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Eurasian Multipartism: Variations on a Theme

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The paper analyzes the structure and competitiveness of party systems, the degree of institutionalization of parliamentary parties, and the role of parties in making and breaking governments in Eurasia's twelve minimal and non-democratic countries. Within the hegemonic party systems of Kazakhstan, Russia, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, personalist dominant parties translate presidential power into the electoral and legislative arenas. However, they are not 'ruling parties.' By contrast, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Ukraine, and to a lesser degree Armenia feature more pluralist, competitive national and legislative party systems that are plagued by the high instability of organizations and their coalitions. Only in this group have parties also become the key actors in government formation and termination. The two patterns mirror the structure and dynamics of network-based 'power pyramids' in patronal regimes rather than a genuine 'partyization' of politics akin to Western democracies.

Keywords

Party system, political party, political regime, governments, Eurasia.

Introduction

The collapse of communism in the European East and Southeast at the end of the 1990s and the dismantling of the Soviet Union spurred a large-scale natural experiment. Not only the majority of the citizens in the postcommunist countries, but also Western observers assumed they were witness to a fundamental and simultaneous transition to democracy and market economy in more than two dozen countries. As part of a historically unique 'catch-up' process, parties and party-based governments were to become the lynchpin of the new political systems, reenacting in a short time span the centuries-long evolution of the West, where modern democracy emerged as a "by-product of party competition"¹.

¹ **Schattschneider E. E.**, Party Government. New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1942, p. 4.

Yet, the postcommunist real-world development unfolded neither quickly nor in the form scholars originally had expected. This is especially true for the Eurasian successor states of the Soviet Union. With the exception of the three Baltic republics, none of them has transformed into a liberal democracy over the last quarter century, nor have political parties become the key players in politics. Nevertheless, not only do parties and party systems exist, but they also display considerable variation all across the region. The spectrum of party systems ranges from pluralist to hegemonic configurations. Legislatures in the region are virtually party-free, structured by well-disciplined parties but tightly controlled by presidents, or fragmented and highly fluid but 'real' multiparty parliaments. Finally, party-based governments have become common in some countries but not in others.

The present paper aims to systematize this variation by mapping Eurasia according to three major dimensions of party system institutionalization. This concept has been elaborated in comparative research in order to understand party and party system development in the so-called 'third-wave democracies' that have emerged in the last third of the twentieth century. After adapting this concept to the Eurasian condition of 'patronal politics,' I analyze the structure and competitiveness of party systems, the degree of institutionalization of parliamentary parties, and the role of parties in making and breaking governments in the twelve post-Soviet countries under scrutiny. In all three dimensions, the bewildering diversity of Eurasian politics can be boiled down to a few patterns. I will interpret the empirical findings from the perspectives of democratization, on the one hand, and of 'patronal politics', on the other hand, showing that the Eurasian party and party system dynamics are best understood as one of the manifestations of the emergence, consolidation or breakdown and reshuffling of network-based 'power pyramids.'

1. Party System Institutionalization in Patronal Regimes

Liberal democracy is virtually unthinkable without political pluralism, organized in parties². Parties integrate societies by bringing

² Lipset S. M., The Indispensability of Political Parties, *Journal of Democracy*, 2000, **11**, 1, 48–55.

together different people with similar interests. They aggregate, shape and represent these interests in politics, providing the electorate with political alternatives and channeling the political participation of citizens. They strive to win elections, to build governments and to implement policies. However, in newly emerging democracies, parties and party systems cannot be taken for granted. Even under the most favorable conditions, they take time to become institutionalized.

Thus, even more than two decades after the onset of democratization, most of the postcommunist countries in Central and Eastern Europe are still plagued by volatile parties and party systems³. Nevertheless, in these young democracies political parties are now considered to be the key players in politics⁴, and parliamentary party groups have become the basic building blocks of the internal organization of parliaments as well as the main actors in government formation⁵.

The same cannot be said about the Soviet successor states. Here, drawbacks and problems in the development of parties and party systems are more forceful, more protracted and of a very different kind. Compared to the countries in East Central Europe, the Eurasian new nation-states started under far less favorable conditions, such as the lack of democratic traditions, highly personalized politics, president-centered constitutions and less democracy aid from the West. True, since the last country in the region, Turkmenistan, legalized party pluralism in 2010, all twelve Eurasian countries also have multiparty systems in the formal sense of the term. Likewise, important processes of institutionalization have occurred, particularly during the early twenty-first century. This notwithstanding, parties and party competition in the post-Soviet space remain markedly different from other parts of the postcommunist world. These differences constitute one of the major aspects of the “enormous

³ **Casal Bértoa F., Mair P.**, Party System Institutionalization across Time in Post-Communist Europe. *Keman H., Müller-Rommel F. (eds.), Party Government in the New Europe*, pp. 85–112, London: Routledge, 2012. **Haughton T., Deegan-Krause K.**, Hurricane Season. Systems of Instability in Central and East European Party Politics, *East European Politics and Societies*, 2015, **29**, 1, 61–80.

⁴ **Ibenskas R., Sikk A.**, Patterns of Party Change in Central and Eastern Europe, 1990–2015, *Party Politics*, 2017, **23**, 1, 43–54.

⁵ **Olson D. M., Ionszki G.**, Two Decades of Divergent Post-Communist Parliamentary Development, *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 2011, **17**, 2, 234–55.

divide” that has been diagnosed by scholars in the early twenty-first century, separating the “mostly democratic East Central Europe” from the “largely autocratic former Soviet Union”⁶. Yet, there is also impressive variation within the Eurasian region which is far from being as homogenous as this statement about the ‘postcommunist divide’ suggests.

The starting point of the present intra-regional analysis is ‘party system institutionalization,’ the core concept in comparative research on parties and party systems regarding newly emerging democracies. It can be defined as the process “when the patterns of interaction among political parties become predictable and stable over time”⁷. In the literature, this concept is usually operationalized by (a) the stability in rules and patterns of interparty competition, (b) the strength of party-voter linkages, i.e. of party roots in society, (c) the consensus of the main political actors about the legitimacy of parties and the electoral process, and (d) the relative independence of parties as collective actors from the interests of their leaders⁸.

Empirical analyses of young democracies show that they are often plagued by weak party and party system institutionalization. This means “less regularity in patterns of party competition; weaker party roots in society; less legitimacy accorded to parties; and weaker party organizations, often dominated by personalistic leaders”⁹. On the face of it, this description also seems to be appropriate for Eurasia, where apart from minimal – democratic Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia, more or less authoritarian regimes prevail. However, this diagnosis is far too shallow. A first closer look at the region reveals that the second and fourth dimensions of party (system) institutionalization cannot be described simply as ‘weak.’ In fact, parties are not anchored in the respective

⁶ **Way L. A., Levitsky S.**, Linkage, Leverage, and the Post-Communist Divide, *East European Politics and Societies*, 2007, **21**, 1, 48–66; **Møller J., Skaaning S.**, The Three Worlds of Post-Communism. Revisiting Deep and Proximate Explanations, *Democratization*, 2009, **16**, 2, 298–322.

⁷ **Casal Bértoa F., Mair P.**, Op. Cit, p. 87.

⁸ **Mainwaring S., Scully T. R. (Eds.)**, Building Democratic Institutions. Party Systems in Latin America. Stanford, CA, Stanford Univ. Press, 1995; **Mainwaring S., Torcal M.**, Party System Institutionalization and Party System Theory after the Third Wave of Democratization, *Katz R. S., Crotty W. J. (eds.)*, *Handbook of Party Politics*. London, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006, pp. 204–227.

⁹ **Mainwaring S., Torcal M.**, Op. cit, p. 207.

societies at all. All countries deliver rather extreme evidence for what has been described in the literature as clientelistic and personalistic voting, meaning that the linkages between parties and their electorate are not based on programmatic or ideological positions¹⁰. Further, most parties are leader-centered ‘political machines’ with almost no ‘party capacity’, defined as the ability of membership-based organizations “to maintain consistency as collective actors in democratic politics—nominating candidates, aggregating voters’ interests by proposing platforms and running competitive national campaigns, and managing government power”¹¹.

The reason for this extreme underinstitutionalization of parties is the context of ‘patronal politics’ shared by all regimes in the region. This is politics “where individuals organize their political and economic pursuits primarily around the personalized exchange of concrete rewards and punishments through chains of actual acquaintance”¹². As a consequence, the political realm is structured by extended political-economic networks that pervade the state, society and the economy. Such networks consist of more or less loosely coupled individuals and groups striving for access to power, rallying around patrons and opportunistically reshuffling alliances with other networks, thus forming ‘power pyramids.’ In this context, political parties may exist and occasionally play important roles, as I will show below. Yet, in essence they consist of rather ephemeral manifestations of patronal networks. While party competition in the electoral and legislative arena, the forging and breaking of (coalition) governments and the emergence and decay of parties certainly reflect intra-elite struggle and bargaining over the resources of the state, they do not necessarily organize and structure this struggle. Rather, political parties are ‘labels’ or ‘shells’ that these networks adopt in order to pursue their interests in different political arenas.

As a consequence, the question of party system institutionalization must be reformulated when applied to Eurasian politics. What is at stake is not merely the ‘stability’ of party systems and the ‘legitimacy’

¹⁰ **Mainwaring S., Torcal M.**, Op. cit.

¹¹ **Samuels D. J., Shugart M. S.**, Party ‘Capacity’ in New Democracies. How Executive Format Affects the Recruitment of Presidents and Prime Ministers, *Democratization*, 2014, **21**, 1, 137–160.

¹² **Hale H. E.**, Patronal Politics. Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 10.

of parties as political actors. Rather, the important questions are somewhat narrower and more basic than the initial focus on parties as the main actors of democratization suggests. They concern the place of parties as forms of elite coordination within patronal regimes. How are the party systems structured? Is there party competition in the electoral arena, and what does this mean in terms of ‘patronal politics’? Do parties play a role in the legislative and governmental arenas at all?

2. Eurasia’s Party Systems

2.1. *Types of Parties and Party Systems*

While the European multiparty systems are typically structured by ideological party families, the Eurasian party systems are not. Their constituent parts are more adequately distinguished by their structural position within the overall system.

The core element of every party system in the region, apart from Belarus, is the so-called ‘party of power.’ During the 1990s, such parties were amorphous coalitions of political-economic networks supporting the president. They mostly emerged in the run-up to legislative elections, but soon afterwards became inactive or disappeared altogether. With the beginning of the second postcommunist decade, however, these electoral machines consolidated in some countries. Parties of power are carefully engineered in order to deliver incentives for the elites to join the ruling coalition. With their privileged access to administrative resources in exchange for supporting the president, successful instances of this party type are able to mobilize voters and to organize (often commanding) electoral victories¹³.

As organizations, parties of power are fundamentally different from voluntary organizations based on formal membership typical for liberal party-based democracies. Their very existence depends on the credible and steady commitment of the president who is either the

¹³ **Turovsky R.**, Party Systems in Post-Soviet States: The Shaping of Political Competition. *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 2011, **12**, 2, 197-213; **Makarenko B. I.**, Postsovetskaya partiya vlasti: ‘Edinaya Rossiya’ v sravnitel’nom kontekste, *Polis*, 2011, 1, 42–65 (in Russian).

organizational patron or the party's chairman or both. Interactions between the party leader, the party officials and affiliated politicians are rather driven by loyalty and the exchange of clientelistic goods than by ideological or programmatic affinity or organizational rules. In political practice, formal party structures and procedures are nearly irrelevant for the party's functional operations, such as candidate nomination and legislative activity. Their organizational capacity remains low, while there is high identification of the party with the leader¹⁴.

The research literature on 'authoritarian institutions' usually subsumes Eurasia's parties of power under the label of 'dominant parties', a party species in semi- and non-democratic settings that can be found in several regions of the world¹⁵. The dominant party is an organization which "controls access to many (...) important political offices, shares powers of policy-making and patronage distribution, and uses privileged access to state resources to maintain its position in power"¹⁶. More precisely, the Eurasian variety of the dominant party is that of a 'personalist dominant party'¹⁷ arising out of the patronal nature of post-Soviet politics.

However, not all parties of power are the same in the region. First, differences in degree lurk behind the overall similarity of strong personalism. At the outward personalist end of the continuum are parties such as Kazakhstan's *Nur Otan party*¹⁸, the *People's Democratic Party of*

¹⁴ **Kostadinova T. Levitt B.**, Toward a Theory of Personalist Parties. Concept Formation and Theory Building, *Politics & Policy*, 2014, **42**, 4, 490–512.

¹⁵ **Greene K. F.**, The Political Economy of Authoritarian Single-Party Dominance, *Comparative Political Studies*, 2010, **43**, 7, 807–834; **Magaloni B., Kricheli R.**, Political Order and One-Party Rule, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2010, 13, 123–143.

¹⁶ **Reuter, O. J., Turovsky R.**, Dominant Party Rule and Legislative Leadership in Authoritarian Regimes, *Party Politics*, 2014, **20**, 5, 663–74; **Reuter, O. J., Gandhi J.**, Economic Performance and Elite Defection from Hegemonic Parties. *British Journal of Political Science*, 2011, **41**, 1, 83–110.

¹⁷ **Isaacs R., Whitmore S.**, The Limited Agency and Life-Cycles of Personalized Dominant Parties in the Post-Soviet Space. The Cases of United Russia and Nur Otan, *Democratization*, 2014, **21**, 4, 699–721.

¹⁸ **Isaacs R.**, Party System Formation in Kazakhstan. Between Formal and Informal Politics. London: Routledge, 2011, pp. 116-7.

Tajikistan and *Yeni Azerbaijan*¹⁹, while Armenia's *Republican Party*, for example, occupies a moderate position. It has already survived several leadership turnovers – a sign of at least some impersonal institutionalization – and is somewhat less president-centered²⁰. *United Russia* can be located somewhere in between, combining “a personalistic party with strong bureaucratic elements”²¹. Finally, political alliances such as *Georgian Dream*²² and Ukraine's *Petro Poroshenko Bloc*²³ are still barely formalized electoral and government coalitions, consisting of different personalized power networks with only a small degree of cohesion.

Second, not all parties of power have managed to consolidate as dominant parties. Failed or abandoned ‘projects’ of pro-presidential networks easily outnumber successful instances. For example, in Russia such electoral machines have been forged in the run-up to every election since 1993. However, it was only with President Vladimir Putin that *United Russia* emerged as the modal case of a Eurasian dominant party²⁴. The differences in the ability of these parties to hold onto power and to consolidate are the most important feature distinguishing the more competitive political regimes in the region from their more authoritarian neighbors, as will be shown below. For convenience, I operationalize the category of ‘consolidated dominant party’ as a ‘party of power’ that controls the legislature for at least two consecutive legislative periods, holding more than 45 percent of mandates.

Related to the strength of the party of power is the degree to which party pluralism is formally allowed or tolerated. Post-Soviet party systems also vary according to whether they embrace the opposition and

¹⁹ **Hale H.**, *Patronal....*, Op. Cit., p. 474; **Ishiyama J.**, Political Party Development and Party ‘Gravity’ in Semi-Authoritarian States. The Cases of Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, 2008, **4**, 1, 33–53.

²⁰ EuFoA (European Friends of Armenia), *Armenia 2012: An Introduction to the Political Party Landscape*, 2012,

<http://www.eufoa.org/uploads/ArmeniaPoliticalPartyGuide.pdf> (25.02.2017).

²¹ **Roberts S. P.**, *Putin's United Russia Party*. New York: Routledge, 2013, p.185.

²² **Fairbanks Ch. H.**, Georgian Democracy. Seizing or Losing the Chance? *Journal of Democracy*, 2014, **25**, 1, 154–165.

²³ **Fedorenko K., et al.** The Ukrainian Party System before and after the 2013–2014 Euromaidan, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2016, **68**, 4, 609–630.

²⁴ **Roberts S. P.**, Op. cit.

whether oppositional parties are represented in the national assembly. For convenience, I set out three categories of parties²⁵ that can be found along with the parties of power. First, ‘satellite parties’ are actively created or at least supported by the ruling group representing appendices to the party of power. Most of them are ‘spoiler parties’ charged to divert votes and support from the more ‘real’ opposition. The second category consists of ‘semi-opposition parties’ that potentially offer some challenge, but do not make claims for fundamental regime change. These parties declare themselves as the ‘constructive opposition,’ implicating at least some loyalty to the president. Their leaders are in an ambivalent position because they simultaneously remain outside the ruling group yet are integrated into the overall regime architecture. Third, the ‘principal’ or ‘non-systemic opposition’, in contrast, consists of parties or individuals that openly challenge the existing regime. All constitutions in the region to some extent restrict the political ideologies, strategies and goals of political parties, but some parts of the principal opposition generally enjoy legal status. Their activities are constrained by rigorous party and electoral laws erecting seemingly technical hurdles of party registration and election participation. In the same vein, repression is often camouflaged by administrative and judicial means or by negative campaigning and the launching of political ‘kompromat’, directed against opposition party leaders and activists.

The party systems in the region vary along the degree of domination exerted by the parties of power. When referring to the traditional typology of party systems as proposed by Sartori²⁶, three categories are relevant. First, in ‘hegemonic party regimes’ multiparty elections are regularly held but “the possibility of a rotation in power is not even envisaged” as long as the regime is intact, so that opposition parties are “second class, licensed parties”²⁷ rather than competitors. In Eurasia, there are two varieties of hegemonic party regimes that feature fig-leaf party pluralism at best. In Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, consolidated

²⁵ cf. **Gel'man V.**, Party Politics in Russia. From Competition to Hierarchy, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2008, **60**, 6, 913–930; **White D.**, Re-Conceptualising Russian Party Politics, *East European Politics*, 2012, **28**, 3, 210–224.

²⁶ **Sartori G.**, Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

²⁷ **Sartori G.**, Op. cit., p. 230.

dominant parties hold more than three-fourths of the seats in the national legislature. By contrast, in Russia, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the respective parties of power also fulfill the criterion of consolidated dominant parties, but it is only with the help of satellite parties that they control from 75 to 100 percent of the mandates.

In other cases, parties of power are forced to compete under conditions of ‘real’ but more or less constrained party pluralism and ‘real’ but more or less flawed elections. Here, we find ‘predominant party systems’ where opposition parties are not only permitted to exist but regularly challenge the dominant party even if this is not effective. Granted that it is rather impossible to define the category of predominant party system in a universal sense²⁸, I will reserve the term for party systems where, first, there is a consolidated dominant party as defined above, i.e. holding a (near to) absolute majority of seats over at least two consecutive legislative periods. Second, in predominant party systems some principal opposition parties are represented in the national assembly in a non – negligible quantity.

All other party systems with a meaningful opposition and parties of power that fail to meet the last criterion shall be grouped together under the label of ‘pluralist party systems.’ When charting the Eurasian cases according to this framework, the following picture emerges (see table).

2.2. Mapping Eurasia

Stable Hegemonic Party Systems. A first group of countries displays hegemonic party systems. The typical cases are Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Russia (since 2003). Here, at least a few semi-opposition and non-systemic parties have taken part in every parliamentary election since independence. On Election Day the number of registered parties, however, is regularly cut by half and more. This especially affects the principal opposition, which is regularly excluded from the assembly, whereas the presidential party of power routinely wins the legislative majority or supermajority.

²⁸ Sartori G., Op. cit. pp. 192-201.

The *Nur Otan party*, founded by President Nursultan Nazarbaev in 1999, has dominated Kazakhstan's party system since 2004. Opposition parties have been either co-opted into the regime or marginalized²⁹. The legislative election in March 2016 produced an assembly with *Nur Otan* holding 82.2 percent of the seats and two parties of the 'constructive opposition' each winning seven out of the 98 seats.

In Tajikistan, President Emomali Rahmon's *People's Democratic Party* (PDPT), founded in 1998, has had a hegemonic position right from the election in 2000, when it won two thirds of the seats. During the first decade after the civil war, the regime was somewhat constrained by a power-sharing arrangement with the opposition³⁰ so that bargaining with the opposition and co-optation as well as the creation of two satellite parties were the prevailing strategies of the ruling group. During the last couple of years, however, restrictions and repression have become more intense. In 2015, the *Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan* (IRPT), the only religious opposition in Central Asia enjoying a legal status, was de facto banned. It is no longer represented in the current assembly. In addition to the PDPT, which now holds 76 percent of the seats, five parties each obtained between one and five seats in the 2015 election. All of these parties are regarded as pro-presidential, with the Communist party (two seats) representing the single semi-oppositional 'constructive opposition,' labeling the election a 'political farce'³¹.

Azerbaijan's party of power, founded in 1992 by late President Heydar Aliyev, has been in control of the country's assembly since the

²⁹ **Isaacs R.**, Op. cit.; **Nurumov D., Vashchanka V.**, Constitutional Development of Independent Kazakhstan, *Elgie R., Moestrup S. (eds.), Semi-Presidentialism in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 143–172;

³⁰ **Borishpolets K.**, Elections in Central Asian State. Political Rivalry in a Transitional Society, *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 2006, **1**, 37, 25-37; **Markowitz L. P.**, Tajikistan. Authoritarian Reaction in a Postwar State, *Finkel E., Brudny Y. M. (eds.), Coloured Revolutions and Authoritarian Reactions*, London: Routledge, 2013, pp. 98–119.

³¹ **Mardon M.**, Neodnoznachnaya otsenka godovoi deyatel'nosti tadjhikskogo parlamenta, *Radio Ozodi*. 17/06/2016 (in Russian), <http://rus.ozodi.org/a/27805100.html> (21.09.2016); **Mardon M.**, Naskolko dolgo prodlihsya 'molchanie' politikov v Tadjhikistane? *Radio Ozodi*. 20/06/2016 (in Russian), <http://rus.ozodi.org/a/27809688.htm> (21.09.2016); **Mardon M.**, Talbakov: Kompartiya trebuet vernut' svoyu sobstvennost'. *Radio Ozodi*. 23/07/2016 (in Russian), <http://rus.ozodi.org/a/27876396.html> (21.09.2016).

1995 election. The case is special, because *Yeni Azerbaijan* has never held a legislative majority on its own. Instead, it assures the near-to 90 percent majority of the party of power by relying on additional 30 to 50 loyal deputies masquerading as independent mandate-holders. Overall, the country's party system is densely populated with about 70 registered parties, remaining highly fragmented and fluid³². In the 2015 legislative election, which was boycotted by the major opposition parties, *Yeni Azerbaijan* won 69 of 125 seats. It is also supported by 43 independents and at least three deputies belonging to small satellite parties.

While Russia's party system was pluralist and 'hyperfragmented' during the first postcommunist decade, since 2003 it has become clearly dominated by *United Russia*³³. The September 2016 Duma election brought back the constitutional majority for the presidential party, a position it had already held in the period 2003–2011. The three satellite respective semi – opposition parties in the Duma are the same as before³⁴. Also, a number of non-systemic opposition parties have run for mandates in every election since 1993, but none of them was able to overcome the seven percent threshold in the 2007 and 2011 elections, when the Duma was elected by proportional vote only. After the restoration of parallel voting in 2016, one candidate of the semi-opposition party *Civilian power* won a single-member constituency. This is much less than in 2003, when the same electoral system was used for the last time and eight parties which had polled below the electoral threshold managed to gain mandates in the first-past-the-post tier of the voting system.

³² **LaPorte J.**, Hidden in Plain Sight. Political Opposition and Hegemonic Authoritarianism in Azerbaijan, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 2015, **31**, 4, 339–366; **Sultanova S.**, Challenging the Aliyev Regime. Political Opposition in Azerbaijan. *Demokratizatsiya*, 2014 **22**, 1, 15–37; **Allahyarova T.**, **Mammadov F.**, Political Parties in Azerbaijan. From One Election to Another. Baku: Center for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2010.

³³ **Gel'man V.**, From 'Feckless Pluralism' to 'Dominant Power Politics'? The Transformation of Russia's Party System, *Democratization*, 2006, **13**, 4, 545–561; **Smyth R.**, Political Preferences and Party-Development in Post-communist States, *Demokratizatsiya*, 2012, **20**, 2, 113–132; **Roberts S. P.**, Op. Cit.

³⁴ **Gel'man V.**, Party ..., Op. cit.; **White D.**, Op. cit.; **Wilson K.**, How Increased Competition Can Strengthen Electoral Authoritarianism. Party-System Pluralization in Russia, *Problems of Post-Communism*, 2011, **63**, 4, 199–2096.

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are extreme instances of hegemonic party systems where party pluralism is a bold, outright fake. All four elections in Uzbekistan since 1999 and the first ‘multiparty’ election in Turkmenistan (2013) – all of them officially showed an 85 percent to 90 percent voter turnout – reveal the same pattern: All registered parties running for seats win mandates, the ratio of which is obviously fixed ex ante. Remarkably, the presidential party is assigned not the majority of seats but only about a third of the overall number. The ‘best loser’ wins somewhat less than three quarters of the winner’s share and the other parties follow in a hierarchy. While this distribution seems surprising at first glance, it makes perfect sense from the perspective of presidents who do not lean on parties of power in the strict sense, but on what could be called orchestrated ‘party systems of power.’ They are composed of a manageable number of organizations each representing a certain cluster of ‘values’ or social groups. Thus, in Turkmenistan, the *Democratic Party* is surrounded by the *Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs*, the *Trade Union*, the *Women’s Union* and the *Youth association*. In Uzbekistan all parties bear the label ‘democratic’ with a qualifying adjective – they are *Liberal*, *Social*, *People’s* and *National Revival Democrats*. In addition, the *Ecological Movement* appoints 15 deputies. Hence, the distribution of seats rather reflects the president’s vision about the appropriate range and hierarchy of social groups or ideological issues. Conceptually, there is no place for even a semi-opposition. This is demonstrated, for example, by the lack of distinction between the parties’ electoral manifestos³⁵ but also by Uzbekistan’s late President Karimov’s routine of regularly changing the party that was honored to nominate him for the next presidential election.

³⁵ **Ismoilov S., Saidov S.**, On the Results of the Parliamentary Elections in Uzbekistan, *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 2010, **11**, 1, 63-78.

Table: Quality of Political Regime, Type of Party System and Cabinet Duration in 12 Eurasian Countries

Country	Democracy rating	Structure of party system		Cabinet duration (months)		
		period	type	dominant party	overall	duration by type
<i>Moldova</i>	1992 PF	since 1992	pluralist	-	17.6	technocratic (until May 1998): 28.3
	since 1995 ED	2001-2009	predominant	Party of Communists (PCRM)		transitional/party-based: 17.6
		since 2010	pluralist	-		technocratic (until November 2002): 12.8
<i>Ukraine</i>	1992 PF	since 1992	pluralist	-	13.2	transitional/party-based: 13.6
	1994 ED					
	2005 F	since 1992	pluralist	-		
	since 2010 ED					
<i>Georgia</i>	1992 ED	since 1992	pluralist	-	15.9	technocratic (until November 2003): 18
	2003 PF	1995-2003	predominant	Citizens' Union (CUG)		
	2004 ED	2004-2011	predominant	United National Movement (UNM)		
	2008 PF	since 2012	predominant	Georgian Dream (GD)		
	since 2012 ED					transitional/party-based: 14.3
<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	1992 PF				12.1	technocratic (until March 2005): 15.8
	1995 ED					
	2000 NF	since 1992	pluralist	-		transitional/party-based: 9.5
	2005 PF					
	2009 NF					
	since 2010 PF					
<i>Armenia</i>	1992 PF	since 1992	pluralist	-	20.3	technocratic (until May 1999): 15.2
	1999 ED	since 2007	predominant	Republican Party (RPA)		transitional/party-based: 23.4
	since 2003 PF					

Table: Quality of Political Regime, Type of Party System and Cabinet Duration in 12 Eurasian Countries (continued)

<i>Russia</i>	1992 PF	since 1992	pluralist	-	20.8	technocratic
	1993 ED since 2004 NF	since 2003	hegemonic (with satellite parties)	United Russia (UR)		
<i>Kazakhstan</i>	1992 PF	since 1992	pluralist	-	33.6	technocratic
	since 1994 NF	since 2004	hegemonic	Nur Otan' Democratic People's Party		
<i>Azerbaijan</i>	1992 PF	since 1995	hegemonic	Yeni Azerbaijan Party (YAP)	n.a.*	technocratic
	1993 NF					
	1997 PF since 2004 NF					
<i>Tajikistan</i>	1992 NF	since 1992 since 2000	pluralist hegemonic	- People's Democratic Party (PDPT)	44.4	technocratic
	1992 PF 1996 NF	since 1992	pluralist	-		
<i>Turkmenistan</i>	since 1992 NF	since 1992 since 2008	single-party system hegemonic (with satellite parties)	Democratic Party (DPT)	n.a.**	technocratic
	since 1992 NF	since 1992	hegemonic (with satellite parties)	Liberal Democratic Party (UzLiDeP)		
<i>Uzbekistan</i>	since 1992 NF	since 1992	hegemonic (with satellite parties)	Liberal Democratic Party (UzLiDeP)	101.2	technocratic

Democracy rating as measured by Freedom House: F = "free"; ED = "partly free" and "electoral democracy"; PF = "partly free", but not rated as "electoral democracy"; NF = "not free"

* No change of prime minister since 1996; ** president-led cabinet without prime minister.

Oscillating Predominant – Pluralist Party Systems. In the other countries of the region, parties of power also regularly emerge but their position is less dominant, more fragile and more short-lived than in the hegemonic systems. Moldova, Georgia and Armenia have party systems that oscillate between the predominant and the pluralist variety. Here, parties of power have sometimes been able to stabilize over a certain period.

While the first two presidents of postcommunist Moldova were disinterested, unable or deliberately reluctant to create parties of power, the situation changed in 2001. The *Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova* (PCRM), founded in 1993 as the successor of the Soviet-Moldovan communist party, had a strong hold between February 2001 and April 2009. As the president's party it controlled the majority of seats in the parliament, cutting the threshold to a predominant party system. However, in 2010, the party system became clearly pluralist³⁶. At present, the Moldovan party system is in heightened flux. Taken together, in the last two elections (2010-2014) 31 parties have participated, 18 of them for the first time.

Georgia has thus far experienced three spells of a predominant party system. Eduard Shevardnadze's *Citizens' Union of Georgia*, founded in 1993, was firmly in control of the parliament between 1995 and 2003³⁷. After the regime was ousted by the Rose revolution in 2003, the new incumbent Mikheil Saakashvili managed to establish a predominant position for his *United National Movement*, commanding constitutional majorities in the 2004 and 2008 assemblies. Yet, in 2012 the newly formed, extremely amorphous opposition coalition *Georgian*

³⁶ **Way L.**, *Lucan Pluralism by Default. Weak Autocrats and the Rise of Competitive Politics*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2015, ch. 4; **Popescu N.**, *Moldova's Fragile Pluralism.*, *Russian Politics and Law*, 2012, **50**, 4, 37–50; **Saran V.**, *Moldova's New Cabinet. A Hope to Overcome the Political Crisis 2016? University of Nottingham: Party Systems and Governments Observatory*, 2016, <http://whogoverns.eu/moldovas-new-cabinet-a-hope-to-overcome-the-political-crisis-in-2016> (24.09.2016).

³⁷ **Christophe B.**, *Understanding Politics in Georgia*. DEMSTAR Research Report, 22. Aarhus: University of Aarhus, 2004. Christophe 2004; **Nodia G., Pinto S. Á.**, *The Political Landscape of Georgia. Political Parties: Achievements, Challenges and Prospects*. Delft: Eburon, 2006.

Dream seized 57 percent of the seats³⁸. With the triumph of *Georgian Dream* in the next (2016) parliamentary election winning more than 76 percent of the mandates, it became obvious that a third period of a predominant party system had commenced.

Armenia's party system was on the cusp of a predominant party system between 1991 and 1998, but the *Armenian National Movement* (ANM) never held a formal parliamentary majority. After a reshuffling of the party system between the late –1990s through until the mid – 2000s, the *Republican Party* (RPA) consolidated as the new party of power. From 2000, party leaders were prime ministers, and in 2008, party chairman Serzh Sargsyan became the country's third president. After having won the biggest share of mandates in Armenia's fragmented national assembly in 1999 and 2003, it reached a majority in the 2007, 2012, 2017 elections consolidating as a predominant party. Observers note that Armenian political space while being more close than Georgia's, remains more open and competitive than that of Azerbaijan, its other neighbor³⁹.

Pluralist Party Systems. In Ukraine, over the entire post-Soviet period, as much as 150 different parties have participated at least once in the seven national elections since 1994, but only 38 have ever held mandates, 22 of these gaining them by joining coalitions or electoral blocs⁴⁰. Using the criteria developed above, the party system has always been of the pluralist variety, afflicted by major instability⁴¹. Even the strongest party

³⁸ **Berglund C.**, Georgia between Dominant-Power Politics, Feckless Pluralism, and Democracy. *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 2014, **22**, 3, 445–470; **Nakashidze M.**, Semi-Presidentialism in Georgia. *Elgie R., Moestrup S. (eds.), Semi-Presidentialism in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 119–142, 2016.

³⁹ **Way L.**, State Power and Autocratic Stability. Armenia and Georgia Compared, *Wooden A. F. and Stefes C. H. (eds.), The Politics of Transition in Central Asia and the Caucasus*. London: Routledge, 2009, pp. 103–123. **Hale H. E.**, 25 Years After The USSR. What's Gone Wrong? *Journal of Democracy*, 2016, **27**, 3, 24–35; **Markarov A.**, Semi-Presidentialism in Armenia. *Elgie R., Moestrup S. (eds.), Semi-Presidentialism in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 61–90.

⁴⁰ **Fedorenko K., et al**, Op. Cit.

⁴¹ **Rybiy O.**, Party System Institutionalization in Ukraine, *Demokratizatsiya*, 2013, **21**, 3, 401–423.

failed to gain the majority of seats, surpassing its closest rival only rarely by more than a slim margin. While Viktor Yushchenko's *Our Ukraine*, Viktor Yanukovich's *Party of the Regions* and the *Petro Poroshenko Bloc* fit the definition of a party of power, none of them was ever able to command the party system for two legislative periods and to establish hegemony.

In Kyrgyzstan, party – affiliated deputies have been the exception rather than the rule over a long period of time. Only by the mid-2000s was party development pushed by President Askar Akaev's attempt to build a party of power modeled after *United Russia* and *Nur Otan*. However, it failed spectacularly with the Tulip revolution in early 2005⁴². The project of the next President Kurmanbek Bakiyev seemed to succeed at first. The new party of power won nearly 80 percent of the seats in the 2007 parliamentary election, but was ousted three years later by another mass mobilization⁴³. With the new 2010 constitution capping the number of deputies for a single party at 54 percent, and a new electoral law in 2011, a pluralist party system emerged with as many as 194 officially registered parties by August 2014 in a country with less than three million adult inhabitants. Two elections produced a fractious parliament with almost evenly distributed seats among five parties in 2010⁴⁴ and a somewhat stronger presidential party in 2015 (38 seats), surrounded by five opposition parties holding between 11 and 28 seats⁴⁵.

Formally, Belarus also has a pluralist party system. In fact, however, this pluralism is completely feckless mirroring the absence of a party of power. The fluid system embraces parties ranging from satellites

⁴² Elebaeva A., Pukhova M., Political Transformations in Kyrgyzstan (1991-2006), *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 2007, 2, 44, 67–78.

⁴³ Marat E., Kyrgyzstan: A Parliamentary System Based on Inter-Elite Consensus. *Demokratizatsiya*, 2012, 20, 4, 325–344; Cummings S., et al, State, Regime, and Government in the Kyrgyz Republic (1991–2010): Disaggregating a Relationship, *East European Politics*, 2013, 29, 4, 443–460.

⁴⁴ Huskey E., Hill D., The 2010 Referendum and Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan, *Electoral Studies*, 2011, 30, 4, 876–879.

⁴⁵ Juraev S., The Evolving Role of Political Parties in Kyrgyz Politics, Marlene L., Johan E.l (eds.): *Kyrgyzstan beyond 'Democracy Island' and 'Failing State'*. *Social and Political Changes in a Post-Soviet Society*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015, pp. 21–38; Fumagalli M., Semi-Presidentialism in Kyrgyzstan, Elgie R., Moestrup S. (eds.), *Semi-Presidentialism in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 173–206.

to the non-systemic opposition, but these are not the relevant players even in the electoral arena, where the bulk of candidates remain nonpartisan⁴⁶. Thus, in the last elections to the House of Representatives (September 2016), 94 independent candidates succeeded, one of them considered to belong to the opposition. At the same time, nine parties ran for seats, five of which won a combined total of 16 mandates - 14 were obtained by three regime – loyal parties, whereas the ‘constructive’ and the non-systemic opposition each gained one seat⁴⁷. Although the number of partisan mandates seems low, it had doubled the share compared to the previous assemblies.

2.3. Discussion: The Structure of Party Competition in Eurasia

In summary, after a quarter century of evolution it is underinstitutionalization, fragmentation and high party volatility that still plague the pluralist or predominant party systems of Armenia and Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Ukraine. In contrast, the hegemonic party systems in the other countries have seemingly been ‘frozen’ over time, revolving around a consolidated dominant party, that is orbited by underinstitutionalized and fluid satellite or opposition parties.

It is important to note that in all cases parties remain weakly organized, personalistic and programmatically weak. Instead, the core difference between the pluralist/pluralist-predominant and the hegemonic party systems can be found at the level of competitiveness within the party system, not in the nature of the parties as organizations. It is therefore not surprising that the different patterns of party competition roughly correspond to the democratic quality of political regimes (see the first column of the table). All authoritarian regimes – as diagnosed by Freedom House – feature stable hegemonic party systems, with

⁴⁶ **Charnysh V., Kulakevich T.**, Belarusian Political Parties: Organizational Structures and Practices, <http://charnysh.net/documents/Parties.pdf>, (23.02.2017); **Glavachek P.**, Politicheskie partii i obshchestvo v sovremennoj Belarusi, *Polis*, 2010, 2, 64–74 (in Russian).

⁴⁷ CEC: Soobshchenie Tsentral'noi Komissii Respubliki Belarus' po vyboram i provedeniyu respublikanskikh referendumov ob itogakh vyborov deputatov Palaty predstavitelei Natsional'nogo sobraniya Respubliki Belarus' shestogo sozyva (In Russian), <http://rec.gov.by/ru/Elections-PPNS6-Gol.> (12.11. 2016).

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as the least free countries being accompanied by the most extreme variety of fig-leaf pluralism. In contrast, none of the minimal democracies in the region – Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia– or the relatively competitive regimes of Kyrgyzstan and Armenia have ever reached the stage of hegemonic party systems. Instead, their party systems are pluralist, with some occasional predominant spells⁴⁸.

However, it is not party pluralism per se that matters, but rather the condition of the party of power. This is the main factor defining whether there is meaningful political competition or not, mirrored by higher or lower democracy scores. This becomes particularly obvious in the exceptional case of ‘pluralist’ Belarus as well as when comparing the dynamics of the party systems in the region. In the more competitive countries, between one and three major party system turnovers have taken place over the last two and a half decades. This has been linked to the decay of parties of power that have been unable to stabilize in the long run, being ousted by mass mobilization in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2014) and Kyrgyzstan (2005, 2010) or by losing elections in Moldova (2009) and Georgia (2012). In contrast, parties of power have managed to become consolidated dominant parties in the authoritarian countries of the region.

Thus, on the face of it, the variation in the structure of party systems seems to echo alternative political trajectories leading to either delayed and inconclusive democratization or authoritarian consolidation. Yet, a more fruitful interpretation of these dynamics refers to the network-based particularities of ‘patronal politics’⁴⁹. Stable hegemonic systems with intact parties of power correspond to the situation of what Hale calls ‘single – pyramid systems,’ characterized by the existence of a comprehensive, nation – wide presidential power network with political contention being almost invisible or absent altogether. Predominant party systems reflect a similar constellation, but the presidential pyramid is somewhat less powerful or less consolidated, facing challenges from other networks. In pluralist party systems, the party of power is far less comprehensive and routinely forced to compete with other network

⁴⁸ Freedom in the World 2016, Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2016> (17.10.2016).

⁴⁹ Hale, H. E., Patronal...., Op. Cit.; Hale, H. E., 25 Years...., Op. Cit.

pyramids. In these network – based interactions, party labels serve as focal points for elite coordination in the electoral arena.

The logic of patronal politics tends to produce regime cycles that are shaped by the emergence of integrated power pyramids, their occasional decay, reshuffling or replacement by a new ‘single – power pyramid’ or the fierce competition between rivalling networks⁵⁰. In the electoral arena, regime crises and breakdowns causing changes in network configurations condense in thrusts of party development and the restructuring of party systems. In the more authoritarian countries, the first post-Soviet single-pyramid systems have survived thus far, taking on the shape of stable hegemonic party systems in the early 2000s. In contrast, Eurasia’s more competitive regimes feature less stable parties and party systems. The oscillation between different types of party systems echoes alterations of parties of power and the reconstruction of power pyramids. Thus, the reported empirical evidence can be interpreted in terms of regime cycles. For example, at present, on the eve of a major change in national leadership, combined with a constitutional switch from semi-presidentialism to parliamentarism, Armenia’s single-pyramid system is under heavy pressure. In Kyrgyzstan and Moldova several ‘pyramid-parties’ are competing on a more or less level playing field. In contrast, in Georgia and Ukraine a fragile centripetal trend is underway, leaning towards constellations with two broader political coalitions as the main competitors and a number of smaller parties on the fringes. Although the challenger coalitions are smaller and weaker than the current party of power, rotation on power is definitely an option in future elections.

3. Parties in the Legislative and Executive Arenas

3.1. *Legislative Parties*

In Western democracies, parties are not only the single relevant players in electoral politics, but also in the legislative and executive arenas. Legislative assemblies are complex institutions that are organized through two different ‘channels’ – committees, on the one hand, and

⁵⁰ Hale, H. E., *Patronal...*, Op. Cit.

‘parliamentary party groups’ (PPG), often called ‘clubs’ or ‘factions’, on the other hand. These channels overlap in several ways: Committees, on the one hand, consist of members that are nominated by party groups, they are the arena where parties negotiate and bargain over policy issues, and both channels share floor debates⁵¹. PPGs, on the other hand, unite deputies from the same (extra-parliamentary) party. They aggregate political and ideological interests, linking mass suffrage with political organizations and national parliaments. By providing electoral accountability of the elites to the voters they ensure the legitimacy of the democratic system. In addition, in parliamentary democracies, PPGs promote system stability and efficiency because they deliver a coherent base for government formation and policy – making⁵². Committees, in turn, stress technical expertise and professionalism in legislation and are organized along different policy domains⁵³. This is the background against which the party structure of the Eurasian national assemblies, more precisely, their lower houses⁵⁴, shall now be analyzed.

Nonpartisan Assemblies. In most countries, the institutionalization of PPGs has been a long and protracted process which has both mirrored and endorsed the institutionalization of the national party system in the wider electoral arena. Currently, all but three Eurasian national assemblies have a dual – channel design including parliamentary party groups as well as committees. As of May 2015, when I conducted an analysis of the composition of all Eurasian national assemblies, only the legislatures of Belarus, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan stand out in their nonpartisan, single – channel, committee – centered design that is reminiscent of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union. In Azerbaijan, the formation of PPGs is not precluded by legislation, however. With a

⁵¹ **Olson D. M.**, *Democratic Legislative Institutions. A Comparative View*. Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 1994.

⁵² **Heidar K., Koole R. A.**, *Approaches to the Study of Parliamentary Party Groups*, Heidar K., Koole R. A. (eds.), *Parliamentary Party Groups in European Democracies. Political Parties behind Closed Doors*, London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 4-22.

⁵³ **Ostrow J. M.**, *Comparing Post-Soviet Legislatures. A Theory of Institutional Design and Political Conflict*. Columbus: Ohio State University, 2000.

⁵⁴ Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Belarus and Tajikistan have bicameral systems. None of the upper houses is organized along party structures.

minimum level of 20 percent of mandate-holders, though, the technical hurdle is very high, and the incentive to unite is low because the usual rights granted to parliamentary groups, such as access to resources and facilities or representation in the leading body of the assembly, are not conferred. The only party that meets the formal requirements is *Yeni Azerbaijan*, but it renounced organizing into a PPG⁵⁵. Similar to this pattern is Tajikistan, where the presidential party is also the only party that overcomes the minimal threshold of five (out of 63) mandates but has been organized as a faction⁵⁶.

Multiparty Assemblies Dominated by Parties of Power. All other countries in the region have assemblies that are well structured along party lines and display officially recognized PPGs. Yet again, there are different patterns. In Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, all mandate-holders of the assemblies are members of three to four PPGs.⁵⁷

In Russia, the decision to break with the Soviet committee system fell immediately after the constitution of the first *Duma* in late 1993⁵⁸. This drove the process of party-building and bolstered the parliament's capacity to bargain and compromise with the executive, even if during the 1990s the PPGs were only moderately disciplined and the assembly lacked stable majority coalitions⁵⁹. After 2003, in accord with the emergence of a hegemonic party system, the *Duma* moved towards a strong majoritarian direction. As in the other two countries, all legislative parties have a stable personnel composition and display a highly

⁵⁵ **Alieva L.**, *Political Party Regulation in the Republic of Azerbaijan*. Baku: Center for National and International Studies, 2012.

⁵⁶ **Mardon M.**, Neodnoznachnaya otsenka godovoi deyatel'nosti tadjikskogo parlamenta. Radio Ozodi. 17/06/2016, <http://rus.ozodi.org/a/27805100.html>, retrieved 21 September 2016.

⁵⁷ In addition, the assemblies of the latter two countries also contain two nonparty groups that are not subjected to popular elections.

⁵⁸ **Haspel M.**, Should Party in Parliament Be Weak or Strong? The Rules Debate in the Russian State Duma, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 1998, **14**, 1-2, 178–200.

⁵⁹ **Chaisty P.**, Party Cohesion and Policy-Making in Russia, *Party Politics*, 2005, **11**, 3, 299–318; **Remington T. F.**, The Russian Federal Assembly, 1994–2004, *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 2007, **13**, 1, 121–141.

disciplined voting behavior⁶⁰. While in the 1990s party switching was extremely frequent in Russia⁶¹, this practice was precluded by the introduction of new rules after 2003. In addition, organizational changes prompted *United Russia* to gain control over the presiding and agenda-setting organ of the assembly, the *Duma* council⁶².

The internal organization of Armenia's national assembly is rather similar to this pattern. It is organized in six stable party groups and seven independent deputies (as of September 2016). The existence of a dominant party in parliament seems to make a fundamental impact on the legislature's overall stability as well as its capacity to serve as a transmission belt for presidential power. Interestingly enough, the Moldovan experience during the 2000s was quite similar, even if the country was a parliamentary republic with a seemingly weak, assembly-elected president. When the *Communist Party* was dominant and formed a large and disciplined PPG, President Vladimir Voronin was able to rule with an "executive dominant 'vertical power' style of governance"⁶³. However, with the decay of the PCRM as the party of power, the situation changed fundamentally.

Pluralist Multiparty Assemblies. The structure of the remaining parliaments is more complicated. It consists of two layers, that of the parliamentary parties proper and that of inter – party coalitions. In Georgia's assembly, at the first level, twelve parliamentary groups organize parties and independent deputies. At the second level, a superstructure is imposed with six factions building the 'majority', and four building the 'minority' (as of September 2016). Both 'superfactions' have their own infrastructure and resources. While the superstructures

⁶⁰ **Remington T.**, Patronage and Power: Russia's Dominant Party Regime, *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 2008, 49, 2, 213–228.

⁶¹ **Mershon C., Shvetsova O.**, Parliamentary Cycles and Party Switching in Legislatures. *Comparative Political Studies*, 2008, 41, 1, 99–127.

⁶² **Chaisty P.**, The Federal Assembly and the Power Vertical, *Graeme J. Gill and James Young (eds.)*, *Routledge Handbook of Russian Politics and Society*, London: Routledge, pp. 92–101, 2012.

⁶³ **Crowther W.**, Second Decade, Second Chance? Parliament, Politics and Democratic Aspiration in Russia, Ukraine and Moldova, *Olson D., Ilonszki G. (eds.)*: *Post-Communist Parliament. Change and Stability in the Second Decade*, London: Routledge, 2012, pp. 32–56; **Hale H. E.**, Patronal...., Op. Cit., ch. 10.

staunchly divide the assembly into the government coalition and the opposition, below the surface some reshuffling has been underway across the entire legislative period (2012–2016), in the form of individual party switching as well as coalition rearrangement. After the 2016 legislative election, Georgia became the third country in the region, whereas in Russia and Kazakhstan—a pro-presidential PPG holds a supermajority of more than three quarters of seats. Whether this will stop the structural instability of the parliament will be seen in the future.

In Kyrgyzstan as well as in Ukraine, the parliamentary rules of procedure also permit intra-group alliances in order to support or oppose the government. Both parliaments have flexible, if not unstable structures creating a heightened level of competition between several elite groups that coordinate or break up majority coalitions⁶⁴. The Fifth Kyrgyzstani *Zhogorku Kenesh* (2010-2015) has experienced a considerable amount of individual party switching, several readjustments in the composition of the assembly's majority and the formation of three new groups in addition to the five existent factions⁶⁵. Ukraine's *Verkhovna Rada* has been plagued by highly conflictual factional politics with unstable PPGs over the entire postcommunist period⁶⁶. The current parliament, elected in October 2014, is organized into eight factions and 46 independent candidates. During the two years that have passed since then, the governing coalition has lost three PPGs, later gaining the support of two others to create a new cabinet. Party switching, being a major problem especially in the period before 2004⁶⁷, continues to take place occasionally. Finally, Moldova's parliament at present consists of five factions, the size of which is unstable. Major defection occurred in early 2016 when 14 of the 20 members of the communist faction transformed into independents and the Liberal – Democratic party group was halved⁶⁸.

To sum up, the assemblies of Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and After-PCRM-Moldova mirror not only the chronically weak

⁶⁴ Marat E., Op. cit.

⁶⁵ Juraev S., Op. cit.

⁶⁶ Crowther W., Op. cit.

⁶⁷ Thames F. C., Searching for the Electoral Connection. Parliamentary Party Switching in the Ukrainian Rada, 1998-2002, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 2007, 32, 223-256.

⁶⁸ Saran V., Op. cit.

institutionalization of the pluralist party systems but also a rather high degree of party system fragmentation and polarization. The internal structure of these parliaments is less coherent, including both party-bound and independent mandate – holders. PPGs are less stable, and party discipline is far less pronounced than in those legislatures that are unequi-vocally dominated by parties of power. Another important feature of the pluralist multiparty assemblies is their comparatively high degree of institutional autonomy from the executive. While legislatures are ‘rubber stamp’ parliaments in countries such as Tajikistan⁶⁹, Uzbekistan⁷⁰ or Russia⁷¹, this cannot be said about the assemblies in the pluralist countries and, probably, Armenia. Yet, even the most pronounced cases of this group, Ukraine and Moldova, have been granted far less autonomy from the executive than their counterparts in Central and Eastern Europe⁷².

3.2. *Technocratic and Party-Based Cabinets*

In Western democracies, two patterns of party participation stand out in the executive arena. The strength of legislative parties is rather irrelevant to the election of presidents as well as to the composition of cabinets in presidential systems, but crucial in parliamentary and semi-presidential systems of government. Since in these constitutional formats cabinets are collectively accountable to the assembly and therefore dependent on the continuing support of the parliamentary majority, parties are key for both the formation and the survival of governments. Against this background, scholars tend to take party-based cabinets as the constitutional norm when looking at those Eurasian countries which are formally parliamentary (Moldova 2000-2016) or semipresidential (Armenia, Belarus, Georgia since 2004, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova 1994-2000 and since 2016, Russia, Ukraine). However, the real picture is far more complicated.

⁶⁹ **Mardon M.**, Neodnoznachnaya... Op.Cit.

⁷⁰ **Tolipov F.**, Democratic Structuralizing in Uzbekistan. The Multiparty System and the Opposition, *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 2011, **12**, 1, 132–140.

⁷¹ **Remington T. F.**, Op.Cit. p. 123; **Roberts S. P.**, Op. cit. p. 122.

⁷² **Olson D. M.**, **Ilonszki G.**, Two Decades of Divergent Post-Communist Parliamentary Development, *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 2011, **17**, 2, 234–255.

Nonparty governments. As expected, and in full accordance with the presidential format, governments in Turkmenistan⁷³, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are presidential cabinets. Overall, the presidents unilaterally select prime ministers and the members of the cabinet, and the assemblies approve these decisions ex post. It is striking, however, that the situation in formally semi-presidential Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia is very similar. Here, not a single party-based government has existed thus far. As in the pure presidential countries, governments are presidential ‘technocratic cabinets’ instead, meaning that they have been formed without the effective participation by legislative parties and/or are composed of more than 50 percent of nonpartisan ministers, and the prime minister himself is nonpartisan⁷⁴. Yet, the formation of party governments is not constitutionally precluded in these countries. In all four countries the assemblies formally approve prime ministers who have been nominated by the president, and cabinets are accountable to both the president and the legislature. In Kazakhstan (2007) and Uzbekistan (2011), constitutional amendments have even assigned parliamentary parties a formal role in the process of government formation. This notwithstanding, the ultimate decision about government formation and dismissal lies with the head of state who also firmly controls the assembly through the presidential party of power as mentioned above.

Party-based governments. By contrast, in the five more competitive regimes, which feature pluralist or predominant party systems and pluralist multiparty parliaments, governments are based on (mostly majoritarian) coalitions of parliamentary parties. Surprisingly, however, clear-cut party-based cabinets are of rather recent origin, emerging after a more or less prolonged transitional period when de facto party cabinets were headed by nonpartisan ministers or composed of more than half of independent ministers, or de facto presidential cabinets enjoyed the

⁷³ Here (as well as Georgia until 2004), the president is simultaneously the head of government.

⁷⁴ cf. **Schleiter P., Morgan-Jones E.**, Who's in Charge? Presidents, Assemblies, and the Political Control of Semipresidential Cabinet, *Comparative Political Studies*, 2010, **43**, 11, 1415–41.

parliamentary support of a dominant party of power (see the last column of the table).

Armenia saw exclusively technocratic cabinets until the end of the 1990s. The first government backed by assembly majority was formed in June 1999, but until June 2003 the overwhelming majority of ministers remained formally unaffiliated to any party⁷⁵. Since then, all cabinets have relied on majority coalitions in the assembly centered on the RPA as the ruling party. As in the parliamentary arena, however, the cohesion of the coalition is also rather low in government: between 2000 and 2014, the government had been reshuffled eight times, because smaller parties had left or entered the coalition.

Moldova had two majority governments in the first postcommunist decade and three technocratic cabinets⁷⁶. While the communist-controlled cabinets during the period 2001-2009 remained formally technocratic, all governments since fall 2009 have enjoyed explicit partisan support by a majority coalition in parliament.

In Ukraine, the first de facto party coalition cabinet was formed in November 2002 after the president had dismissed a technocratic cabinet amidst a severe political crisis, but between 2010 and 2013, the government was again 'presidentialized' by Yanukovych. Similarly, in Georgia the first party government was formed by the winning coalition of the Rose revolution in November 2003, lasting until February 2005. Until 2012, however, cabinets became de facto presidential, notwithstanding the parliamentary support of Saakashvili's *United National Movement*. It is only since 2012 that cabinets have been regularly based on party coalition majorities⁷⁷. Kyrgyzstan is the third case where the first 'near'-party-based cabinets after the Tulip revolution in 2005 were soon substituted by de facto presidential cabinets. Governments supported by majority party coalitions in the assembly became routine only after the next regime ouster in 2010⁷⁸.

⁷⁵ Markarov A., Op.cit., p. 81-2.

⁷⁶ Protsyk O., Intra-Executive Competition between President and Prime Minister. Patterns of Institutional Conflict and Cooperation under Semi-Presidentialism., *Political Studies*, 2006, 54, 2, 219-244.

⁷⁷ Berglund C., Op. cit; Nakashidze M., Op. cit.

⁷⁸ Fumagalli M., Op. cit., p. 195-6.

Cross-country as well as within-country comparisons reveal that presidential cabinets are very durable. The all-time record is held by Azerbaijan's current prime minister, who has served since November 1996, but tenures of office exceeding five years can also be found in Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In contrast, the longest-living explicit party cabinet survived little more than three years in Armenia (April 2009-June 2012). More often than not, the flipside of party government in the context of weak party system institutionalization is not 'democratic normalcy,' but government instability, sometimes reaching exceptional levels and triggering acute political crises. In Moldova, for example, the average lifespan of the seven party governments between September 2009 and January 2016 was 11 months, while the five Ukrainian party governments between January 2005 and March 2010 lasted 12.5 months, and Kyrgyzstan's seven party and caretaker cabinets between December 2010 and October 2016 survived for only ten months on average.

4.3 Discussion: Patronal Politics and Party Government

Similar to the electoral arena, the role that parties play in the legislative and executive arena corresponds to the condition of the respective pyramid system and can therefore be understood under the perspective of patronal politics. As I have shown, all competing-pyramid systems in the region display not only pluralist (or oscillating pluralist-predominant) party systems, but also pluralist multiparty assemblies and party-based governments. Here, parties of power are unable to tightly control the electoral, legislative and executive arenas in the long run. Instead, they are players in a game that can be lost at any time. In these countries, the decisive impulse for the 'partyization' of the executive arose from the dynamics of elite coordination in competing-pyramid systems. Embedded in pluralist assemblies, party cabinets emerged when intra-elite competition reached high levels and some of the rivaling network pyramids managed to coordinate, forming coalitions that were based on the respective party groups in parliament.

Thus, even under the condition of a weakly institutionalized party system, party cabinets have become the norm in the course of the last

decade or so. Taken together, the dynamics in the more competitive countries of the region indicate that parties, as one of the organizational forms of elite networks, have gained relevance and have acquired new functions. In fact, after accessing the electoral and parliamentary arena, parties conquered the new dimension of governing or ‘ruling’ parties. In most cases, party governments have been coalition governments. Since the benefits of ministerial office are valuable assets, they can be offered by powerful networks to potential rivals in order to invite them to join the pyramid and, subsequently, enter a coalition cabinet in case the alliance manages to become stronger than rivaling pyramids. Thus, party government emerges as a tool of elite coordination and co-optation under the unstable condition of multipartism and political pluralism.

In contrast, more often than not, technocratic cabinets indicate an overall constellation marked by a consolidated single pyramid revolving around the president. In this context, elite competition is dampened or shut down altogether. The opposition in the party system is marginalized, the presidential pyramid integrates both the party of power and satellite parties, and the relevant opposition is ‘constructive’ at most. In the parliamentary arena, this situation is echoed by assemblies that either display party structures but are controlled by a supermajoritarian party-of-power faction, or the assemblies lack parliamentary party groups altogether. In the governmental arena such consolidated single pyramids find their expression in cabinets that are purely ‘technocratic’ by composition and ‘presidential’ by origin and survival. Often, they are presented as ‘expert’ governments or cabinets of ‘national consensus’ mirroring the self-identification of the national leader as standing ‘above parties.’

True, in most of the consolidated single-pyramid regimes, parties of power are useful tools for presidents as the centerpiece of manufactured party systems and in the electoral arena, thus signaling to whom the elites and the voters can express their loyalty. They help to implement the president’s legislative agenda and ensure the coordination of the regime’s political and administrative elites around the national leader, thus bolstering the consolidation of presidential regimes. Yet, they are not ‘ruling parties.’ Presidents do not need them for government matters. They have no incentive to share executive power with prime

ministers relying on an (at least potential) autonomous power base, such as a nominating party. Since even in presidential systems the latter have some political weight on their own, the office is often conceived as the springboard for presidential successors. Yet for the same reason, presidents run the risk of grooming resolute rivals in this position. Thus, when doubting the loyalty of their prime ministers they will duly discharge them, placing them either as (prestigious) speakers of parliament, ministers, senior officials in the presidential administration and leaders of state oil companies or as (rather disgraced) ambassadors, or simply putting them in prison⁷⁹.

At present, this ‘cadre rotation’ continues in Kazakhstan, with prime ministers being changed by president Nazarbaev every two to five years. This indicates a rather brittle presidential pyramid, or a more distrustful and cautious president compared with his fellows. The more common pattern is cabinet ‘hyperstability’ indicating a high degree of consolidation of the single-power pyramid. For example, the four Tajikistani cabinets in the first half of the 1990s, when Rakhmon’s presidency was highly contested, survived for about a year on average, while the following two cabinets lasted for four and fourteen years respectively. In Russia, cabinets survived for about 15 months under Yeltsin’s presidency and for more than 29 months under that of its successor. More examples can be found when looking at those more competitive regimes that also have (or had) more or less consolidated presidential pyramids for some time. Thus, Georgia’s technocratic, formally nonpartisan cabinets which were controlled by Saakshvili’s consolidated pyramid (2005-2012) had a far longer life expectancy (more than 22 months) than the party governments since then, formed by the less cohesive and inclusive *Georgian Dream* pyramid (ten months). The impressive stability of technocratic cabinets in Moldova when Voronin’s pyramid had predominated politics (2001-2009) shows that it is indeed

⁷⁹ **Kangas R. D.**, Uzbekistan. The Karimov Presidency - Amir Timur Revisited. *Cummings S. N. (ed.): Power and Change in Central Asia*. London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 130–149; **Isaacs R.**, Op. cit., p. 79; **Nurumov D., Vashchanka V.**, Op. cit.; **LaPorte J.**, Semi-Presidentialism in Georgia, *Elgie R. and Moestrup S. (eds.) Semi-Presidentialism in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 91–118.

the existence of a comprehensive presidential network, which is the crucial condition even if a parliamentary constitution provides for an assembly-elected president.

Therefore, elite unity in single-pyramid constellations, as found in countries such as Russia, Kazakhstan, Saakashvili's Georgia and Voronin's Moldova, is the result of coordination around the president, not political parties. On the contrary, systems with competing elites such as Moldova after 2009, Georgia after Saakashvili, and Kyrgyzstan are far less president-centered. Instead, the presidency is an asset over which the rivaling groups fight fiercely. The same is true for the office of the prime minister, which becomes a second major regime position, in particular if it is designed by the premier-presidential variety of semi-presidentialism, which provides for a government that is accountable only to the assembly and therefore independent of the presidency.

Thus, it is the lack of patronal regime consolidation, which makes parties the appropriate tools of elite networks attempting to conquer the cabinet and the prime ministerial office, i.e. the non-presidential part of the dual executive in semi-presidential regimes. In contrast to parties of power in single-pyramid systems, which promote elite coordination around the president, parties in highly competitive regimes assume a signaling function for (potentially) competing networks.

Conclusion

The analysis of national party systems, assemblies and governments has revealed that parties and their patterns of interaction display remarkable variation all across Eurasia. As I have argued, this variation does not arise simply as a result of differences in the quality of political regimes, as measured, for example, by Freedom House. Rather, it reflects two different patterns of patronal regime dynamics. These patterns set the overall framework for party (system) institutionalization, yet still allow for distinct, country-specific varieties.

The first general pattern is that of a consolidated 'single-pyramid system' integrating all relevant political, administrative and economic elites around the national leader as the main patron. In the electoral arena, this configuration typically features hegemonic party systems where

contestation is heavily dampened or virtually stalled. These party systems are centered around well-organized ‘personalist dominant parties.’ As formalized manifestations of comprehensive presidential networks, they translate the power of the head of state into the realm of public politics in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. It is striking that in none of these countries have parties accessed the executive arena thus far. Thus, while often dubbed ‘ruling parties,’ parties of power do not govern at all. Kazakhstan, Russia and Uzbekistan are the only countries in this group, where party system institutionalization stretches beyond the electoral arena at all. Here, at least legislatures are structured along party lines. They are tightly controlled by the president’s party.

At present, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Ukraine and Armenia embody a second and more dynamic pattern of network interaction. Here, single-pyramid systems have emerged and collapsed several times, being replaced by competing-pyramid constellations that have experienced subsequent reshuffling and also new attempts to forge single-power networks. In general, the degree of political competition in these systems, including its party – based forms, is more substantial than in the consolidated ‘single-pyramid systems,’ as reflected in higher democracy scores assigned by Freedom House. In essence, however, competition epitomizes first and foremost elite pluralism, heightened contestation and political openness, accompanied by political instability. It oscillates around an overall baseline which is higher in Moldova and Ukraine, and lowest in Armenia, where politics in many respects resemble that of Russia, the most competitive of the single – pyramid systems.

The overall competitiveness of these regimes corresponds to party systems that are simultaneously less and also more institutionalized than in the first group of countries. In the traditional perspective, party system institutionalization appears as ‘weak’ compared to the ‘hyperinstitutionalized’ single-pyramid party systems, because literally all parties are volatile and the structures in which party competition is organized are subject to permanent reorganization. In contrast, the perspective presented in this paper holds that institutionalization should not be mistaken for stability. It is in fact stronger in the more pluralist group, since parties are made up of the single most important players not only in

the electoral but also in the legislative and, most importantly, the governmental arena.

However, the greater degree of competitiveness and the real relevance of parties are indeed related to high instability in all three arenas. ‘Parties of power’ are typical for almost all regimes in the region, but here, they are less long-lived and more brittle than their counterparts in countries with consolidated single-pyramid systems. In addition, they face more or less serious competition in the electoral arena which is reflected in party systems that often fluctuate between the pluralist and the predominant variety. Their overall instability also penetrates the parliaments, which are inhabited by legislative parties and party coalitions that are frequently rebuild. Thus, the legislative arena represents another important realm for political contestation. Only during regime phases when a party of power dominates the national party system, it is also able to control the assembly. Finally, over the last decade or so, legislative parties have become the key actors in cabinet formation and termination. They do indeed make and break governments, and these are also plagued by instability. In sum, it is those patronal regimes, where single – pyramid consolidation has failed, that parties have gained major importance in Eurasia.