europarties and their associates are united in a common cause), processes of fragmentation of post-revolutionary democratic coalitions also receive a boost by their leaders' increasing confidence after they gain the nod of one of the major party families.

If in Ukraine one Europarty has been deeply implicated in party politics, contributing to the polarisation and ideologization of party competition after a post-authoritarian's return to power, and in Moldova the three major Europarty involvement has had both consolidating/polarizing and fragmenting effects on party competition, Georgia has been over the last year the first non-EU country where the European party system has exported not just its ideological components but

divide in terms of ethnic and regional support for the Communists and the pro-European coalition (Mungiu-Pippidi and Munteanu 2009: 141-142).

[50] Kamil Calus, 'Crisis in the government coalition in Moldova', East Week, 20/2/2013, Centre for Eastern Studies.

[51] Andew Wilson, 'Filat's Gamble'.

[52] See for example 'Moldova: European future in jeopardy; EPP President calls on AIE members to resume dialogue', European People's Party, Brussels, 7/3/2013.

[53] 'New government in Moldova: Liberals urge reform programme to be continued', ALDE Party, Brussels, 3/6/2013.

some of its dynamics of competition. Indeed, because in Georgia the authoritarianism-democratization cycle has repeated itself twice, with the democratizer of 2003 being charged of authoritarian tendencies by 2012, Europarties have found themselves in the opposing side of the main partisan divide there. While in Ukraine and Moldova Europarty involvement can be said to have contributed to the polarisation of party competition on behalf of post-revolutionary democratizers, in Georgia it is this polarization that has engulfed Europarties, leading to a quite untypical war of words between representatives of different party families in Brussels over a state where in theory they share the common goal of democratization[54].

Saakashvili built his regime on the legitimacy of the democratic demands of the Rose Revolution and his own guarantees that Georgian democracy would shed its authoritarian characteristics. However, under conditions of absolute dominance of his party, Saakashvili was free of any control and checks to proceed and built mechanisms of semi-authoritarian governance himself. Especially after the failed war with Russia in the summer of 2008, Saakashvili was seen retreating from his previous promises and succumbing to paranoid fears about his opponents' motives[55]. His self-proclaimed support for true democracy in Georgia and purging of the old regime eventually came to be seen as an effort to build a new autocracy itself (Hale 2006: 312). In an ironic twist of events, Saakashvili's autocratic tendencies fed the creation of an opposition pole around Bidzina Ivanishvili, who settled back into Georgia after years of pursuing his business in Russia and Europe and put together the coalition 'Georgian Dream'. Ten years after a democratic revolution, the dynamics of party competition in Georgia still revolved around the question of democratization, only unlike Moldova and Ukraine the heirs of the original revolution were now being framed as autocrats themselves.

With Georgian Dream controlling both parliament and the post of President, it was the turn of UNM and the EPP to cry foul because the new government started prosecuting a number of Saakashvili loyalists on corruption charges that felt politically motivated[56] (Saakashvili himself has left the country after stepping down, with no indication when he will return). Both PES and ALDE have distanced themselves from these practices, calling out against the danger of establishment of an authoritarian government. The new government's practices have cooled down the enthusiasm of ALDE and PES about outmanoeuvring EPP in Georgia, even though both Europarties also want to maintain open the prospect of maintaining links with strong partners in Georgia. While in Ukraine and Moldova Europarties underpinned patterns of competition by backing one side of the post-revolutionary axis of competition, in Georgia they backed different sides of the divide as the authoritarianism/democratization nexus repeated itself. Georgia may become the first post-Soviet republic with a party system enjoying links to the European party system reproducing (at least nominally) patterns of competition discernible in the European Parliament and most European states. In this way, a combination of elite strategies and Europarty involvement may lead to the authoritarianism/democratization axis turning into a (nominally at least) proper ideological one.

[54] Graham Watson, 'Georgian democracy is on a slippery slope', statement in the European Parliament, Strasbourg, October 2012. 'Georgian foreign minister lashes out at EU centre-right party'.
[55] 'Georgia: Van Rompuy should raise concerns over pre-election political climate at today's meeting with Saakashvili', *ALDE Group*, 4/7/2012.
[56] 'Georgian foreign minister lashes out at EU centre-right party'. The EPP also accepted a declaration in March 2013 in its Summit (where Saakashvili also participated) on the state of democracy in Russia. Ivanishvili retorted by writing on open letter to EPP leaders and members.

Much though will depend on the extent to which Ivanishvili will follow the examples of Shevardnadze and Saakashvili before him down authoritarian lines. If he does, the cycle of the authoritarianism/democratization axis of competition (with major Europarties again united on the side of democratization) will most probably repeat itself five years from now.

CONCLUSION

This paper has proposed a new avenue in studying the effect of Europe on national party politics, namely the influence of transnational European party federations (Europarties) on the degree of polarisation and the format of party systems, and has applied it in a region that has as of now rarely featured in comparative analyses of European party politics, the post-Soviet states comprising the EU's Eastern Partnerships (EaP). The starting assumption of this argument was that, while Europarties are essentially creatures of their constituent parts (national parties) and therefore relatively weak towards them within the EU, they actually possess significant independent power towards parties seeking to accede to them from countries outside of the EU. If in accession-candidate states the process of party reform and association with a Europarty mirrors (and shadows) the national effort of adaptation to conditionality criteria ahead of EU accession, in states beyond the EU's enlargement zone association processes between parties and Europarties reflect the outspoken decisions of parts of the political spectrum in favour of Europe, in a context of geopolitical uncertainty and fragmented state and social identities. The paper therefore theorized that 'the limited impact of Europe' per Mair can actually be more far reaching in as yet unformed party systems for the strategies of post-revolutionary political-economic elites seeking to consolidate and legitimize their partisan 'labels' as legitimately European and ideologically consistent.

Prima facie evidence of what remains essentially a preliminary empirical research points to important effects of Europarty involvement in three post-democratic revolutionary national party arenas in terms of consolidation of partisan corporate identities and of increase of polarization by underpinning a democratization/authoritarianism dimension of competition with more substantial contestation of states' geopolitical orientation. It was shown for example that EPP membership amplified processes of consolidation of the post-revolutionary Orange camp around Yulia Tymoshenko's party to the detriment of Viktor Yushchenko's party, that convergent Europarty involvement in Moldova has stabilized the organization of the post-revolutionary forces around three parties with equivalent links to the Big 3 Europarties, and that the involvement of Europarties in the bitter politics of Georgia may assist in the consolidation of stable partisan identities after the first electoral peaceful transfer of power in the post-Soviet world. The contrast between Ukraine and Moldova on the one hand and Georgia on the other show that, for as long as the post-revolutionary democratization/authoritarian dimension of competition is dominant, Europarties will find themselves on the side of post-revolutionaries against post-authoritarians, and their main effect will concern the consolidation of the pro-European 'democratic' camp. But if the post-revolutionary dimension of competition recedes (because democratizers turned out to be less committed to democracy as initially hoped, and their opponents – even if post-authoritarian – become more adept in playing the democratizing blame game), Europarties are perfectly capable of exporting the dynamics of their competitive interaction to the EU's periphery. In any case, at least in Moldova and Georgia, one would have to wait at least for one more electoral cycle to see whether parties that have appeared consolidated in government survive their time in opposition.

At the same time though Europarties may also serve to consolidate less-than-ideal tendencies. In Moldova for example, both EPP and PES pursued a combination of interest and values, supporting the creation of a mature party system by taking in their fold parties that had already grown strong under less-than-ideological leaderships. In the case of PLDM, it seems that it cleared the EPP's otherwise strict vetting procedure once it had established itself as the major political force of the pro-European camp. The PDM on the other hand went from being an almost non-entity to a significant political force under ex-Communist heavyweight Lupu virtually overnight, with the party's shallow ideological credentials being deemed enough for PES to welcome it in 2010. Instead, ALDE has shown to be associated with more ideological and consistent partners, perhaps reflecting its own membership structure (whereby all associated parties are full members) as well as its more deferential attitude towards questions of power. In terms of mechanics, Europarty involvement (as a subset of the overall contestation of 'Europe' in national arenas) assists post-revolutionaries to employ Europe as a deliberate polarizing strategy in their competition with post-authoritarians, even if the latter do not deny the need to bring their countries closer to Europe. Yanukovich's decision to interrupt negotiations with the EU for an association agreement before the Vilnius Summit lends credence to democratizers' claims that post-authoritarians can never be serious about their intentions towards Europe. It is also probable though that Europe (and Europarty discourse in Brussels and EaP states) increases the apocalyptic nature of what remains intra-elite competition and struggle between parties with always weak rooting in their society.

This paper has only offered a primary elaboration and testing of this argument. Much more thorough research is required to establish whether and how Europarties matter in party politics of EaP states. More specifically, the institutional avenues through which Europarties affect national partisan strategies, as well as associated parties promote their interests and agendas to Brussels and from there back into national arenas, must be explored. One such institutional avenue can be the meetings of European and EaP parliamentarians in inter-parliamentary forums, such as the EP-EaP EuroNest Assembly, where EaP politicians become socialized in the life of transnational political families. This paper has admittedly fallen short of offering specific mechanism-like links between Europarty involvement and outcomes in national party systems. At most it was shown that Europarties amplify pre-existing tendencies in national party systems. The temporal congruence between Europarty involvement and some outcomes (in terms of format and mechanics) in national party systems though is tempting enough at this stage to invite more serious and detailed research.

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